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Abstract

A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Criminal Gang Members

Enrolled in an Employment Program to Reduce Gang-Related Homicides

By

Mc Carta Browne

MPhil, Walden University 2021

Msc., Kings Graduate School, 2018

Bsc., DeVry University, 2016

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

In collaboration with the local police force, St. Kitts and Nevis's government introduced an Alternative Lifestyle Pathway Program (ALPP). The ALPP is an incentive-based program newly introduced in St. Kitts and Nevis, and there is no evidence that the program reduced gang-related homicide. This research investigated the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP. The primary research question in this study explored the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in an employment program to reduce gang-related homicides. Phenomenology and hermeneutic theory of interpretation were used to explore this question. The data for this research were analyzed using coding, categories, and themes, and the hermeneutic circle was used to interpret the data. The results provided valuable insights into the development of program policies aimed at reducing gang-related homicides. The participants revealed the advantages of peace policies, such as providing gangs with ample opportunities, ensuring sustainability and support for families, and offering an alternative life trajectory. The study adds value to the positive social change agenda by giving the criminal justice system an evidence-based alternative diversion program to mitigate gang-related homicides and save lives.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving mother, Pearlina Dore Carty, who died knowing I would not stop until I succeeded in this academic journey. I love and miss you and wish you were here to wear my cap once again. Thank you for believing in me. Yes, I did it for you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

Criminal gangs are considered a predominantly urban phenomenon in the United States (Hallsworth, 2013; Harding, 2014). However, recently, some neglected elements of gangs, including aspects of religion, operational methods, ethnicity, gender, and race, have been included in the research (Irwin-Rogers et al., 2019). Based on their differences and complexities in spatial reconfigurations, the categories include organized crime, criminal network enterprises, crime syndicates, criminal street gangs, and organized mafia groups.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018) indicates that the categorization directly results from cross-border and societal effects, with the common purpose in all activities being engagement in criminal activities. International research on gangs has mainly focused on small identified bodies of work from the United States, South Africa, Brazil, and Central America, while other isolated studies have emerged elsewhere (Kolbe, 2013). Violence is a significant aspect of criminal behavior and gang life. Many studies have established a link between one's prior levels of aggression and their likelihood of joining a gang, with gang involvement promoting more advanced levels of violence, such as homicides (Williams, 2015; Irwin-Rogers et al., 2019).

Hazen (2010) stated that evidence on gangs highlights violence as a central role in gang culture. In this study, I focused on using incentive-based programs to reduce homicides and on criminal street gangs due to their propensity to commit homicides.

Criminal gangs have existed throughout the world's history. From the seminal work of Thrasher (1927), which focused on gangs in Chicago approximately a century ago, to the substantial number of studies in recent decades, there is a consensus on the existence of gangs (Irwin-Rogers et al., 2019). However, there is a lack of consensus on their first recording. Some state that criminal street gangs date back to England in 1873, while others believe that criminal groups have existed since the 12th century in the Western Hemisphere (Howell & Moore, 2010). Nevertheless, there is a consensus on gang activity's primary attributes and features, with research agreeing that gangs are predominantly urban (Williams, 2015). Another attribute of gang research highlights violence. Hazen (2010) states gang groups and members conduct criminal activities through violence. Howell and Moore (2010) indicated that criminal gangs have common interests and use violence for protection; poverty and ethnic migration are critical factors influencing their formation. Additionally, there is consensus on the negative impacts of criminal gangs on society.

Over the decades, criminal gangs have transformed significantly from small, non-violent groups of the 17th century to extensive, modernized, violent organizations (Howell, 2015). The transformation of these gangs does not always follow the same process. According to Wolff (2015), most gangs follow their territory's environmental and social design, as evidenced by the criminal gangs in Rio de Janeiro and Recife. Kolbe (2013) noted that the extraordinary transformation within activities has led to dynamism and characteristics that provide a basis for the production of gangs. For instance, violent spatial processes and polarization impact social structures, resulting in the social stigmatization of spaces becoming grounds for criminal gang activities. Like the rest of

the world, gangs and their culture have affected Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) states.

The Caribbean continues to have the fastest gang development in the Western Hemisphere; since the 1960s, gangs in Jamaica, Trinidad, and Tobago have transformed into structural criminal enterprises (Sutton & Ruprah, 2017). However, although the smaller islands have witnessed significant gang development, their organizational structure development has been sporadic.

The gang phenomenon in the Caribbean region and the pace of growth varies from island to island. While the region's demographics are the same, each island's geographical location presents a different culture and sub-culture for gang transformation. Further, there has been an organizational shift in the scale and nature of the gang networks, whereby there is increased transnational inertia (Orjuela, 2011). For instance, the Maras is a Central American gang that can be described as transnational.

Despite being born in the streets of LA, it has local cells or *clikas* throughout Central America (Winton, 2014). Sutton and Ruprah (2017) alluded to political division, youth protection, identity, and the illegal drug trade as the reasons for gang development in Jamaica, Bahamas, Trinidad, and Tobago. Similarly, Williams (2015) attributed several factors to the establishment of gangs, including gang identity, whereby gangs develop and acquire members by highlighting cultural identity activities. Violence is a significant activity used to illustrate membership whereby a recruit may be required to commit homicides to prove their loyalty (Klein, 2011). Regions marked with gang activities show increased violence and homicide rates.

The growing interest in gangs has led to research on gangs from different contexts, including their negative impacts on society. Evidence from the United States shows that gang violence has an estimated annual cost of over 5 billion dollars (Davis, 2011). A comprehensive analysis of the effects of criminal activities, including criminal justice systems, reveals that the costs are over \$300 billion (Hayes, 2020). The evidence from countries, including Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) nations, illustrates that criminal behavior is costly to society. According to Sutton et al. (2017), the cost of crime, including crime prevention and security, is much higher in the Caribbean than in most Western countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Germany, Australia, and France, with the estimated cost approximately 3.5% of the GDP of these nations and 3.7% in Latin America. Crime prevention and security in the Caribbean is approximately 2% of the GDP, much higher than in most Western countries. These statistics illustrate a need to implement effective prevention programs.

Notwithstanding the cost associated with crime prevention and security efforts in Western countries, criminal gangs perpetuate an increased homicide problem. For instance, homicide in North America rose by 53% in the summer of 2020 compared to the summer of 2019. Higginson et al. (2015) reported that the South and Central American regions face a worse homicide situation with a gang population exceeding 200,000. Ambrosius (2018) reported that the higher numbers of homicides in the region are attributed to criminal gangs. The high homicide numbers have resulted in the region's governments seeking approaches to reduce gang-related homicides, as illustrated by political directorate demand.

In the Caribbean federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, the political directorate has led law enforcement and other stakeholders to revisit existing prevention policies and programs. For instance, the rising level of criminal gang homicides in St. Kitts and Nevis was deemed unacceptable by the Minister of National Security, Prime Minister Dr. Hon. Timothy Harris. The Royal St. Christopher and Nevis Police Force's published statistics concerning homicides from 2015 to 2017 stood at 82. In February 2018, the federation recorded 90 gang-related homicides; the sudden surge in these homicides resulted in the introduction of the Alternative Lifestyle Pathway Program (ALPP). The program aims to reduce or eliminate gang-related homicides by providing incentives such as employment, small business loans, and educational opportunities to participating gang members. From the implementation of the ALPP in March 2018 to the present, the federation has recorded 45 homicides, a significant decline.

The police department gave full credit to the ALPP for the sudden decrease in homicides, increasing other regional governments' interest in the program. However, according to the Commissioner of Police, Mr. Hilroy Brandy, the ALPP is not based on scientific research; there is a lack of evidence to support the program's implementation or offer guidance to government policymakers. This lack of evidence has made sharing the program with other governments difficult. While this study is unique to the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, the phenomenon of using incentive-based programs to reduce gang-related homicides is not new.

As a result of rising gun crimes in Sacramento, California, the Advance Peace Program was implemented to provide financial support and other incentives to criminal gang members (Began, 2020). With the long-term aim of reinstating gang members as

law-abiding citizens, incentive-based programs provide criminal gang members with positive reinforcement to avoid committing crimes (Kolbe, 2013). Similarly, incentive-based programs have illustrated positive outcomes, including reduced homicides (Ramakers et al., 2017). However, such incentive-based programs are not standard in LAC, with the region struggling with gang violence and homicides.

According to Moestue et al. (2018), using incentive-based programs is not common despite the region being home to six of the world's most violent countries. Evidence indicates that the LAC nations are hotspots for criminal gangs; there is a need for evidence-based programs to reduce gang activities such as homicides (Hazen, 2010). Despite the lack of research, there has been a recent increase in the use of incentive-based programs in LAC, which necessitates a comprehensive review of their implementation in the region to help identify best practices to reduce gang activities and behavior. In this study, I focused on understanding the lived experiences of criminal gang members participating in incentive-based programs.

Research Problem

Gang-related homicides in St. Kitts and Nevis are increasing. Between 2011 and 2018, the murder rate in the Caribbean Island of St. Kitts and Nevis was 67.6 per 100,000 persons. In 2019, it fell to 35.5 per 100,000 persons (International Security Sector Advisory Team, 2015). The alarming rate of gang-related homicides has negatively affected civil society and the business sector. Evidence suggests that the high prevalence of gang behavior may be due to the limited social opportunities and difficulty in finding jobs as a known gang member (Spergel, 2007). Fraser and Atkinson (2014) stated that one joins a criminal gang due to several factors, including exclusion, poverty, and

unemployment, with gang membership offering a sense of belonging and money to care for the family. By conceptualizing the contributing factors to gang membership, one can understand the programs that can effectively deter criminal behavior.

Incentive-based programs, such as those providing employment opportunities to criminal gang members, have been proposed to reduce criminal behavior (Sturup et al., 2018). However, despite their use in reducing criminal behavior, most quantitative studies have focused on determining the link between employment and criminal behavior. For instance, Irwin-Rogers et al. (2019) explored the link between employment and crime, indicating that employment can help reduce crime rates in a region. Others, such as Chioda (2017), Fallahi et al. (2012), and Poutvaara and Priks (2011), investigated incentive-based programs aimed at reducing crime, but the studies did not specifically address gang-related homicides or the program participants' lived experiences. Similarly, Farmer (2016) explored the use of money to deter crime, with criminal gang members paid not to commit a crime; however, the study did not provide insights into the effectiveness of the approach in reducing homicide rates. Therefore, there is a need to focus on criminal gang members enrolled in incentive-based programs and acquire their perspectives on using money to deter crime.

While numerous studies have been conducted on gangs and the factors affecting their behavior, most researchers have focused on gang composition and the contributing factors to gang development and culture (Fraser & Atkinson, 2014; Irwin-Rogers et al., 2019; Sturup et al., 2018). However, these studies do not focus on the lived experiences of criminal gang members and how programs such as the use of incentives have impacted their behavior. Fallahi et al. (2012) and Poutvaara and Priks (2011) further established the

literature gap and theorized that neither employment nor unemployment affects crime. However, the studies did not involve criminal gang members participating in an incentive-based program to reduce crime. Research needs to be focused on whether incentive-based programs impact gang members' criminal activities. I conducted this phenomenological study to close the gap in the literature by understanding the lived experiences of gang members in incentive-based crime reduction programs.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of criminal gang members participating in the Alternative Lifestyle Pathway Program (ALPP) in St. Kitts and Nevis and to understand the negative consequences of using incentive-based programs to reduce homicides. The central phenomenon was the significant reduction in gang-related homicides since implementing the ALPP and understanding the lived experiences of the participants enrolled in the ALPP. Therefore, I explored the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP program, as well as the consequences of the program.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in incentive-based programs focused on reducing gang-related homicides?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How can the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in incentive-based programs help develop program policies focused on reducing gang-related homicides?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Based on an assessment of the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in an incentive-based program, are there any negative consequences of using such a program to reduce crime?

Theoretical Framework

Criminal gangs and their activities can be studied using many theoretical frameworks. In this study, I used social bonding theory and phenomenology. Social bonding theory was developed in the 1960s by Travis Hirschi, who suggested that people are less likely to commit crimes or get involved in criminal behavior when they are connected to society and have strong attachments to family, school, and work. It assembles the knowledge of why people are interested in a life of crime but avoids becoming involved in criminal behavior. Phenomenology is used to explore the lived experiences of a particular group or individual.

Social Bonding/Control Theory

Social bonding is a control theory that explains why delinquency occurs (Roh, 2017). Travis Hirschi founded the theory in 1969 based on the assumption that four society-bonding factors (attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief) prevent persons from engaging in criminal activities. According to Back et al. (2018), Hirschi viewed attachment as the bond with the most important people in one's life and their desire to feel accepted by not committing criminal acts. Hirschi viewed commitment as the time, energy, and resources a person invests in building a good life that should be protected (Back et al., 2018). Involvement stems from the acceptance and participation in society within the community's social norms, while belief represents the acceptance of normal society and its moral behaviors. Hirschi theorized that the more one values the

four social bonds, the less likely they are to commit a crime or engage in deviant behavior (Back et al., 2018).

Similarly, if any of the bonds are weakened or eroded, an individual becomes more likely to commit a crime. The theory is relevant to the control of gang activities and the reduction in gang-related homicides because it addresses humans' basic needs and their importance and correlation to deviant behavior. The theory supports the long-held position that crime and criminality are societal problems that need to be addressed by implementing social remedies.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology was the theory and methodology that I deemed best suited for studying the lived experiences of criminal gang members participating in an incentive-based program aimed at reducing gang-related homicides. Phenomenology focuses on the experiences of individuals and how meaning is constructed from such experiences (Gallagher, 2012). I used Heidegger's phenomenological approach to understanding knowledge as the foundation in this study. Phenomenologists study the structured conscious experiences of individuals and focus on the first-person point of view (Smith, 2006).

I used Heidegger's hermeneutic theory of interpretation to analyze the data in this study. Barrett et al. (2011) stated that hermeneutic philosophy as a theory enables understanding the process of interpretation and experience. In hermeneutics, knowledge is based on life experience (Howell, 2013).

Summary and Conclusion

The phenomenal decrease in gang-related homicides when the ALPP was introduced in St. Kitts and Nevis is credited to this study. Understanding the lived experiences of the gang members in this homicide reduction program can provide valuable information usable in crime-fighting initiatives. The study will investigate three questions developed to give a holistic insight into what transpired in the participants' lives while they were a part of the program or actively engaged in it.

The study uses the social bonding theory and phenomenology as a theoretical framework for support in the literature and data analysis. Social bonding is a control theory that explains why delinquency occurs, and the introduction in Chapter 1 speaks to an increase in gang homicides; social bonding theory is best suited to explain why such escalation in delinquency occurred. Travis Hirschi founded the theory in 1969 based on the assumption that four society-bonding factors (attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief) prevent persons from engaging in criminal activities.

The study focuses on the lived experiences of a particular group of people, and Phenomenology was the theory and methodology that I deemed best suited for this undertaking. Phenomenology focuses on the experiences of individuals and how meaning is constructed from such experiences. Additionally, Phenomenologists study the structured conscious experiences of individuals and focus on the first-person point of view. In Chapter 2, I will extensively review the literature on the contemporary issue of incentive-based programs used to reduce gang-related homicides.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I conducted the literature review for this study to validate my argument and highlight the differences surrounding the research topic and previous studies. Through this review, I discovered gaps in previous literature and filled them with current data at the end of the study. The literature review begins with a description of the search strategy employed in acquiring evidence. It includes the search terms, the databases I used, and the phenomenon I investigated.

Further, I reviewed the literature on critical variables and concepts of the research problem to lay a foundation for conducting the research; subsequently, I identified the research gap and provided conclusions on the review and summary of the chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

To find relevant sources, I used several key search terms, including incentive-based crime reduction programs, phenomenological theory, criminal gangs, peace programs, Caribbean gangs, gang culture and sub-culture, Latin America/North America gang history, paying gangs not to commit crime, and social bonding theory. By using the search terms in databases such as the Walden University library, Google Scholar, Lexis Nexis, ProQuest, National Criminal Justice Service, and Sage Publication, I obtained a vast amount of literature relevant to this research.

Additionally, by reviewing previous dissertations in various databases, I discovered relevant data and peer-reviewed literature that helped me understand the research topic. Several researchers have investigated the history of gang development, the nature of criminal gangs, unemployment and gang development, gang-related homicides, and the intervention strategies used to reduce gang-related homicides.

In this chapter, I expose the gaps in previous literature and focus on current literature concerning the research topic. Moreover, I emphasize the literature that supports the theoretical framework and methodology used to investigate the research questions. Criminal justice practitioners find academic literature useful when forming policies and filling gaps in the literature with current data. In this study, I focus on the lived experiences of criminal gang members and their desire to stop gang-related homicides through incentive-based programs.

Other researchers have investigated the various relationships between gangs and factors such as poverty, unemployment, peer pressure, environment, and lack of education. However, the issues of gang-related homicide reduction strategies still need to be addressed. In this research, I have focused on the gang members and their experience in trying to reduce homicides as a policy that guides the criminal justice system and enacts positive social change.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

The definition of a criminal gang varies from region to region. In the United States of America, the federal government defines a criminal street gang as an ongoing association of five or more persons with the primary purpose of committing criminal offenses. Its members have continuously engaged in such offenses within the past five years, affecting interstate or foreign commerce (Department of Justice, 2020). In London, according to the United Kingdom Home Office (2015), a criminal street gang possesses one or more characteristics that enable others to identify it as a group.

The Euro-network of countries defines criminal gangs as any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity

(Gemert & Weerman, 2015). The Caribbean region follows the European definition of a criminal gang; Katz (2015) noted that while the authorities in the Caribbean were slow to recognize gangs, when they did so, they replicated the statutes of England and Europe as opposed to those of the United States of America. However, there is a commonality among the regions concerning criminal gang identification: being young and delinquent (Department of Justice, 2020; Gemert & Weerman, 2015; Katz, 2015). The laws have little provision for older men and women who engage in similar criminal activities; studies (Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015; Watkins & Moule, 2014) show that the average age of criminal members ranges between 17 and 25. However, there may still be older men and women who engage in illegal gang activities. As the world modernized, the definition of criminal gangs largely remained the same, with a slight exception.

The evolution of criminal gangs began with the formation or codification of gangs and gangsterism. Still, even at the turn of the century, understanding gang evolution is difficult due to the definition of a gang and the characteristics some researchers have used to label gangsters (Whittaker et al., 2020). According to Pitts (2008), gangs were primarily people of color or other minority races subjected to high poverty and concentrated in urban areas. Although Pitt's assertion was heavily criticized, new research on the contemporary characteristics of criminal gangs agrees with his description (Hallsworth, 2013). However, Pitt's identification of criminal gangs was limited in scope and did not consider territories outside the United Kingdom, especially in an era when race relations were intense. Opponents believed that this stigmatization of the Black community and other minority groups agreed with government policy to further

criminalize the underprivileged and poorest communities in society (Gunter, 2017; Williams, 2015).

The definition of gangs did not change much throughout the years of crime and criminality; however, their methodology and purpose evolved, making it more difficult for law enforcement. Pitts (2019) based his historical review of criminal gangs' evolution on research by Darwin (1859) and Thrasher (1927), who found that gangs evolved from the disorganized social environment created by informal migration. Building on Darwin's (1859) and Thrasher's (1927) findings, Pitts concluded that there is no difference in the way gangs evolve today compared to historical research findings. According to Densley (2014), Thrasher's finding is that the natural evolution of gangs from loosely disorganized adolescent groups into organized adult criminal associates requires face-to-face engagement, planning, and frequent meetings; these factors continue to be the trademark of gang formation and development.

Additionally, Densley (2014) specified migration, culture, and societal changes as factors affecting the pace of gang evolution and transformation. However, there is no evidence proving that street gangs evolve into well-organized crime groups or entrepreneurial crime enterprises. Instead, Densley suggested that a few street gangs' evolutions include structural organization, discipline, and specific economic goals. Notwithstanding Densley's research, Whittaker et al. (2020) suggested an existing change in the evolution process of modern-day gang culture. Their general explanation of this change hinged on the periods of gang evolution and gang research.

Whittaker et al. (2020) found that decades-old gangs' evolution and gang research were snapshots of their time and could not be compared with contemporary gang-related

issues. According to Whittaker et al., much has changed since early research surrounding gangs began; the illegal drug economies, for example, have attracted gang members who are now becoming more business-oriented and better organized. Gangs now view themselves as business organizations chasing opportunities to expand their operation and increase their profit margins Whittaker et al. (2020). The new development in gang evolution starkly contrasts the findings of Densley (2014) and Pitts (2019). Whittaker et al. argued that gangs no longer consider gang membership bad for business, as the shifting model indicates a profitable black-market industry, especially in the illegal sale of narcotics.

Therefore, the question arises of what is driving this change in the gang culture from street violence to a business-oriented model. Sonterblum (2021) suggested a review of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to answer the question, as gang members now realize that basic needs must be satisfied. According to Pyrooz and Sweeten (2015), the evolution in contemporary gang issues is bound by the desire to reach self-actualization, the highest position in the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943; Mcleod, 2020; Sonterblum, 2021). However, in his theory, Maslow made clear that self-actualization cannot be fulfilled unless all basic needs are met, and according to Sonterblum, "individuals who do not have their basic needs met by their families and environments may seek out gang membership as a way to fulfill them" (p. 1). The evolution into business-oriented groups or organizations reflects the findings of Sonterblum, as basic needs are achieved through gangsterism. Understanding the changes and evolution of criminal gangs is critical to understanding incentive-based programs used to reduce gang-related homicides.

Employment and Crime

Several studies have addressed the relationship between crime and employment, focusing on whether employment reduces criminal behavior (Kleemans, 2014). There is a common perspective in criminology that employment can help offenders cease criminal activities. According to Kleemans and van Koppen (2020), employment provides individuals with a steady income to take care of their needs and those of their families. However, it also allows criminals an opportunity to conform, which motivates offenders to avoid routine activities and participate in criminal behavior.

Researchers have attempted to test these assumptions mainly by focusing on general offenders, particularly young offenders (van der Geest et al., 2020; van Koppen, 2013; van Onna et al. (2014). These researchers reported a reduced rate of criminal involvement during stable employment. However, according to Mawby (2012), the occupational setting may provide opportunities to engage in criminal gang behavior such as organized crime. It is only through a review of the lived experiences of criminal gang members that their experiences and impacts on employment can be comprehensively understood.

Researchers have posited that employment and life events such as parenthood and marriage act as triggers and turning points in reducing crime (van der Geest et al., 2011). However, employment has been deemed the most appropriate as it provides criminals with a legal income and structured daily routines, increasing the chances of gaining responsibility and attaining conformity. Further, Kleemans and van Koppen (2020) explained that a good job provides appraisals, social structures among peers, and some level of autonomy, thus enabling a more conventional life.

Despite the findings of Kleemans and van Koppen (2020), it is difficult to empirically develop and establish the impact of empowerment in crime because the findings do not focus on causation from the selection. According to Kleemans (2014), offenders are assumed to possess individual attributes such as poor skills, low education, and drug abuse, which increases their risk of criminality and reduces their chances of employment. Hirschi's self-control theory holds that when the characteristics of the individual are controlled, there are no causal effects between employment and crime. The theory suggests that individuals' level of self-control determines the extent of engaging in criminal behavior or seeking employment opportunities.

Therefore, empirical evidence on the negative impact of employment on crime is ambiguous. Most experiments have shown that job programs have no impact on offending behavior (Kleemans & van Koppen, 2020). However, the studies are limited since most of the programs had low-quality jobs with limited career prospects, while others were temporary. Bushway and Apel (2012) indicated that low-quality or temporary jobs are likely to have poor long-term positive impacts. Results from observational studies are more promising, arguing that employment reduces offending behavior (Savolainen, 2009; van der Geest et al. (2011)). However, the observational studies did not focus on the quality of the job provided. Additionally, Apel and Horney (2017) and Ramakers et al. (2017) did not focus on the stability of the employment offered or the offender's age.

Individual attributes and their potential long-term opportunities in affecting criminal behavior are crucial. Further, studies have shown that the impact of employment on crime may differ based on specific attributes, such as white-collar offenders or

organized crime offenders, van Onna et al., 2014; van Koppen & de Poot (2013).

Therefore, there is a need to study and explore how employment programs can impact crime to advance practice and theory and improve the understanding of strategies best suited to control criminal behavior.

Several studies have addressed the link between employment and organized crime. According to Levi and Soudijn (2020), organized criminal activities are mainly embedded in work settings, with many offenders working relatively independently and enjoying a high level of autonomy. Operti (2018) agreed, stating that many crime offenders are business owners, with their businesses often related to their criminal activities. The evidence further indicates that some offenders sought employment by creating a company with legal intentions but transitioned to criminal activities, while others started the companies to foster their criminal activities (Mawby, 2012).

Such offenders' criminal behavior will likely be impacted by employment. Levi and Soudijn (2020) stated that employment programs can be used for criminal purposes in several ways, including providing logistics support, legitimizing criminal activity, and facilitating money laundering (Operti, 2018). The evidence further indicated that individuals with conventional life and employment statistics may start committing criminal behavior, including organized crime (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Specific contacts, opportunities, and skills from conventional employment can lead one to engage in criminal activities (Levi & Soudijn, 2020). Therefore, empirical research illustrates employment as enabling criminal behavior rather than reducing it. However, most of these studies were qualitative and focused on specific contexts rather than providing a generalized view.

Although there are widely accepted assumptions on the development and impacts of criminal behavior, most of these assumptions are based on general and mostly younger offenders who are yet to engage in criminal behavior or are new to it (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Evidence reveals that adult offenders differ from younger offenders in terms of their criminal career paths and dimensions and the mechanisms that drive their involvement in crime (Apel & Horney, 2017). This revelation indicates that the widely accepted assumptions explaining criminal behavior need to be specific and comprehensive to allow the application to various groups and categories, including adult offenders and those in organized crime. Ramakers et al. (2017) argued that the link between age and crime should be explored and is more significant in early adolescent years, peaks in late adolescence, and decreases from early adulthood. Therefore, criminal behavior is complex and requires a comprehensive review of all possible factors influencing it.

Incentive-Based Programs

As a crime-fighting strategy, incentive-based programs are not new (Chioda, 2017; Farmer, 2016). However, some researchers have questioned their effectiveness in lowering crime and even suggested they worsen criminal activities (Poutvaara & Priks, 2011). The general idea behind incentive-based programs and crime reduction is that the people committing the crime do so because they are affected by the social hardships of modern society. In his study, Sonterblum (2021) suggested that people join gangs to meet the basic needs of life. Although joining a gang might be an avenue to meet some needs, as Maslow (1943) described, there is a debate over the relationship between poverty and

increased criminality, especially homicides (Chioda, 2017). There is no clear indication that poverty causes crime or that economic development reduces crime.

According to Chioda (2017), crime increases and decreases in several environments. However, the author indicated that income expansion could have a sustainable positive effect on the homicide rate if the pace of economic development is fast enough and in lockstep with the entire criminal justice system. Similarly, in a quantitative study, Kyriacou et al. (1999) examined the relationship between socioeconomics and gang violence and concluded that gang formation could result from lower income and unemployment in Los Angeles.

Around the same period, other economic and gang violence studies concluded that poverty and crime are not exclusively related (Fajnzylber et al., 2012; Kelly, 2000; Kyriacou et al., 1999). The question remains: What role does an incentive play in the life of a gang member? The approach to gang violence reduction has always been a heavy-handed policing strategy. The police services worldwide use significant and sometimes deadly levels of force in response to gang situations. An incentive-based program is the direct opposite of such a police response (Corburn et al., 2021). Such programs' design, application, and implementation are critical to their success. According to Corburn et al. (2021), a broad cross-section of a given society must be involved, including individuals from law enforcement, social services, probation, and the private sector. Without the involvement of these key stakeholders, such programs will likely fail. The Advance Peace Program in the United States of America uses money as an incentive to ensure that criminal gang members are not focused on committing crimes but on structuring lifelong goals (Corburn et al., 2021).

The ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis also uses money as an incentive to engage gang members, among other noneconomic strategies. While these programs produce short- and medium-term results in reducing gang-related gun violence and homicide (Corburn & Fukutome, 2019), their long-term sustainability continues to be questioned.

Conventionally, once a program or project produces the desired result for a particular government, society, or enterprise, the stakeholders continue building on its success or implementing the strategy that works. The Geneva Peacebuilding Program contrasts two strategies to reduce gang violence and focuses on the sustainability of the more viable and successful option.

According to Milliken (2013), the Geneva Peacebuilding Program addressed the Government of Central and Latin America's approach to gang violence reduction, both the *mana dura* or strong-arm strategies of harsh repression and the pacification strategies with community policing and social welfare advancement. The study concluded that the strong-arm approach is a socially acceptable response to appease the government and the angry families who are victims of such crimes. However, according to Milliken (2013), the strong-arm approach is only effective in the short term and has forced governments to consider other strategies, such as the pacification approach.

In El Salvador, the pacification strategy is credited with significantly decreasing gang-related homicides. In March 2012, the first results of this strategy were revealed; according to Milliken (2013), the country's homicide rate fell by 59.7%. The government moved to consolidate the success and developed a viable, sustainable path. The sustainability of the El Salvador model enabled the inclusion of international groups such as the Organization of American States (OAS), the European Union, and Interpeace

institutions. According to Milliken, they all work with the government and other local groups to ensure the social needs of the vulnerable are met. Moreover, the pacification strategy has extended its reach to countries such as Honduras, Guatemala, and Brazil (Roque, 2017). The government of St. Kitts and Nevis has since introduced a similar program; it is essential to explore whether it has effectively reduced criminal behavior.

Incentive-based or evidence-based programs are not bad ideas and have been shown to produce quick results with positive gang homicide reduction (Carlton, 2020; Corburn et al., 2021; Milliken, 2013; Roque, 2017). In the United States, several states have expanded these programs or introduced new ones. Crime reduction programs can change how the criminal justice system administers justice, especially for firearm-related crimes. According to Dholakia and Gilbert (2021), reliance on arrest, prosecution, and incarceration has significantly damaged many fragile communities, and the time for a shift in response is now. The future of the criminal justice system as it relates to reducing gun crimes and gang homicide is evidence-based crime reduction programs, community intervention programs, gun violence interventions, and hospital-based violence interruption programs. Each of these programs seeks to reduce gun violence and homicide through nontraditional methods, and according to Dholakia and Gilbert, they are effective.

The literature reviewed indicates several successful interventions in various parts of the world, including North America, South & Central America, England, and the Caribbean. However, few researchers have examined the lived experiences of the participants in these crime intervention programs. Critics have argued that these experiences have no impact on the participants' lives or the victims of crimes and their

families. One way to address this gap is to have the participants tell their stories and share their experiences while enrolled in the programs.

Gap in Literature

The employment of incentives as a strategy for crime reduction has been used in regions with a high prevalence of gang-related activities. Previous research has illustrated that incentive-based programs can be employed to reduce crime. However, there is little research focusing on the use of incentive-based programs to reduce criminal gang homicides. In the current research, I focused on closing this gap by exploring the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in incentive-based programs targeted to reduce homicides and other gang-related activities. By focusing on the criminal gang members, I acquired insights into the consequences of using incentive-based programs.

Summary and Conclusion

I explored the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in incentive-based programs in order to understand the consequences of such programs. While previous studies have established a link between employment and a reduction in criminal activities, no study has focused on the lived experiences of those enrolled in employment programs, including the challenges faced and the widespread impacts of their involvement. The literature review has shown that incentives such as employment and benefits can deter criminal gang members from engaging in criminal activities. However, gaps remain in the literature relating to the manifestation of the phenomenon in different contexts and the experiences of those participating in incentive-based programs. I could not identify any study regarding this phenomenon in St. Kitts and Nevis. Therefore, I

employed a phenomenological study to close this gap by exploring the perspectives of criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP through their lived experiences.

After conducting the literature review, exploring and understanding the methodology employed to close the identified research gap is vital. The literature review has revealed a lack of knowledge and evidence on the consequences of using incentive-based programs to reduce gang-related homicides. After analyzing this phenomenon and evidence, explaining the challenges of managing and influencing criminal gang behavior, and identifying the research gaps, in Chapter 3, I outline the methodologies and designs employed to address the research question. I apply a phenomenological qualitative approach and provide a rationale for choosing this research approach. In this chapter, I also explore my role as the researcher, the research design, the participant selection, data collection, analysis procedures, and ethical procedures. Further, I address the issues of the trustworthiness of the research process and analysis.

Chapter 3: Research Plan

I examined the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis, an employment program focused on reducing gang-related homicides. I undertook a phenomenological study on the lived experiences of criminal gang members who are part of this employment program, allowing an understanding of their experiences and the program's success. In this chapter, I review the methodology and the rationale for choosing the specific methods; moreover, I discuss my role and responsibilities in this study. Further, I review the study setting, the data collection procedures, the data analysis tools, the study's trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and ethical considerations, including procedures to protect the data collected in the study.

Research Design

I employed a qualitative approach to provide a detailed description and review of the phenomenon revealed through the participants' lived experiences. The research questions, as stated in Chapter 1, are:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in incentive-based program focused on reducing gang-related homicides?

RQ2: How can the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in incentive base program help develop program policies focused on reducing gang-related homicides?

RQ3: Based on an assessment of the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in an incentive-based program, are there any negative consequences of using such a program to reduce crime?

By using a qualitative approach, I focused on how meaning is socially constructed and the experiences that the participants have had about the social phenomenon being studied (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As Denzin (2014) illustrated, I could acquire the participants' perceptions and perspectives through the qualitative method; further, I could analyze the complexities of the research phenomenon, allowing an in-depth understanding of the multi-faceted nature of human phenomenon Babbie, (2017). I deemed quantitative research to be inappropriate due to its broad conceptualization and use of numbers in testing relationships but not explaining the how and why Smith et al., (2009). The qualitative method uses open-ended and unstructured questions to gather insights through the participants' responses (Reiners, 2012). Therefore, I chose this method to acquire a detailed description of the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in an employment program.

I used phenomenology to answer the research questions. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), phenomenology involves the study of individuals' experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and judgments. Further, Smith (2006) indicated that phenomenology is a structured methodology focused on subjectivity based on the premise of lived experiences and the construction of meaning. Through phenomenology, I could acquire the shared experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in an employment program by focusing on their lived experiences concerning the phenomenon in its actual setting.

As Gallagher, (2012) recommended, the qualitative phenomenological design is appropriate for this type of study. Through this design, I could identify the nature, essence, and lived accounts that criminal gang members in ALPP share. I deemed the case study approach to be inappropriate as it requires a specific context, whereas in this

study, I aimed to acquire the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in an employment program. Smith and Firth (2011) indicated that a case study involves using a specific case within a specific context and location. I also considered ethnography but deemed it unfit as it involves studying a specific period and observing the practices and behaviors of the target population Merriam & Tisdell, (2015).

Based on the limitations and scope of the current research, both ethnography and case study are not appropriate to address the study's research objectives. Babbie (2017) stated that the use of phenomenology study design in exploring a research problem enables the acquisition of in-depth information and the construction of meaning through detailed descriptions of participants' experiences. I collected data through face-to-face interviews to identify these patterns and conclude the research on criminal gang members.

Role of the Researcher

My role was central in collecting and analyzing data to explore the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP. I am a career police officer, and thus, it is critical to analyze and understand my roles and responsibilities in data collection and analysis. My current professional rank of assistant commissioner of police is solely administrative, not involving day-to-day operations or street-level interactions with any participant or their affiliates. To further protect the study's validity, I took an 8-month hiatus from active duty during the study's data collection, analysis, and conclusion stage. This step ensured that any data collected was free from fear or intimidation and that participants were comfortable reflecting on their own real experiences.

One of my roles involved the development of the methodology for the study, including data collection procedures, testing tools and techniques, and necessary adjustments. In addition, I identified the participants by employing purposive and snowballing sampling methods. After data collection through face-to-face interviews, I also analyzed the data by retrieving codes, themes, and conclusions from the participants' responses. After identifying the research participants, I invited them for interviews, informed them of the objectives and other details of the research, and explained their roles and expectations as study participants.

As Turner (2010) recommended, adequate information must be provided to the potential participants, allowing them to give informed consent. Therefore, ensuring appropriate consideration and employment of research ethics is a significant role of researchers. Moreover, Smith et al. (2009) stated that research ethics must be reviewed for their implications, mainly when the participants are human.

Several implications were made during this study. First, the ALPP is an employment program implemented in March 2018 and focused on reducing gang-related homicides by providing incentives such as educational opportunities, small business loans, and employment for participating gang members. As a law enforcement officer, I have close relationships and interactions with several ALPP participants, which might influence data collection and analysis. Some participants were uneasy when answering questions as they had pending cases and even existing arrest warrants.

Further, some participants were influenced by the culture of snitching and the fear of retaliation, which is common in criminal gangs. As Reiners (2012) recommended, researchers must review and address their close interaction and engagement with the

participants. Ravitch and Carl (2016) warned researchers that they must meet and respect the obligations of their research relationship and engagement with the participants by ensuring the safety of the participants during data collection. As a law enforcement officer, I was in a position of power; some participants may have felt like they had no choice; thus, I ensured to obtain informed consent while clarifying that they had no obligation to participate in the study. Moran (2018) stated that researchers should inform the participants that they are free to withdraw from the study during the research process.

Turner (2010) recommended that the setting for face-to-face interviews should make the participants feel comfortable. In this study, I conducted the data collection in the neighborhood of the criminal gang members. Conducting the research in a police station would have influenced the participants. Moreover, I offered no incentives for the respondents' participation, as this would have influenced their responses. I also ensured that the participants understood that the research was strictly for scholarly reasons and was separate from my position as a police officer. Importantly, I committed to strict ethical standards in academic research by taking an extended leave of absence from my job. However, it is important to state my employment as a police officer publicly for fairness.

Reflexivity is employed in qualitative research, allowing the researcher to be aware of the dynamics of their relationship with the study participants Saldana, (2016). I used reflexivity to acknowledge the significance of my role in the research and how it may influence the data collected and meanings constructed from the responses. Palaganas et al. (2017) recommended that researchers use reflexivity to acknowledge their roles, including recognizing how their judgments, beliefs, and assumptions throughout the

research process may influence the respondents and the interpretation of responses. As Murray and Holmes (2013) recommended, I continuously examined my conceptual and theoretical biases, assumptions, and preconceptions and how they might influence the research. Prior experiences with gang members and my understanding of the research phenomenon were also considered.

Participant Selection

This study involved 10 participants, including eight criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP and two program administrators in the ALPP. I used purposive sampling and snowballing sampling to identify the participants. As Reiners (2012) illustrated, researchers use purposive sampling to acquire adequate and best-suited participants to inform the researcher (Murray & Holmes, 2013).

Through snowball sampling, I ensured that the research acquired adequate participants to inform the study. According to Maxwell (2013), snowball sampling involves using existing study subjects to recruit other subjects from their networks. Therefore, the existing participants refer potential participants with similar attributes required by the researcher (Mesley, 2015). After identifying participants through purposive sampling, I employed snowballing sampling with the identified participants, obtaining referrals of their peers in the program. By using both sampling approaches, I acquired an adequate sample size to inform the study.

The determination of an inadequate sample size in qualitative research is mainly based on one's judgment and experience. Therefore, scholars suggest different recommendations for an adequate sample size. Morse (1994) suggested a sample size of six participants, whereas Creswell (2009) argued that a sample size of ten is enough for

data saturation within a qualitative study. Data saturation refers to the quality and quantity of data or information where no new information can be retrieved without acquiring data from a different participant (Moustakas, 1994). Although there is no consensus on the optimal number of participants for a qualitative study, the researcher has the flexibility to determine the best sample to achieve saturation.

The studied phenomenon is the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP; I thus acquired insights from criminal gang members in the program. Further, I included ALPP program administrators to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of criminal gang members in the program. I used purposive sampling as it enabled the targeting of only criminal gang members participating in the program and thus provided insights into their experiences with the program. To secure data saturation, I used snowballing sampling as it allowed me to access criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP, who I could not have accessed otherwise. Criminal gang members may cancel the appointment, and I would have had difficulty accessing them, but snowballing ensured access to this hidden population. As Saunders et al. (2019) indicated, with snowballing sampling, researchers can find samples more efficiently and access subjects from reliable sources. I did not consider the number of years that a criminal gang member or program administrator has been in the program, but I included their age and gender to provide demographic profiling of the participants.

To provide insights, I identified 10 participants (two program administrators and eight criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) recommend choosing a sufficient sample size to inform the study. A small sample size is recommended in a phenomenological research design as it allows for detailed description

and comprehensive data analysis (Gill, 2014). Using a small sample size of 10 participants, I could spend adequate time collecting and analyzing data to address the research aim. Further, Moran (2018) recommends using a small sample size in qualitative research as it verifies the collected data, allowing the researcher to conduct follow-up discussions if necessary. Verifying allows for the clarification of information and gives participants time to make changes to their responses.

In the recruitment procedure, I used my professional and personal networks to determine the ten participants to recruit and include in the study. As mentioned earlier, I am a career police officer and was directly involved with some of the criminal gang members in the study area and indirectly integrated with the ALPP implementation. Through these personal and professional networks, I contacted criminal gang members who participate in the ALPP employment program and the ALPP program administrators. I introduced myself to the potential participants and shared the study's objectives. Moreover, I provided an in-depth description of the study, including the participants' expectations, to those interested in participating.

After identifying those willing to participate, I sent them a consent form, asking them to send back a signed copy before participating in the study. After obtaining consent, I organized a face-to-face interview, giving consideration to the participants' preferences for the interview location. I also shared the interview questions and the duration expected for the interview in advance. If peers wish to review the study, I will send them the recruitment and selection details so they can analyze the procedures and ensure that appropriate ethical protocols and guidelines were followed in conducting the research.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation in research is critical, as the instruments chosen must collect the correct information to address the research problems and answer the research questions (Merriam, 2014). I used in-depth individual interviews to collect data, with an interview schedule to guide the data collection. As per Pernecky's (2016) recommendation, I employed an interview protocol to develop the interview guide and clarify the procedures to be improved. Saunders et al. (2019) stated that an interview protocol explains the data collection process, including informed consent, details of the interviews, post-interview activities, and tools used within the interview process. The interview protocol offers the readers an overview of the procedure used for conducting the research.

I used the theoretical review and background of the literature review to develop the interview questions. The main research question the study addresses is: "What are the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in an employment program to reduce gang-related homicides?" To obtain relevant answers to the research question, I developed interview questions that focus on understanding the lived experiences of criminal gang members participating in the ALPP program and the negative consequences of incentive-based programs used in reducing gang-related homicides.

The theoretical frameworks employed were social bonding theory and phenomenology. As Roh (2017) indicated, social bonding theory explains why delinquency occurs with social bonding factors guiding behavior, such as attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. One can determine the basis for preventing individuals from engaging in criminal activities by focusing on these four factors. I also developed the interview questions based on these four factors. In addition to the

theoretical framework, I used the literature review to develop the interview questions. For instance, evidence indicates making money and identity development as contributing factors to gang formation (Sonterbum, 2021; Whittaker et al., 2020).

Previous studies have also proposed using employment and other incentives to deter criminal behavior (Bushway & Apel, 2012; Levi & Soudijn, 2020). Based on the literature review, I used significant variables such as employment and other incentives to develop the interview guide. As Mesley (2015) recommended, the researcher's personal knowledge and understanding of the study context can be used to develop the interview schedule. Since I am a career police officer, I have personal knowledge and professional experience with criminal gangs and their behavior. Thus, I used this method to develop the interview guide.

I also employed individual interviews as they are iterative and offer flexibility for me to adjust the questions while also giving the participants the space to describe their lived experiences. Maxwell (2013) indicated that in-depth individual interviews enable participants to explain their lived experiences, construct meaning from their experiences, and provide their opinions regarding the subject matter. Thus, through the in-depth interviews, I was able to explore the use of the ALPP in reducing homicides among criminal gang members and analyze adverse consequences of the program.

In this study, I aimed to explore the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis, which offered an opportunity to understand the negative consequences of the program. I used interviews to collect responses from the selected participants to achieve this aim. I considered several factors when developing the interview guide. First, I considered the study context and ensured appropriateness in the

data collection process. I undertook the study within areas with gang activities, thus exercising sensitivity and caution.

Further, Hua (2015) recommended incorporating cultural sensitivity in developing the interview guide. Researchers must consider cultural barriers and differences that may challenge the data collection process. For instance, since I had intimate knowledge of and interactions with the targeted participants, I could ensure cultural sensitivity. Further, it is recommended to consider power imbalances and social distances, with measures taken to ensure that the data collection environment is comfortable and safe for the participants (Bryman, 2012). In adhering to this recommendation, I ensured that the participants understood that the purpose of the study is purely scholarly and that I would not utilize the information collected for any other purpose.

Therefore, it was necessary to identify a suitable location for conducting the research and ensuring an understanding that the study is strictly academic. As Saunders et al. (2019) illustrated, an interview guide provides direction during the data collection and secures consistency in the themes and concepts identified from the participants' responses. I thus developed an interview guide providing specific questions that were used to guide the data collection process.

I also ensured the credibility and validity of the content. First, I employed peer debriefing, whereby I sent peers the data collection procedures adopted in the study. Peer debriefing includes sending the methodology details, the participants' selection, the sampling procedures, and the instruments used to collect data. Through peer debriefing, I acquired feedback from my peers on the interview questions and the data collection procedures. As Creswell (2009) claimed, peer debriefing allows feedback on the data

collection procedures used in the research, allowing for adjustments. Peer debriefing secures the validity and credibility of the study. As per Maxwell's (2013) recommendation, I also employed member checking by sending the interpretations from the responses, allowing the participants to make changes and clarify their responses. Member checking further improves the validity and credibility of the study. Other data sources used for the research include the notes that I made throughout the interview process of key concepts and variables. They helped acquire a more detailed review of the findings.

Data Collection Procedures

The data were collected from 10 study respondents, including eight criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP program and two ALPP program administrators. I obtained informed consent before commencing the data collection and provided adequate details about the research to the participants. To ensure reliability, I ensured that the research questions in the interview guide were flexible, whereby the questions changed where necessary. The face-to-face interview took approximately 60–120 minutes, and the participants had sufficient time to answer the questions and describe their lived experiences.

Where necessary, I used follow-up interviews to ask follow-up questions, clarify information, and give respondents a chance to ensure that my interpretations from their responses were appropriate and accurate. Creswell (2009) indicated that qualitative methods must provide data verification to secure validity, rigor, and reliability. As Gravetter and Forzano (2015) recommended, I obtained consent from the participants to record the interviews. Compiling interview information is critical and ensures that the

data collection is efficient and consistent across the interviews. According to Creswell, the documentation method can involve note-taking, whereby the interviewer takes notes throughout the interview, or tape-recording, whereby the interviewer uses a tape recorder to document the interviews. In this study, I used a professional tape recorder to document the interviews, allowing for a comprehensive review of the respondents' responses. As explained by Hua (2015), tape-recording allows the interviewer to engage in the conversation without being distracted by taking notes.

However, Saunders et al. (2019) indicated that the interviewer can take brief notes about key points during the interview and use the recording to fill in the information gaps or details. Note-taking also enables the researcher to mark points that need clarification or follow-up. By recording the interview, the researcher can verify the responses from the participants, with the transcriptions providing accurate representations of their descriptions. Further, as Maxwell (2013) recommended, recording delimits limitations in memory and provides an opportunity for close examination of the participants' responses.

Finally, recording the interviews allows peer reviewers and other parties to address validity issues. Therefore, I recorded the interviews and considered follow-up interviews to acquire more details or clarify the responses provided by the participants. After the data collection procedures, I debriefed the participants. As indicated by Merriam (2014), participant debriefing involves informing the participants about the purpose of the study in which they have participated. Thus, debriefing participants marks the conclusion of their participation in the research, allowing them to withdraw their participation if they so desire. Due to the phenomenological qualitative approach, I directly interacted with the criminal gang members participating in the research. Thus, I

continually reflected on my roles and responsibilities and how they might affect the research findings, guided by several ethical guidelines.

Ethical Procedures

I applied several considerations to ensure that the study adheres to critical ethical principles. First, I acquired informed consent from the participants. Moreover, I provided details of the research, including the participants' roles and responsibilities, to the potential participants, giving them a chance to refuse to be part of the study. In addition to the informed consent, I obtained the appropriate permission from the Institutional Review Board for Ethical Standards in Research # 08-01-23-1010392, with clearance acquired from the university before commencing any activity in the research process.

I have also been transparent about the potential prior relationships with the participants to allow the IRB an opportunity to ensure that appropriate ethical guidelines and standards are observed. As illustrated, I am a career police officer, and thus, there is a power imbalance between the respondents and me. However, I took a leave of absence from my job to create an environment of comfort and balance for the participants. The news of my leave of absence was published in the media so that participants understood that it is valid and were informed that I hold no office of authority while conducting the interviews. Further, I observed honesty, anonymity, and transparency in conducting the research. Anonymity ensures that the identity of the research participants is protected.

Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of criminal gang members participating in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis and to understand the negative consequences of using an incentive-based program in homicide reduction. The central

phenomenon was the significant reduction in gang-related homicides since the implementation of the ALPP. The aim was to understand the lived experiences of the participants enrolled in the ALPP, by answering the research question: “What are the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in an employment program to reduce gang-related homicides?”

After the data collection procedures, I transcribed the interviews and employed thematic analysis in reviewing the data. As Saunders et al. (2019) illustrated, thematic analysis involves the development of codes from responses, categorizing them into themes and sub-themes, and using them to inform the study. I employed thematic analysis to understand how criminal gang members constructed meaning from living and experiencing employment within the ALPP and determine the consequences of their involvement.

In the research, I used a structured approach to examining, organizing, and constructing meaning from the respondents’ responses. Next, I categorized the themes and subthemes based on the information gathered and developed them based on the research questions the study aimed to answer. With the responses answered and categorized in alignment with the research questions, I referenced the literature reviewed, providing a theoretical framework for analyzing the findings.

Using the thematic analysis, I interpreted the collected data, as per the recommendations of Smith and Firth (2011). Based on Saldana’s (2016) framework, I derived the codes from the responses and categorized them into themes to address the research questions. Table 1 in Appendix A summarizes the coding framework employed in this study based on the research concepts and the research questions. For instance, the

first theme is the lived experiences of criminal gang members with arrests and fear of arrests, gang culture, and violence—the codes informing the theme.

Through the codes, I developed the themes and used them to answer the research questions. The quality of the data collected is critical to securing the strength and credibility of the results and the interpretation of the data to inform the research. To help improve and ensure the analysis and interpretation, I employed NVivo, allowing adequate management and analysis of the complex data collected. NVivo's approaches enable data categorization and classification, allowing a more efficient representation of qualitative data. I used computer-based coding with NVivo in this study to help code the responses. The manual coding method in qualitative research is labor-intensive, time-consuming, and outdated, with folders and filing cabinets used to gather materials based on similar themes (Saunders et al., 2019). Unlike manual coding, computer-based coding saves time, provides increased flexibility, allows for handling large amounts of qualitative data, and improves the research's validity (Hua, 2015). Thus, I used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the phenomenological research is critical to conducting the research and presenting the findings. Hua (2015) recommended that researchers secure the study's trustworthiness by considering the research's credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability.

Credibility

The research's credibility entails the dissertation's audience being certain about the results presented and how the analysis was conducted (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). To

ensure credibility, I confirmed that I objectively interpreted the collected data. Moreover, I recorded the interviews and developed the transcripts. Further, I used reflexivity to secure credibility by avoiding assumptions, misinterpretations, and personal biases in my interpretations. I also used member checks and peer reviews to ensure accurate interpretations and adopted the university dissertation process procedures for an appropriate research approach.

Transferability

The transferability of research involves determining whether the results can be transferred to different contexts (Maxwell, 2013). However, as Gravetter and Forzano (2015) indicated, qualitative findings often involve specific contexts and are thus difficult to transfer to other settings. The topic of criminal gang members enrolled in employment programs in a specific area might not apply to other settings. However, as per Merriam's (2014) recommendation, I provided a structured and detailed research process, allowing the audience to understand the procedure. It also allows one to replicate the research and evaluate whether similar results will be obtained.

Confirmability

Confirmability involves the researcher's competence in coding bias and providing an objective and non-judgmental interpretation of the findings (Saunders et al., 2019). In the current research, I used reflexivity to ensure checks on my personal biases and record and transcribe the interviews to limit any bias. Further, I used the participants' and peers' reviews of the transcripts and interpretations to secure the accuracy of the interpretations.

Dependability

The dependability of research involves relying on the research procedures used in collecting the data (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, it must be possible for another researcher to conduct the same research and obtain similar results. In this study, I applied rigor to the research design and its implementation, with detailed guidelines for performing the research. Moreover, I provided peers with the details of the sampling procedures and the identification of participants for debriefing.

Summary and Reflections

The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of criminal gang members participating in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis and understand the negative consequences of using an incentive-based program in homicide reduction. The central phenomenon was the significant reduction in gang-related homicides since implementing the ALPP and understanding the lived experiences of the participants enrolled in the ALPP. The following were the research questions of the study:

RQ1. What are the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in incentive-based programs focused on reducing gang-related homicides?

RQ2. How can the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in incentive-based programs help develop program policies focused on reducing gang-related homicides?

RQ3. Based on an assessment of the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in an incentive-based program, are there any negative consequences of using such a program to reduce crime?

Reflection on Social Change

Through this phenomenological qualitative study, I aimed to achieve social change by exploring the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP employment program, which aims to reduce gang-related homicides. By understanding the lived experiences of criminal gang members in the employment program and the program's consequences, I proposed initiatives and recommendations that can help improve the effectiveness of such employment programs in reducing gang-related homicides. Walden University's mission is to develop a community of career professionals and scholars who can transform society by impacting positive social change. Social change can be described as changes in how things are done to enact positive and innovative transformation of the society (Cohen, 2011). According to Walden University (2022), positive social change involves the deliberate process of developing and implementing strategies, ideas, and actions that promote the dignity, worth, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, societies, and cultures. Throughout its history, Walden University has been driven by a passion for effecting positive social change by empowering its scholars.

The Turners developed the university in 1970 as a learning institution, allowing the use of knowledge to provide solutions to societal challenges. Sutton and Ruprah (2017) indicated a high prevalence of gang-related homicides and criminal activities in the Caribbean, with a continued rise in gang development. St. Kitts and Nevis reported high rates of criminal gang homicides, resulting in the introduction of the ALPP to reduce these numbers. However, there are consequences of implementing the ALPP for participating criminal gang members. Through the current study, I intend to close this gap

in knowledge, understand the consequences, and inform practice. Therefore, I intend to effect positive social change by exploring the lived experiences of criminal gang members participating in the ALPP.

There is a consensus that education promotes quality of life and enacts social change (Brown & Baltes, 2017). Through education, individuals become aware of social challenges and inequalities, leading to a desire to create positive social change. With knowledge of the challenges given to society and the desire to change the status quo, individuals are more likely to take steps to enact changes. As a career police officer, I have an intimate understanding of the challenge of criminal gangs and how they negatively affect society through their criminal activities. However, I understand the challenges criminal gang members face in leaving behind their criminal history and becoming law-abiding citizens and society members. As a scholar-practitioner, I can foster positive social change in my work and my community by helping to rehabilitate criminal gang members. I believe that with the help of programs such as the ALPP, criminal gang members can rehabilitate and contribute positively to society.

Employment and incentive programs such as the ALPP improve the opportunities for rehabilitating criminal gang members by eliminating challenges such as the inability to find work or obtain funds to start businesses. After conducting this study on the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP program, I have understood the consequences of the programs and how to better position them to reduce gang-related homicides.

Social research is a critical foundation for programs that engage communities in change and develop more sustainable communities (Vadrot, 2020). Without research,

programs such as the ALPP, which are aimed at transformation, may have a foundation based on assumed problem identification or the implicit wishes and needs of a community. According to Cohen (2011), participation in programs and activities that can lead to real change must involve understanding the experiences and perspectives of the targeted community. Through this study, I have understood the challenges criminal gang members face in employment programs and identified adverse consequences of such programs. It has enabled me to provide recommendations on the programs and enact more practical guidelines for reducing gang-related homicides.

As Brown and Baltes (2017) indicated, social research enables customized policies and approaches that address issues that result in real change. By acquiring a current and updated understanding of social issues, the proposed policies are customized to meet the community's changing needs (Cohen, 2011). Therefore, through this study, I can effect positive change in employment programs targeting gang-related homicides by proposing sustainable social change initiatives. The evidence-based change will lead to informed decision-making and align with Walden University's mission.

Reflection on Course Learning

I have had more experience in quantitative research with statistical approaches such as descriptive statistics, regression analysis, t-tests, and factor analysis, among others. It has enabled an understanding of how social scientists use quantitative research to investigate social phenomena. However, while quantitative research involves a level of objectivity, I recognize its limitations, whereby the focus on numbers does not allow an in-depth understanding of concepts and experiences. Course learning has enabled me to acquire a balance by improving and increasing my knowledge and awareness of

qualitative research. I have learned various qualitative research methodologies such as case studies, ethnography, narrative analysis, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Scauso, 2020). During this course, my exposure to the paradigm has transformed my mindset and opened an opportunity for me in my future research endeavors.

First, I have learned that conducting a qualitative study is not easy and involves several pitfalls. As Jamshed (2014) indicated, conducting a qualitative study is labor-intensive and time-consuming in terms of data collection and analysis. Further, I have realized that qualitative research involves direct engagement of the researcher, whereby one has to balance participating and observing. Carey (2012) indicated that achieving a balance between participating and observing is complex, and one must reflect on and understand their role as a researcher.

Further, there is a challenge and risk of personal beliefs and attitudes leading to bias Willis, (2013). For instance, in researching criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP program, being a career police officer and my personal beliefs on the program and behavior of criminal gang members may have influenced the research process. Further, as indicated by Pulla and Carter (2018), conducting qualitative research poses ethical dilemmas that need consideration. For instance, as a police officer, I may be tempted to report or take action on ongoing criminal behavior or links. Secondly, I have learned that a qualitative study's description is a double-edged sword.

For instance, detailed descriptions are a strong weapon for improving the legitimacy of qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2019). However, detailed descriptions can also lead to bias and challenge the study's validity. According to Carey (2012), providing detailed descriptions of the research process enables the audience to understand

how the data were collected and the interpretations acquired from the responses provided. Thus, in conducting qualitative research, the researcher needs to understand the limitations posed and develop appropriate delimitations to secure the reliability and validity of the study.

In my research, I used a phenomenological qualitative study of the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in an employment program aimed at reducing gang-related homicides. As Jamshed (2014) indicated, the starting point for the researcher is to understand the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that can help select an appropriate methodology. Through the phenomenological framework to explore and describe the subjective experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in an employment program, I was able to acquire an essence of the social phenomenon and inform practice and research on its consequences in reducing gang-related homicides. Further, as Willis (2013) indicated, I acknowledged the relevance of the number of participants and their quality as they affect the richness of the study findings. As a result, I recruited ten study participants, with eight criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP and two program administrators. This mix of participants allowed a comprehensive review of the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in the program.

During the journey, I also encountered the need for and importance of the IRB. As Saunders et al. (2019) indicated, the IRB focuses on maintaining ethical standards and protecting human subjects involved in studies. I realized the significance of the participants' consent and safety. Scauso (2020) indicated that the safety of participants and other ethical considerations are critical in qualitative research as the researcher is closely engaged with the participants. The IRB process helps ensure that a researcher

does not risk harm to their participants by providing appropriate, adapted ethical procedures. Finally, I have understood the relevance of reflection and challenging assumptions in using qualitative research. Josselson (2013) indicated that a good researcher needs to be aware of oneself and the extent to which subjectivity may influence research. It is impossible to separate oneself from one's research, and this reflection is crucial for qualitative researchers.

Reflecting on this experience, I believe I have the skills to conduct qualitative research appropriately. I have learned that performing comprehensive qualitative research surpasses possessing research skills and knowledge with attributes and abilities such as flexibility and innovativeness. It requires reflexivity, continuous awareness, and learning how to improve and secure high-quality research.

Next Steps

Research planning is critical as it helps develop guidelines and research activities to successfully conduct a research process (Creswell, 2009). Developing the research proposal is the first step in the dissertation process and allows the researcher to develop the study plan. The research proposal enables the researcher to provide a structure for conducting the research and to gain approval from the ethics committee to perform the research. After developing the proposal, there was a need to gain approval from the committee, with my committee chair reviewing drafts of the proposal and completing a research ethics planning worksheet.

After their approval, I sent the proposal to the other committee members for review, with appropriate changes made to ensure that the standards were achieved. I then submitted the Safe Assign self-evaluation to the chair, and after approval, I requested a

formal committee review. After the necessary approvals, the proposal was sent for the University Research Reviewer (URR) review and submitted for an oral defense. Saunders et al. (2019) indicated that obtaining approval from the ethics committee ensures that the study participants are protected from harm. Thus, obtaining authorization from Walden's IRB before any research commenced was essential. After getting approval from the IRB, I began the research by collecting and analyzing the data. Finally, I reported the findings, drew conclusions, and developed the final report on the dissertation.

Chapter 4: Results

Through this investigation, I assessed the lived experiences of criminal gang members who have participated in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis. Additionally, I obtained insights into the adverse outcomes associated with an incentive-driven program implemented for the purpose of reducing homicides. In particular, I tried to answer the question of how and to what extent the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in incentive-based programs aimed at lowering the homicides that are related to gangs contribute to the development of program policies focused on reducing homicides associated with criminal gangs. Moreover, I analyzed whether there are any negative consequences of using such a program to reduce crime.

Therefore, in this section, I illustrate the setting of the research, participants' demographic information, collection of data, evidence of trustworthiness, data analysis, results, and a summary.

Pilot Study

The initial phase of the research involved conducting a field study to assess the efficacy of the data-gathering methods in a real-world setting prior to their implementation in the primary study (Pauline-Graf & Mandel, 2019). According to Dikko (2016), researchers can enhance their research tools by subjecting them to rigorous testing in real-world environments, thereby acquiring valuable insights for their improvement. A pilot study is an essential aspect of the research process as it enables investigators to evaluate the many stages and components of a study.

This evaluation is critical for determining the effectiveness of these elements in generating interview questions and facilitating access to relevant information. According

to Dikko (2016), a pilot study is significant as it allows the researcher to evaluate the dependability of the research instruments before commencing the actual study. Consequently, by conducting a pilot study, any deficiencies in the research instrument can be rectified prior to the implementation of the study. I conducted the initial round of interviews, encompassing a sample size of 3% of the entire participant pool. Consequently, a certain group of criminal gang members was subjected to the aforementioned technique, confirming the interview's suitability as the data collection tool for the current research.

Settings

The current research included those respondents who were eligible to participate. In particular, the participants were criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP and program administrators. This inclusion approach captured these varied participants' perspectives, minimizing the potential for bias in the findings. Furthermore, the participation in this research was limited to the participants mentioned above, who possess the ability to read to ensure that the problems under investigation can be effectively addressed and the examined phenomenon can be sufficiently analyzed and discussed.

The participants' availability and level of motivation influenced their selection for the current research. However, I needed to have a requisite level of cooperation and accessibility from the participants who underwent the research study's interview process. Finally, I gave careful and thorough consideration to the respondents who possessed the capacity to allocate their time and resources toward the study, as their valuable feedback was needed to establish legitimate and dependable findings.

Demographics

I identified a representative sample of both the program administrators and criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis. This study's sample size included two program administrators and eight criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP. I chose this sample size to ensure there would be enough high-quality information to generate themes for answering the research questions. Table 1 depicts the individuals' age, gender, level of education, category, race, and dependents:

Table 1*Composition of Participants*

Participant	Gender of Participant	Category of the participant	Participant's Age	Race	Level of education	Any Dependents
Interviewee #1	Male	Criminal gang member	24	Black	High School Subjects and Two years AVEC	Mother, Nieces, and nephews
Interviewee #2	Male	Criminal gang member	40	Black	High school	8 children
Interviewee #3	Male	Criminal gang member	33	Black	High school	One child, friends, and family members
Interviewee #4	Male	Criminal gang member	38	Black	High School	Siblings and Extended Family members
Interviewee #5	Male	Criminal gang member	38	Black	High School	4 Children and a Fiancé
Interviewee #6	Male	Criminal gang member	42	Black	High School	3 Children and Family Members and Certain Community Members
Interviewee #7	Male	Criminal gang member	N/A	Black	High School and College	Two children
Interviewee #8	Male	Criminal gang member	36	Black	High School or Secondary	Yes (Family members)
Interviewee #9	N/A	Program administrators	N/A	Black	N/A	N/A
Interviewee #10	N/A	Program administrators	N/A	Black	N/A	N/A

Table 1 demonstrates that all respondents who provided data on lived experiences of crime were males. Additionally, 80% ($n=8$) of the total participants were criminal gang members, while 20% ($n=2$) represented program administrators in the ALPP. Nonetheless, the majority of the criminal gang members who participated in this research were aged between 24 and 42 years, indicating that these participants could be engaged in gang activities and could offer information regarding their past experiences and how the ALPP's importance in preventing homicides. Additionally, all of these criminal gang

members had high school as their highest education achievement, which suggests they have enough knowledge to provide answers to the questions regarding their lived experiences in crime. Lastly, the findings indicate that most criminal gang members depended on their children, family members, and community members.

Data Collection

The participants of this research included eight criminal gang members, and two program administrators in the ALPP who could provide specific details on criminal gang members' lived experiences while participating in the program. I included both the program administrators and criminal gang members as the participants in this study to avoid the potential for skewed findings due to focusing on only one group. To that end, these participants included those over 18 who I believed to have prior knowledge to offer extensive responses to the questions asked.

Finally, I only recruited knowledgeable individuals with a high school or above level of education for the survey to ensure that they could provide real feedback regarding the questions addressed and that the results aligned with my expectations. The research environment is a crucial factor in the data collection because it can significantly impact the achievement of study goals and the participants' motivation to answer the research questions. Thus, I conducted this research in St. Kitts and Nevis since it was easier to focus and gain access to the participants, as it provided the atmosphere needed to achieve the current research aims. Although it is ultimately up to the researcher to discover what works best, it is still vital to try to obtain the optimal location to enhance the research process.

The rate at which data are gathered is known as the collection frequency. Specifically, I used a one-time frequency while eliciting information from the participants since the participants understood the research questions and provided extensive feedback in the first instance of the study. Therefore, there was no need to conduct another study because the data collection included several processing steps, including extraction, purification, transformation, and recording meaningful patterns from a single round of data collection.

However, I prepared a set of open-ended probes and questions before conducting the interviews; I specifically tailored these questions to elicit responses relevant to the research questions within the context of the interview setting. The interviews with each respondent ranged from 60 to 90 minutes—the data collection procedure involved using audio recording techniques. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) stated that interviews must be professionally recorded with the participant's consent to ensure precise transcription, data analysis, and interpretation. However, to address any potential ambiguities that could have been raised during audio recordings, I also conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews, facilitating further clarifications not captured during audio recordings with participants.

Nonetheless, I did not deviate from the data-gathering process since the collection locations, methods, and timelines were outlined while planning to collect data. The major method of data collection was in-depth face-to-face interviews, which I recorded to aid in further understanding of the issue being studied. In this case, it was the lived experiences of criminal gang members and to comprehend the adverse ramifications associated with the implementation of an incentive-driven program to reduce homicides. In addition, I

performed the in-depth interviews designed to achieve this study's aim within the stipulated time frame, with no variation between the data collection planning and actual data collection. Similarly, the sample used in data collection was consistent with the plan, as a total of eight criminal gang members and two program administrators were involved. Therefore, for each metric, I had an actionable data-collection plan that described important information, including the method's operational description and any sampling strategies.

The data gathered in this study predominantly consisted of qualitative information because the research aimed to evaluate the real-world occurrences, perspectives, and understandings of gang members who participated in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis. Additionally, the gathered data improved one's knowledge regarding the adverse outcomes of using incentive-based programs to lower homicide rates and contributed to the wider knowledge repository on the management and functioning of program administrators in the ALPP.

However, I faced difficulties with data quality in the data collection process. Raw qualitative data sometimes contain inconsistencies and errors because there was no set format for the answers to the questions and all respondents cannot provide consistent feedback regarding the questions asked. In the context of this research investigation, the absence of responses or a dearth of respondents willing to take part increased concerns over the integrity and reliability of the obtained data. Nonetheless, in order to effectively reduce the effects of these inappropriate data collection circumstances, I established attainable research aims and research questions that could be answered. Moreover, I

strategically prioritized the research through effective time management techniques to complete the research in the stipulated time period.

Data Analysis

I assessed this qualitative research through the application of thematic analysis, which is employed while identifying, analyzing, and presenting themes in qualitative data analysis (Terry et al., 2017). Terry et al. revealed that thematic analysis enables academics to determine key fundamental ideas by identifying commonalities. Nowell et al. (2017) suggested that the use of thematic analysis facilitates the process of efficiently examining extensive textual data.

Furthermore, Castleberry and Nolen (2018) observed that researchers commonly employ collaborative efforts when using thematic analysis as a qualitative data analysis technique because the thematic data analysis technique is feasible when the personal perspectives of individual researchers are important during the course of conducting research. Thematic analysis is a valuable tool for researchers to discern different thematic elements within the texts being examined. Therefore, I adopted this method of analyzing data as the most effective approach.

In order to effectively capture the important themes derived from thematic analysis, I used direct quotations to find these themes within the respondents' responses. Thus, the aforementioned data analysis technique is essential in answering the questions of the study by enabling an in-depth assessment of the provided data and information. I employed the data analysis procedures Kiger and Varpio (2020) suggested to identify the various themes for the designed research questions. These procedures encompass becoming acquainted with the data, coding the given information, generating themes,

reviewing and defining these themes, and ultimately documenting and discussing the themes discovered. The steps are detailed below:

Step 1: Becoming Familiar with the Data

According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), qualitative analysis should commence with thoroughly examining the transcripts provided by the participants through a first reading and subsequent re-reading. Before proceeding, the investigators must comprehensively understand the complete data corpus, encompassing all the available interviews. In addition, taking notes and recording initial thoughts can be advantageous during this stage.

Step 2: Generating the Codes from the Data

In the subsequent stage, Kiger and Varpio (2020) suggested that investigators organize the collected data logically and systematically. Coding reduces a substantial volume of data into smaller and more meaningful segments. Therefore, I selected the coding approach based on the research questions at the previously described stage.

Step 3: Theme Generation

According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), when the available data set is restricted, such as in the case of a single and concise interview response, the coding phase and the process of identifying emergent themes may substantially overlap. In the present phase, I identified the codes that exhibited comparable associations with each other as the overarching theme.

Step 4: Reviewing Themes

In this stage, I examined the themes identified in Step 3, made any required modifications before proceeding to the subsequent phase, and evaluated their logical coherence (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Hence, this process is significant since it involves compiling all relevant data pertaining to the specified themes.

Step 5: Defining Themes

This step represents the pinnacle phase of theme development, whereby the objective is to ascertain the fundamental essence of each topic (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). In addition, as per Kiger and Varpio, this stage involves interpreting the theme. Furthermore, this procedural measure guarantees that any supplementary topics are interconnected and engage with the overarching subject matter. Finally, this step of defining themes establishes a link between the concepts and the study questions.

Coding

The notions of thematic analysis render it a significant method for tackling the research questions. The second step described above is used in the identification process to recognize codes in qualitative data sets, which are used to identify major themes and draw conclusions about the research questions. Table (see Appendix 1) visually presents the process involved in formulating and retrieving codes from the raw responses and conclusions obtained from the current research participants. Searching for common themes across codes is characterized by an iterative approach involving continuous moving between codes to uncover shared patterns.

Thus, based on the data provided by the participants, I deduced various codes such as choice, gang environment, pressure and poverty, life for oneself, children,

opportunities, defending, mistreatment, benefits, criminals and killers, bad behavior, bad influence, and feeling uncomfortable from the responses used in the assessment of the first research question (see Appendix 1). The codes I deduced from queries related to the second research question included different life paths, sustainability and provision, opportunities, program restructuring, and face-to-face meetings (see Appendix 1).

Lastly, the most common codes for identifying the negative consequences of incentive-based programs were money, societal problems, political problems, and concrete structure (see Appendix 1). Table 2 illustrates how I transposed the codes obtained into useful themes adopted to answer the designed research questions. Additionally, the themes encapsulate significant aspects of the data in connection to the aims of the current investigation. Similarly, these themes indicated consistent patterns or correlations within the given dataset.

Table 2

Turning Codes Into Themes

Codes	Themes
Choice	Not having a choice
Gang environment	Growing up in a gang environment
Pressure and poverty	Societal pressure and poverty
Making a life for oneself	Making a life for oneself
Children	For the purpose of children
Opportunities	Opportunities such as business
Defending	Defending oneself
Avoiding mistreatment	Avoiding mistreatment
Financial benefits	Benefiting the business financially
Criminals and killers	Society perceives criminal gangs as criminals and killers.
Bad behavior	Gangs have bad behavior.
Have a bad influence.	Gangs are perceived to have a bad influence.
Feeling uncomfortable	Society feels uncomfortable
Different life path	Offered gangs a different life path
Sustainability and provision	Ensuring sustainability and provision in the families

Opportunities	Offered the gangs a lot of opportunities
Program restructuring	The need to restructure the program
Face-to-face meeting	Reintroducing face-to-face meeting
Opportunities	Offering more opportunities
Money	Mishandling of money
Societal problems	Societal victimization
Political problems	Political victimization
Concrete structure	Lack of concrete structure

Discrepant Case Quality

I used discrepant case sampling as a sample quality identification technique to provide further elucidation, modification, or enhancement to the existing theory adopted in the current research. The objective was to intentionally select instances that had the potential to refine a developing theme rather than outright disprove it. In particular, I used a triangulation approach in this study to examine and compare qualitative findings by employing data obtained from eight criminal gang members and two program administrators in St. Kitts and Nevis. I aimed to highlight the discrepant case quality in the data from various research approaches while investigating the criminal gang members' lived experiences of their time in the ALPP.

This study revealed that criminal gang members and program administrators consistently reported comparable responses about their lived experiences and how they could help develop program policies to reduce gang-related homicides. In addition, I factored in qualities of discrepant cases in this research since the proportion of criminal gang members and program administrators reporting multiple and concurrent responses was significantly greater in qualitative interviews, exhibiting a substantial increase compared to other sources.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

A researcher's degree of confidence in the methodologies employed while collecting and analyzing data is shown through the concept of trustworthiness (Parker & Northcott, 2018). Johnson et al. (2020) proposed that the thoroughness of a case study and the integrity of its data can be assessed based on four criteria: confirmability, transferability, credibility, and dependability. Therefore, it was imperative to incorporate two methodologies, empirical investigation and the dissemination of dependable outcomes, to ensure the findings' validity and significance. However, the reliability and generalizability of the data in this qualitative case study research were contingent upon the data's confirmability, transferability, credibility, and dependability.

I evaluated the credibility of the qualitative data to determine if they would ensure confidence in the provided findings and the methodology. The concept of credibility pertains to the degree to which it is possible to extrapolate the conclusions of a study to a larger population, as determined by the analysis of a body of evidence (Sarma, 2015). The data validation solely relied on the respondents as they were the exclusive source of information. However, I employed data triangulation in this study to ascertain the generation of genuine findings.

Therefore, I frequently employed the triangulation technique to ensure the trustworthiness of the data in this research, which confirmed the findings had high credibility. Furthermore, the themes generated from the in-depth interviews were interconnected and validated through triangulation across multiple cases, enhancing the credibility of the results. Consequently, I attained triangulation by employing primary data gathered from a substantial sample of criminal gang members and program

administrators. This approach guarantees the validity of the findings derived from the accumulated data since the sample was large enough to support the various themes that helped answer the research questions.

The use of in-depth interviews as the principal technique of collecting data also lends credence to the dependability of the present qualitative exploratory case study's findings because the open-ended questions led to the respondents providing thorough feedback. In addition, due to this instrument's malleability and adaptability, I could probe more deeply into the participants' experiences and viewpoints, boosting the validity and dependability of the collected data. The in-depth format of the interviews enabled me to ask specific follow-up questions based on the participant's responses, which guaranteed that the collected data accurately reflected the wide range of opinions held by the respondents.

Nonetheless, I checked the transferability of the findings to assess their external validity. The concept of transferability as evidence of trustworthiness in research pertains to the degree to which the conclusions drawn from a study can be extended to a broader population and generalized to different contexts (Parker & Northcott, 2018). Consequently, to guarantee that the findings were transferable, I conducted comprehensive interviews and analyzed the gathered data to ascertain the generalizability of the findings beyond the immediate breadth of the current investigation.

This study's findings apply to various circumstances, provided that the people under consideration exhibit similar life cycle characteristics. However, due to the impracticality of engaging in structured conversations with individuals in the target group to gather information and insights about a particular topic, I relied on general conclusions

drawn from the sample to make inferences about the entire target population.

Nonetheless, due to the reliability of the findings of this study, the procedures employed in this case study can be used to explore and assess the current research issues in future investigations.

Lastly, I ensured the confirmability of the qualitative data by double-checking the work at every stage of the process, from collection to analysis, increasing the likelihood that the findings were accurate. In addition, I documented the codes and patterns found in the analyses through a well-defined coding system, which helped implement the qualitative data's confirmability. I took these measures to eliminate the possibility of researcher and participant bias in the data and results. Moreover, I established confirmability frequently through an audit trail, in which I meticulously documented every stage of data processing.

Through this process, I ensured that conscious or unconscious biases did not influence the conclusions but rather thoroughly represented the replies provided by the respondents. Nonetheless, I also implemented confirmability by summarizing the content of every question posed during the in-depth interview with criminal gang members and program administrators. Through this analysis, I highlighted the convergence of themes presented unbiasedly, incorporating all the comments received as they possess potential value for researchers in future studies.

Findings

In this section, I present the findings of the predetermined study questions. I used the key themes derived from the questions pertaining to each research question to organize and analyze the results section. To ensure the anonymity of all participants, I

used pseudonyms, including "respondent" and "participant," to represent criminal gang members and program administrators.

Research Question 1

The study's primary question was to examine the lived experiences of criminal gang members actively participating in incentive-based programs explicitly targeting the reduction of gang-related homicides. I answered this research question by using various inquiries associated explicitly with evaluating the criminal gang members' lived experiences. In particular, the interview questions determined the causes of joining a gang, causes of leaving a gang, perceptions of society toward gangs, and benefits of being in a gang. By analyzing the collected data on these issues, I identified several themes, which are discussed under each lived experience below:

Causes of Joining a Gang

This lived experience among the criminal gangs involved the following themes:

Theme 1: Not Having a Choice. The interviews highlighted the significance of not having a choice as a cause for joining gangs, with 20% of participants acknowledging this factor. One example is provided by Participant 1, who recounted the following:

So, I didn't have a choice. I would get bullied in school until I found my way to grow into it. It started from small until I got bigger, and it got to a part where we started killing each other. But some of us don't have a choice. It is either to kill or be killed...

In addition, Participant 7 stated, "*Most of us are family members and people whom I grew up with,*" which indicates that most of the gang members were associated

with the people who involved them in crime from childhood, providing them with no choice but to be part of the gang.

Theme 2: Growing Up in a Gang Environment. The participants (20%) repeatedly highlighted this cause in the interviews. One example of this can be seen in the observations made by Participant 1, who, when asked what attracted him to gang life, indicated as follows: “...*I grew up in Cayon and being the last sibling of five older brothers, 2 of them are the bosses. Going to school, I was known to be the brother of the two bosses in Shanty Town...*” Nonetheless, Participant 2 responded the following: “*The environment. In terms of watching my elders and being influenced by their lifestyle...*” In addition, participant 4 narrated the following: “*From growing up with childhood friends who were part of gangs.*” Similarly, interviewee 6 mentioned, “*I grew up around people who became my street family and were part of gangs.*” From these results, one can infer that the majority of the contacted gang members were affiliated with gangsters due to the environment that they grew up in.

Theme 3: Societal Pressure and Poverty. Among the eight criminal gang members, three of them, accounting for 37.5% of the total sample, emphasized the significance of societal pressure and poverty as another cause of joining the gang. For instance, when I requested the participants to clarify their reason for joining gangs, Participant 3 indicated the following: “*Peer pressure, frustration, and poverty.*” Participant 5 also supported this theme by revealing the following when asked what compelled him to join a gang: “*Peer pressure and a means of survival.*” These illustrations confirm that pressure from society and poverty increased individuals’ chances of engaging in criminal activities.

Causes of Leaving Gangs

Theme 1: Making a Better Life for Oneself. Among the criminal gangs, 50% (4 out of 8) agreed that making a life for themselves was a significant factor in leaving the gangs. For instance, during the interview, when I inquired about what made criminal gangsters leave a life of crime behind, Participant 1 expressed the following:

I am a young man with nothing, and in a gang, the kind of life that you live in a gang, there's no time to build a life, build a house, or live a lavish life. So, the best thing is to put down the gang life and try to make a life for myself.

Similarly, Participant 2 indicated, *"For the betterment of myself,"* and Participant 3 mentioned: *"A second chance."* In addition, Participant 7 expressed the following: *"A better life in terms of the environment and being far from this reality."* Lastly, Participant 8 noted, *"A different mindset. A need for change in my surroundings for the better... also, being lost in the streets with no sense of direction..."* From these illustrations, one can infer that most criminal gangs were motivated to leave gang life to improve their lives.

Theme 2: For the Purpose of Children and Family. Out of the eight participants, three individuals, representing 20%, left the gang life due to their family and children. For example, the Participant 2 observed, *"My kids."* Similarly, Participant 3, when asked about the main fear of remaining in a gang, revealed the following: *"For my son to follow in my footsteps."* In addition, Participant 4 also supported this theme as he mentioned, *"so that my kids don't have to do what I did or see what I saw."* Nonetheless, Participant 1 indicated the following, *"because my mother depends on me at the end of the day. If I don't provide, we will starve..."* In addition, Participant 7 stated, *"My death, not seeing my children grow up, and the death of my loved ones."* Therefore, several

criminal gang members leave gangs to prevent their children from experiencing such a life, maintain their roles in their families, and protect their families from being victims of gangs.

Perception of Society Toward Gangs

This lived experience within criminal gangs was characterized by several elements that elucidate how society perceives criminal gangs. The following section depicts these themes:

Theme 1: Society Perceives Gangs as Criminals and Killers. Society identifies gangs as criminals and killers, as 40% of the participants who expressed their support for this theme revealed. For instance, when the respondents were asked to give their views on how society perceived them, Participant 1 indicated the following:

There's only one thing gang members do: kill each other. For instance, I am a gang member, and today or tomorrow, I go up the road, and a man comes and tries to fight; in the event, I stab and kill him.

Similarly, Participant 2 also confirmed the above theme by illustrating, “*Society will only see a criminal as a criminal.*” In addition, Participant 3 indicated that “*they view gang members as community terrorists.*” Moreover, when Participant 8 was asked whether he thinks society sees gang members as criminals, he said, “*Yes, some. Some people in society could relate.*” These quotes confirm this theme; the participants thought that society perceived them as criminals and killers due to the acts of killing, terrorizing, and harming associated with gangs.

Theme 2: Gangs Have Bad Behavior. Society perceives gangs as bad behavior, as 30% of the participants indicated, expressing support for this theme. For instance,

Participant 1 said, *“They think of us as the worst.”* On the same note, Participant 7 said, *“Society will always judge us because they don’t understand why we took this path.”* Lastly, Participant 8 said, *“Society does not like our behavior. They are not accepting of us.”* From these observations, society is not pleased with how the criminal gangs carry themselves and perceive them to be associated with bad behavior.

Theme 3: Gangs Are Perceived to Have a Bad Influence. Among the eight participants, three criminal gang members, constituting 37.5% of the total, claimed that society perceives them as having a bad influence. For example, the Participant 4 stated, *“Consider or categorize us as a ‘bad’ influence.”* In addition, Participant 8 mentioned the following: *“Some in society view gang members as bad.”* These assertions show that society regarded criminal gangs as having a bad influence on other people due to their involvement in gangs.

Theme 4: Society Feels Uncomfortable. A substantial number of participants (30%) agreed regarding society feeling uncomfortable about gangs. When participants were questioned on their views regarding the perception of society concerning them, Participant 4 expressed the following: *“Society is not comfortable being around gangsters.”* In addition, Participant 6 noted the following: *“Society does not believe in the members; they don’t trust them and don’t feel comfortable being around them.”* Lastly, Participant 4 asserted, *“At the same time, some don’t want to associate with us.”* These observations indicate that most people in society feel discomfort around gang members.

Benefits of Being in a Gang

Various themes were applied to the lived experiences of criminal gang members to determine how most of them benefited from being associated with the gang. The following examples illustrate the support for these themes:

Theme 1: Defending Oneself. Most of the criminal gang members who participated in this research agreed with this theme, with 30% expressing agreement. For example, when the participants were questioned about the benefits of being in a gang, Participant 1 remarked, *“teaches you different things, like using a gun and defending yourself.”* Similarly, the following narration was provided by Participant 5: *“I felt mighty, and it also came with protection,”* while Participant 8 indicated the following: *“Being in a gang came with a level of protection.”* Thus, based on these assertions, the criminal gang members benefited from being in a gang as they perceived that it taught them various things, such as using guns, and enabled them to feel mighty and safer over other people.

Theme 2: Avoiding Mistreatment. Avoiding being mistreated was highlighted in a substantial proportion of the conducted interviews, accounting for 25% of the total criminal gang members. When the participants were prompted to provide feedback on the benefits they acquired from being in a gang, Participant 1 expressed the following: *“It makes you streetwise.”* In addition, Participant 2 asserted: *“Also, the retaliation from being mistreated in the street.”* These claims confirm that individuals involve themselves in gangs to acquire tactics that could help them avoid being mistreated in the streets.

Theme 3: Benefiting the Business Financially. Generating financial gains for their businesses was highlighted by 30% of the participants. For instance, Participant 2

said, *“There were also financial benefits due to hustling.”* In addition, Participant 3 revealed that *“there is credibility and access to certain block market resources.”* Lastly, Participant 4 asserted: *“Business ideas include hustling and gaining income to provide for the family.”* Thus, from these above assertions, one can infer that gang life benefited the financing of members' businesses by hustling and gaining access to certain block market resources.

Based on these findings, RQ1 was answered and revealed the causes of joining gangs, such as not having a choice, growing up in a gang environment, and societal pressure and poverty. Moreover, participants revealed the causes of leaving gangs, such as making a better life for oneself and protecting children and families from a life of crime. They also indicated society's perception toward gangs, such as being perceived as criminals and killers, having bad behavior, having a negative influence on others, and making the community uncomfortable. Additionally, the findings indicate the benefits associated with being a gangster, such as generating financial gains for the businesses, avoiding being mistreated, and defending oneself.

Research Question 2

Additionally, I discerned the comprehension of the lived experiences of criminal gang members participating in an incentive-based program and how they contribute to formulating program policies that specifically target the reduction of gang-related homicides.

Benefits of the Peace Program

I specifically examined the benefits of the peace program and how it was implemented to reduce the homicides associated with gangs. The following themes emerged from the analysis of the data that was provided:

Theme 1: Offered Gang Members a Different Life Path.

The concept of offering gangsters a different life path was identified as a contributing factor in enhancing the development of program policies that focus on lowering homicides among gangsters. Four participants consistently supported this finding, representing 40% of the interviewees. For instance, Participant 1 narrated their experience:

It teaches the youths to take a different path in life ... It also provides a haven for the gang youth to go anywhere without fear of being murdered or harmed. In other words, it gave us freedom. It gave us another chance in life. If not for the program, there would have been murders every day.”

Similarly, Participant 3 noted the following; *“It was an eye-opener and a new perspective on life. However, the program started to dissipate due to a lack of commitment and trust, which allowed members to seek different options and alternatives.”* Additionally, Participant 6 asserted, *“It allowed the youths to think differently,”* while Participant 7 narrated the following: *“The program brought a sense of togetherness between the communities that once had differences and allowed us to think about life and the things that are more important than being involved in a gang.”* Thus, these assertions support the theme; providing a safe haven for the gang youths and

offering members various alternatives made the adoption of different life paths a significant benefit of the peace program.

Theme 2: Offered the Gang Members a Lot of Opportunities.

The significance of offering the criminal gang members different opportunities was highlighted by 70% of the total participants. For example, when I prompted the participants to provide feedback regarding the experience and benefits of being on the peace program, Participant 1 said, *“It gave us opportunities to own things. The peace program brought everyone together and gave us opportunities to build houses and apply for business loans so that we can start making money.”* In addition, Participant 2 asserted, *“I was able to become a business owner and a homeowner. I also got to enjoy a peaceful life. I also got to meet good people, people with whom I have violent encounters.”* Similarly, Participant 3 stated, *“I gained business-wise knowledge and interacted with high-level officials, which offered a new way of thinking,”* while Participant 4 indicated, *“I see no bad involvement in the Peace program. Many opportunities were offered, and interactions with other members outside of the community were encouraged to resolve any unwanted issues.”* Similarly, Participant 5 commented,

Before the program, there weren't any opportunities offered to gangsters. Gangsters were granted loans and were provided the opportunity to start businesses. I was able to start my car rental business and also obtain a piece of land to build my home. These are things that I have always wanted to do in life, and the peace program granted that to me.

Similarly, Participant 5 also noted the following: *“Before the program, I didn’t have a legitimate job or source of income, and with the program coming on stream, I was afforded that.”* Participant 6 indicated that the program *“allowed the youths to become more business-oriented. It offered opportunities that were not granted to gang members before.”* Participant 7 stated, *“The program offered me and other members a voice to resolve problems instead of turning to guns and violence.”* These assertions support the identified theme by illustrating that several opportunities, which include loans to start businesses, a new way of thinking, knowledge concerning business, the ability to start a car rental business, and land, were offered to the gang members through the Peace Program.

Theme Three: Ensure Sustainability and Provision in Families.

Based on the participants’ responses when asked to indicate their thoughts concerning the peace program, an essential benefit of this program was that it ensured that the members were sustainable and could provide for their families. This theme was supported by 30% of those who participated in this research. For instance, Participant 3 stated,

I also have employees who can provide for their families. It helped a lot. Crime is developed by poverty and peer pressure... The program provided income for those people. The payments were not only to stop the killings but also to give members a second chance and provide for their families.

Participant 4 revealed, *“It helps in a lot of several ways. People were able to sustain themselves and provide for their families.”* Moreover, Participant 6 supported this theme by stating, *“The monies were effective. The money allowed people to progress in*

life and shy away from the crime life.” Thus, based on these illustrations, one can infer that the peace program made the lives of criminal gang members better and more sustainable, offering them the chance to provide for their families through the income they received from it.

Implementation of Policy Changes for the Peace Program

Various themes were applied to identify how policy changes for the peace program were implemented to ensure lower homicides related to criminal gang members. The following examples illustrate how the data supported the identified themes:

Theme 1: The Need to Restructure the Program.

One of the most prevalent themes identified from the interview due to the implementation of policy changes in the peace program was the need to restructure the program, as a considerable proportion of 50% supported it. For instance, Participant 1 mentioned the following: *“No, because there is a new government, the program needs restructuring. Their work and ideas are not enforced now,”* while Participant 2 gave the following view:

There is a need for restructuring. To ensure the program is effective, change is inevitable. The program needs to be separated from politics. The structure needs to change in terms of the officials who are now in charge. Without that structure, people will look for what they want instead of what the program can offer.

Participant 5 asserted, *“Too many inexperienced people are involved in the decision-making process, which needs to change.”* Moreover, Participant 9 revealed the following: *“There needs to be adjustments. The policies have to adjust to people evolving. It must stop the flow, the youth, the younger ones coming in and joining*

gangs.” Similarly, Participant 10 revealed the following, *“No, there must be some policy changes to be effective and sustainable. There needs to be a proper plan for how things will transition into the program.”* These responses suggest that restructuring the program by enforcing ideas, the need for change due to too many inexperienced people engaged in making decisions, and proper planning of how things are to transit into the program is an effective implementation for the peace program to undergo policy changes.

Theme 2: Reintroducing Face-to-Face Meetings.

The participants indicated that the reintroduction of face-to-face meetings significantly affected the implementation of policy changes for the program. The following statements encapsulate the primary insights provided by three participants (50%) who corroborated this overarching theme. Participant 2 revealed the following:

“The regular meetings reduced the number of homicides. I would choose the meeting. The meeting allowed us to vent or voice our concerns and problems versus getting paid and not solving the issues.” Similarly, Participant 3 stated:

In addition, face-to-face meetings with the officials need to be reintroduced. It allowed gang members from all over the federation to sit in a room without animosity or hate. At these meetings, officials provided us with options, and once agreed upon, collaboration arose. The meetings also allowed for peaceful debates when voicing one’s concerns.

Moreover, Participant 4 commented, *“The meetings allowed the members to resolve problems and keep other members following the program’s policies,”* while Participant 5 asserted, *“Also, the regular face-to-face meetings that were held are required again...”* In addition, Participant 7 asserted the following: *“Communication was*

key. We came to an understanding of how to resolve the past and current issues.”

Similarly, Participant 8 indicated: *“A higher level of communication is required. In addition, when in-house meetings are being held, someone should be present to give input or advice on the matter.”* These responses confirm that using face-to-face meetings as opposed to other ways of communication is vital to enact the required policy changes into the peace program.

Theme 3: Offering More Opportunities to Gangs.

Based on the feedback provided by the participants, another significant policy change of the program reported was more opportunities being offered to criminal gangs. Four criminal gang members who participated in this study, accounting for 40% of the sample, agreed with the claim mentioned above. For example, Participant 2 mentioned the following: *“I was able to become a business owner and a homeowner.”* Additionally, Participant 3 noted: *“More opportunities and programs should be offered, such as personal development and leadership training. It put me in a position where I am now self-employed.”* Participant 4 asserted:

With opportunities available, individuals have things to live for and to look forward to. If loans are granted to persons in the program, a financial management course should be provided to teach them how to manage their money and put it to good use.

In addition, Participant 7 indicated, *“The opportunities gave people jobs and things to occupy their spare time instead of turning to criminal activities. Members became productive and gained a living legally instead of selling drugs, etc.”* These statements reveal that providing more opportunities, such as personal development,

leadership training, and a financial management course, was significant for the effectiveness of the peace program.

Based on these responses, one can conclude that the assessment of RQ2 revealed that the benefits of peace policy include offering the gangs myriad opportunities, ensuring sustainability and provision for the families, and providing a different life path. Moreover, the findings supported fully implementing this program by making changes such as offering personal development, skills training, small business training, leadership training, and a financial management course as opportunities to the gangs, restructuring this program, and reintroducing face-to-face meetings. This section provided data regarding how to develop program policy that focuses on lowering gang-related homicides.

Research Question 3

This study's final aim was to investigate whether there are negative consequences associated with using incentive-based programs to reduce gang-related homicides by assessing the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in that program. My primary aim was to use these experiences to inform whether the development of peace program policies that specifically target the reduction of gang-related fatalities has any negative consequences. I answered this question using various themes, as discussed below:

Theme 1: Mishandling of Money

According to the responses provided by 30% of the participants, the mishandling of money is a significant consequence or problem associated with adopting the peace program in reducing crime. For instance, when participants were asked to indicate some

negative aspects about the peace program, Participant 1, a criminal gang member, indicated, *“The only thing I didn’t like was my payment going to the bank.”* Participant 4, another criminal gang member, also said, *“Bad money management. Persons were granted loans to pursue businesses, etc., and did not manage the money properly.”* Nonetheless, Participant 10, a program administrator, provided these viewpoints:

Because for some, their focus became on the money as opposed to what the program was supposed to represent. So a lot of it was money-based, which wasn’t ideal because then some of them were using social media to flaunt the monies they were receiving without the context of the payments. It looked as if the gang members were being branded with a ton of money and using it for ill gains instead of working to earn money.

These claims confirm that mishandling money, improper money management, and inappropriate payment methods were significant consequences associated with applying the peace program.

Theme 2: Societal Victimization

As many as 50% of the participants agreed with this consequence. For instance, Participant 3, a criminal gang member, indicated, *“also, societal victimization. Society battered the program with negative statements and remarks regarding criminals,”* while Participant 5, another criminal gang member, mentioned, *“The general population was not acceptable to the program; they did not support the opportunities offered to gangsters.”* Nonetheless, criminal gang member Participant 7 said, *“It exposed people, and society was not welcoming to the program.”* Participant 8 (criminal gang member) also said, *“Society did not accept the program. They thought we were just being paid for*

peace. Hearing their opinions on the radio and social media impacted the program negatively.” On the same note, Participant 9, a program administrator, asserted, *“Hence, without society fully embracing it, it took a much longer pathway to reach its full extent.”* Thus, based on these indications, it is justifiable to deduce that societal victimization, characterized by battering the program with negative statements and not accepting, offering support to or embracing the program, constitutes a significant negative outcome linked to using the peace program to mitigate criminal activities.

Theme 3: Political Victimization

Political victimization was identified as another negative consequence of the peace program, as shown by 30% of the participants who expressed their support for this theme. When queried about some of the negative effects that the peace program caused in society, Participant 3, a criminal gang member, provided the following viewpoints: *“Political victimization – the previous government enforced the program. However, the change in government caused the program’s founders to be pushed aside,”* while Participant 6 stated, *“The leaders of the program are not committed. The leaders mistreated the program for their political gain and agenda.”* Lastly, Participant 9, a program administrator, mentioned *“how the politicians set a negative narrative on the program, which created a pushback for the wider society.”* From this feedback, one can infer that political victimization through pushing previous program founders aside, employing uncommitted program leaders, and setting a negative narrative about the program is an important consequence associated with using the peace program to reduce criminal activities.

Theme Four: Lack of Concrete Structure

I found that lack of concrete structure was another consequence associated with using the peace program to lower crime, as revealed by 20% of the participants who expressed support for this theme. For example, when asked to indicate the negative consequences of the peace program, Participant 2, a criminal gang member, said, “*Lack of interest from the officials. The frequent meetings are no longer being held,*” while Participant 10, a program administrator, asserted:

Some of the challenges would have been the lack of a concrete structure for the program. So for that reason, it created a program that was not appropriately managed even though it could have been if there was a layout of how it would operate.

These responses indicate that the lack of concrete structure due to the lack of interest from the officials, infrequent meetings, and inappropriate management of the program were notable outcomes resulting from the implementation of the peace initiative for reducing criminal activities.

Based on the findings presented above, one can infer that RQ3 was evaluated. The analysis demonstrated that the peace program had several consequences, such as lack of concrete structure due to the lack of interest from the officials, infrequent meetings, and inappropriate management of the program; political victimization, which resulted from pushing previous program founders aside, having uncommitted program leaders, and setting negative narrative concerning the program; societal victimization, which is characterized by battering the program with negative statements and not accepting,

offering support, or embracing the program; and mishandling of money, which is as a result of improper management of money and inappropriate payment methods.

Summary

Overall, through the current research, I investigated the subjective experiences of criminal gang members who have enrolled in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis. I sought to comprehend the adverse outcomes associated with implementing an incentive-based program to reduce homicides. Based on the aforementioned findings, it is clear that the research questions were critically answered and resulted in the determination that the lived experiences of individuals affiliated with criminal gangs encompass various factors that contribute to their involvement in crime, including, but not limited to, having no alternatives, exposure to a gang-affiliated upbringing, and societal pressures stemming from impoverished circumstances.

However, I also recognized the reasons for individuals quitting a criminal gang, such as striving for personal improvement and prioritizing the well-being of their children and family, as firsthand experiences among gang members. Furthermore, the societal perception of gangs encompasses the characterization of gang members as individuals involved in criminal and violent activities, portraying negative behaviors, exerting a detrimental influence on their surroundings, and creating an atmosphere of discomfort. Conversely, criminal gang members reported certain advantages associated with gang affiliation, including the generation of financial gains for local businesses, protection against mistreatment, and the ability to defend oneself; these lived experiences of gang members may reduce gang-related homicides.

The findings of the second research question of this study have shown that the peace program effectively decreased the incidence of gang-related homicides. These results can be attributed to the program's several advantages, including the provision of numerous opportunities, ensuring sustainability and provision for families through income, and offering alternative life paths for the gang members. The program achieved these results by strategically implementing initiatives such as conflict resolution through frequent communication between rival criminal gang members, bridging the communication gap between gang members and their families, building trust and bonds between law enforcement and criminal gang members, providing a legitimate source of income for gang members, and introducing gang members to the social and professional fabric of society, which, according to the participants, sometimes gave them a sense of belonging.

The program also underwent some restructuring and reintroduced face-to-face meetings to enhance its effectiveness. Lastly, this research has revealed a correlation between the peace program and negative outcomes such as the absence of a well-defined framework, political and societal victimization, and mismanagement of financial resources. In Chapter 5, I discuss this paper's findings and provide conclusions and recommendations. In particular, I interpret the results, analyze the implications of these findings for theoretical, methodological, or empirical studies and the present social changes, offer practical business recommendations, discuss drawbacks, and provide suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Gang violence has significantly increased in St. Kitts and Nevis since the mid-20th century, mirroring similar issues observed in LAC and other nations at various stages of development. Research has shown that in the last decade, many individuals in LAC were victims of homicide due to gang activities. Crime has a notable disparity in its impact on individuals belonging to the demographic of elderly and young men aged 20 to 24. This group experiences a significantly higher homicide rate of 92 per 100,000, which is approximately four times greater than the corresponding rate observed in the broader region.

The lived experiences of criminal gangsters are likely to influence one's perception of the risk associated with them. Individuals with a history of crime, such as being affiliated with gangs, may exhibit an enhanced awareness of the correlation between criminal activities and specific locations or people. This awareness can be attributed to physical and social delimitation, which facilitates the mitigation of subjective experiences of fear and perceived levels of risk. Notably, reports of gang-related incidents have exhibited an upward trend for 5 out of the past 7 years. The issue of criminal gangs and gang activities in both emerging countries, such as those in the Caribbean region, and developed countries, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, is not a recent development.

The emergence of gangs in metropolitan regions became increasingly documented during the 1970s and 1980s. Despite the consistent expansion in both the quantity and scale of criminal gangs throughout the Caribbean areas, such as St. Kitts and Nevis, along with the resultant criminal conduct and violence, there exists a dearth of knowledge

regarding the underlying factors that propel the formation and proliferation of gangs, as well as the most effective programs to counteract their expansion. Therefore, my primary aim through this research was to examine the lived experiences of individuals involved in criminal gang activities who have engaged in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis.

Additionally, I aimed to gain insight into the adverse outcomes associated with implementing an incentive-driven program to reduce homicides related to criminal gangs. Through the qualitative nature of the research, I identified, chose, manipulated, and examined data pertaining to the subject of investigation. Moreover, I could comprehensively evaluate the study's overall dependability and soundness.

I deemed the qualitative form of research most appropriate in the present study since I sought to acquire knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon such as participants' lived experiences, which involve abstract concepts. Additionally, through qualitative research, I obtained a comprehensive understanding of the research setting of St. Kitts and Nevis, rather than merely providing a superficial description based on a large sample of the population. Furthermore, I could visualize patterns' organization, arrangement, and expansion within a group of participants.

I was able to answer the research questions that guided this study critically. For instance, when assessing the lived experiences of criminal gang members who have participated in incentive-based programs designed to mitigate gang-related homicides, the results revealed the causes of joining gangs, such as not having a choice, growing up in a gang environment, and societal pressure and poverty.

The results also illustrated the causes of leaving a gang, which include making a better life for oneself and protecting children and family. In addition, the participants'

lived experiences included the perception of society toward gangs, such as being criminals and killers, having bad behavior, having bad influence, and making society uncomfortable. They also included the benefits of joining gangs, such as generating financial gains for members' businesses, avoiding being mistreated, and defending oneself.

Secondly, the results provided valuable insights into the development of program policies aimed at reducing gang-related homicides. The participants revealed the advantages of peace policies, such as providing gangs with ample opportunities, ensuring sustainability and support for families, and offering an alternative life trajectory. However, effective implementation of this policy involves various measures, such as the provision of personal development opportunities, leadership training, and financial management courses to gang members, restructuring the program, and reintroducing face-to-face meetings. Lastly, in an attempt to lower the number of homicides perpetrated by criminal gangs, I found the peace policy to have various drawbacks or repercussions, including the lack of a well-defined framework, instances of political and societal victimization, and mismanagement of funds due to inadequate financial oversight and improper payment practices employed by the program.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I compare the findings reported in this study with those of previous research. I have made the interpretations of the current study in accordance with the designed research questions.

The Lived Experiences of Criminal Gang Members Enrolled in Incentive-Based Programs Focused on Reducing Gang-Related Homicides

The causes of joining gangs, such as not having a choice, growing up in a gang environment, and societal pressure and poverty, imply that gang affiliates may experience coercive influences to engage in criminal activities as a prerequisite for gang membership. The ramifications associated with these causes of gang affiliation encompass exposure to substances, such as drugs and alcohol, engagement in sexual activities that are not commensurate with one's age, challenges in securing employment due to inadequate education and vocational competencies, and separation from one's familial unit.

The report of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2015) provided by the United Kingdom Home Office illustrated that a criminal street gang is delineated as a collective exhibiting one or more distinguishing features, such as growing up in a gang environment, that facilitate their recognition as a cohesive unit by external observers. Similarly, Pyrooz and Sweeten (2015) aimed to ascertain the factors that contributed to the turnover rates, prevalence, and frequency of gang membership among individuals aged 17 to 25 years in the United States. Pyrooz and Sweeten (2015) findings support the current study's findings, which illustrated that the existing laws have limited provisions for addressing the involvement of older individuals in criminal activities despite research findings indicating that the average age of those involved in criminal behavior typically falls within the range of 17 to 25 years.

According to Pyrooz and Sweeten (2015), because of their young age, most criminals are prompted to join gangs by growing up in a gang environment, making it

essential to the findings of this study. In addition, Mawby's (2012) findings were consistent with the current study results as they revealed that the professional environment of criminal gangs could present individuals with chances to participate in criminal gang activities, such as organized crime. Watkins and Moule (2014) compared the gang-related attitudes and behaviors that caused adults and juveniles to be associated with gang members. Their findings support this study's results since they illustrated a restricted range of fluctuation in reporting between 1999 and 2007.

Similarly, Pitts (2019) reinforces the present findings by positing that gangs predominantly comprise individuals belonging to racial or ethnic minority groups who experience significant poverty levels in metropolitan settings. Through the adoption of Maslow's theory, Sonterblum (2021) also supports the current results by emphasizing that self-actualization is contingent upon the satisfaction of all fundamental needs and further positing that individuals who lack the fulfillment of their basic needs within their familial and environmental contexts may resort to joining gangs as a means to satisfy these requirements.

Similarly, the current study's results are in line with the findings by Chioda (2017), which indicated that a scholarly discourse exists regarding the correlation between poverty and heightened criminal behavior, particularly regarding homicide. Moreover, Kyriacou et al. (1999) conducted a quantitative investigation examining the correlation between socioeconomic factors and gang violence. The investigation's results support the current study's findings by revealing that the creation of gangs in Los Angeles may be attributed to socioeconomic factors such as lower income levels and unemployment rates, which are associated with a high rate of poverty.

The causes of leaving gangs, which include making a better life for oneself and the purpose of children, signify that when criminal gangs' esteem needs are unfulfilled, they become discouraged and may engage in various actions to make a better life for themselves and their children to establish their sense of worth and acquire recognition. These findings are supported by those of Whittaker et al. (2020), who asserted that significant transformations have occurred since the inception of gang-related studies. Notably, the research by Whittaker et al. illustrated that the illicit drug markets have exerted a magnetic pull on the gang affiliates, resulting in their gradual transition toward a more entrepreneurial mindset and enhanced organizational capabilities.

In addition, Whittaker et al. (2020) found that contemporary gangs perceive themselves as commercial entities actively seeking avenues for expansion and profit maximization, consistent with the current study's findings. Additionally, Pyrooz and Sweeten (2015) surveyed gang members in the United States between the ages of 5 and 17 to assess the factors leading to their prevalence, frequency, and turnover rate. Their findings agree with those of the present study, as they revealed that the progression of current gang-related concerns is constrained by the pursuit of self-actualization and the attainment of elevated positions within the hierarchy of needs.

Similarly, van der Geest et al. (2011) also support the current findings by suggesting that several life events, such as job, parenthood, and marriage, serve as catalysts and turning points in the reduction of criminal behavior. Van der Geest et al. also indicated that securing employment is widely seen as the most suitable course of action for individuals involved in criminal activities, as it enables them to obtain a lawful source of income and establish an organized daily regimen. This aspect enhances the

likelihood of fostering a sense of responsibility and achieving adherence to societal norms, thus lowering criminal gang involvement. Similarly, the current results are in line with the idea presented by Back et al. (2018), who adopted the theory of social bonding by Travis Hirschi (1969) and posited that the prevention of individuals' engagement in criminal activities can be attributed to belief, involvement, commitment, and attachment.

The findings concerning criminal gangs being perceived by society as criminals and killers, having bad behavior, having bad influence, and making society uncomfortable suggest that in addition to exerting influence within corporate circles, criminal gang members pose a significant threat to the financial sections of an economy. This phenomenon is because organized crime tends to create a monopoly within the economy and financial sectors of society; organized crime groups employ many methodologies, including intimidation, to establish and maintain control in their areas.

The above-mentioned findings are consistent with those of Kleemans (2014), who posited that individuals who engage in criminal behavior are commonly perceived to be associated with certain personal characteristics, including limited skill sets, low levels of education, and substance misuse. These factors heighten their susceptibility to criminal involvement, diminishing their prospects for gainful work. In contrast to the aforementioned findings, Whittaker et al. (2020), who sought to gain insights into society's perception of criminal gangs over the previous decade, revealed that there is a contention that gangs have altered their perspective on gang membership, perceiving it as a potentially lucrative endeavor due to the emergence of a profitable underground market, particularly in the illicit trade of narcotics.

The results concerning benefiting from being in a criminal gang by generating financial gains for businesses, avoiding being mistreated, and defending oneself imply that by being associated with a gang, criminals discover a sense of identity, a feeling of safety, the presence of like-minded companions, and a profound sense of inclusion that had previously eluded them within their households. Moreover, some criminals become affiliated with gangs solely for survival or to safeguard themselves from rival gangs. This affiliation with the gangs may symbolize a means of achieving success and acquiring material items that would be inaccessible to individuals who are not gangsters.

Levi and Soudijn (2020) support the current study's findings, as they revealed that many of the offenders in organized crime enjoy independence on the job and work in a somewhat unregulated environment. Similarly, Operti (2018) noted that many criminals are business owners; despite these enterprises being frequently involved in illegal activities, ownership makes them feel safe. Furthermore, Mawby (2012) supports the aforementioned findings since they suggested that some criminals sought employment by starting a company with legal purposes before transitioning to criminal activity, while others formed companies specifically to aid them in their illicit operations. Similarly, Bushway and Apel (2012) support the present investigation's findings by revealing that people who lead conventional lifestyles also engage in illegal activities, such as organized crime, to defend themselves.

Therefore, with regard to the above-discussed results, one can infer that the lived experiences of criminal gang members are associated with various themes, such as individuals choosing to affiliate with gangs as a means of fulfilling their fundamental life necessities, growing up in a gang environment, and societal pressure and poverty. In

addition, the discussions confirm that increased opportunities and defending oneself are crucial benefits associated with being in a gang. However, criminal gang members usually leave gangs to make a better life for themselves and for the sake of their children and family.

The Lived Experiences of Criminal Gang Members Enrolled in Incentive-Based Programs Help Develop Program Policies Focused on Reducing Gang-Related Homicides

According to the results, the peace program led to a reduced rate of homicides by gangsters by implementing various benefits, such as offering gang members several opportunities and a different life path. The program also implemented conflict resolution through frequent communication between rival criminal gang members, bridged the communication gap between gang members and their families, built trust and bonds between law enforcement and criminal gang members, provided a legitimate source of income for gang members, and introduced gang members to the social and professional fabric of society, which, according to the gang members, gave them a sense of belonging.

The findings regarding the benefits of the peace program imply that the eradication of organized criminal gangs poses a significant challenge due to their adeptness at safeguarding their operations through a multifaceted approach. Nevertheless, the peace program offers gang members various opportunities, ensuring they are sustainable and can provide for their families. The program offers monetary incentives and a more productive life path as methods to reduce gang-related homicides. These findings are supported by Densley (2014), who indicated that the evolution of certain

street gangs encompasses elements such as structural organization, discipline, and the pursuit of certain economic and business objectives.

The study by Corburn et al. (2021) is also consistent with the aforementioned results, as it illustrated that the United States' Advance Peace initiative is an example of a program that employs financial incentives to encourage gang members to initiate the engagement process of that program. In particular, these results illustrated that monetary incentives deter criminal gang members from engaging in illicit activities and encourage their involvement in pursuing long-term objectives. In support of the results of the peace program benefiting the gangs by offering multiple opportunities, Corburn and Fukutome (2019) indicated that the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis is similar to the Peace Stockton initiative, as it employs monetary incentives as a means to encourage the involvement of gang members in peace programs, alongside several non-economic techniques. These interventions have demonstrated efficacy in mitigating gang-related gun violence and homicide in the short and medium terms.

Similarly, the findings from an investigation conducted by Milliken (2013) are in line with the current results. Milliken stated that the Geneva Peacebuilding Program's use of a forceful strategy can be perceived as a socially sanctioned measure to address the government's demands and occasionally assuage the grievances of affected families. However, the program does not prompt gang members to change their lives.

Nonetheless, the results regarding implementing the peace program through policies such as offering personal development, small business training, leadership training, and a financial management course as opportunities to the gang members imply that the implementation of the peace program in the context of current globalization has a

favorable impact on economic growth by reducing the uncertainties and risks associated with criminal gangs. These results also imply that the presence and implementation of a peace program benefit the buildup of physical and human capital, which offers criminal gang members an opportunity to invest in businesses instead of engaging in illegal activities. These findings are in line with those of an investigation by Densley (2014). Densley revealed that the process of gang creation and development necessitates face-to-face involvement, strategic planning, and regular meetings; these elements remain integral to the establishment and growth of gangs. This research indicates that the elements that drive gang creation can also be used to drive gang disintegration.

Therefore, based on the results discussed above, one can conclude that understanding criminal gangs' transformations and developmental trajectories is important to the efficacy of incentive-driven initiatives employed by the peace program to mitigate gang-related fatalities. Thus, all the aforementioned programs from previous studies and the peace program in the current research share similarities in their efficacy as they aim to mitigate gun violence and homicide through unconventional approaches.

The Negative Consequences of Using Such a Program to Reduce Crime Based on the Assessment of the Lived Experiences of Criminal Gang Members Enrolled in an Incentive-Based Program

When assessing the adverse ramifications associated with using the peace program for crime reduction, as inferred from the evaluation of the firsthand encounters of individuals affiliated with criminal gangs, the results illustrated that the peace policy led to consequences such as a lack of concrete structure, political victimization, societal victimization, and mishandling of money. The findings regarding societal victimization

as a consequence imply that, since this victimization pertains to the experience of being subjected to deliberate actions aimed at detrimentally affecting an individual's social standing or interpersonal connections, its impact disproportionately affects individuals enrolled in the program.

This consequence is thought to arise from the feeling of society due to the criminal gangs being supported by this program having earlier adverse behaviors aimed at instilling anxiety and frustration. In line with these results, Gunter (2017) argued that stigmatizing the black community and other minority groups was consistent with governmental strategies to exacerbate the criminalization of marginalized and economically disadvantaged communities. Similarly, Williams (2015) provided a distinct perspective on the factors that cause criminal gangs in which criminal justice institutions are appropriating and employing the term criminal gang. These results support the identified current results by revealing that various causes can be related to the prevalence of gangs. One of these causes is the victimization of gangs when they identify in society because society perceives that gangs establish themselves and recruit members by engaging in cultural activities that stress their gang membership.

The results concerning mishandling of money as a considerable consequence of peace programs imply that money mishandling due to suboptimal management practices and an unsuitable remuneration system has a detrimental effect on the criminal gang members as it lowers their chances of investing the earned money, which could lead to them engaging in criminal activities again, hence impeding the progress of the peace program. These findings are backed by Milliken (2013), who assessed the aspects that led governmental organizations to seek options for lowering the criminal activities associated

with gangs by arguing that the use of coercive tactics yields only temporary results, prompting governments to explore alternative options such as the pacification approach.

However, the findings regarding the lack of a concrete structure imply that the use of an appropriate program structure enhances operational efficiency by offering clear guidance to personnel across various hierarchical levels within a corporation. The ramifications of an inadequately conceived or executed organizational structure can be substantial and encompass overlooked prospects for growth and innovation of the program, decreased staff morale and engagement, and diminished efficiency and productivity, resulting in the failure of the peace program goals.

In addition, the results concerning the consequence of political victimization due to the peace policy imply that since this form of victimization commonly exerts a multifaceted influence on individuals, encompassing psychological, financial, physical, emotional, and social dimensions, it significantly affects the peace program when trying to alleviate the rate of gang-related homicides. Even so, these presented findings lack support from previous research or studies with the same implications. This lack suggests that the present study has addressed a previously unidentified gap in knowledge regarding the lack of a concrete structure and political victimization associated with peace programs to lower gang-related homicides.

Based on the results discussed above, one can infer that consequences such as societal victimization and mishandling of money influence the peace program greatly in its mandate of lowering the rate of homicides associated with gang members. Consequently, these findings support future researchers who may wish to include a lack

of a concrete structure and political victimization as consequences in their field of inquiry.

Limitations of the Study

Through the present study's results, I have offered valuable insights into the lived experiences of gang members engaged in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis. I have also provided insights into the adverse consequences associated with the implementation of an incentive-driven program aimed at reducing homicides related to criminal gangs.

Notwithstanding the conclusions mentioned above, this study has several noteworthy constraints that may provide valuable insights and directions for future scholars. For example, it should be noted that the present findings were based on a limited sample size based on the size of the island population where the study was conducted; this poses challenges in making definitive assertions regarding their generalizability to a broader population of both program administrators and criminal gang members.

Furthermore, the scope of this study was limited to the program administrators and criminal gang members. Therefore, the generalizability of the identified results is limited to this specific category of participants and cannot be extrapolated to encompass the perceptions of other people in the governing bodies of St. Kitts and Nevis who handle criminal gangs by imposing strategies that could help in the reduction of gang-related homicides. Moreover, the current study was constrained to only one field of study, St. Kitts and Nevis; hence, the findings might not be applicable in research settings such as other countries that do not have similar factors that influence the criminal gang activities in St. Kitts and Nevis.

In addition, the applicability of the findings about the lived experiences of individuals involved in criminal gang activities discussed in this study may be limited when applied to other populations characterized by diverse social and educational backgrounds. In this study, I used qualitative approaches, which involved gathering and presenting data based on the interviewees' perceptions; therefore, I did not include the statistical evaluation of the research questions. Finally, it is noteworthy that I derived the data in the present study exclusively from the participants; I did not include my views regarding the research issues, which is a substantial concern.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The limitations of the current research serve as a basis for offering recommendations for future studies. For instance, I recommend that future research explore the aforementioned research topic by employing a similar research design and methods while expanding the scope of the study by using a more extensive sample frame encompassing a diverse range of program administrators and criminal gang members. This approach would facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the questions adopted in this study to improve the validity and reliability of the conclusions drawn from the findings.

Furthermore, I recommend that future researchers incorporate program administrators and criminal gang members representing other states and countries and assess the potential variations in their perspectives on the lived experiences and the adverse outcomes associated with implementing an incentive-driven program to reduce gang-related homicides. In addition, researchers who intend to perform the same study should incorporate their views or perspectives while interviewing the participants or

develop a closed-ended questionnaire based on previous studies to assess supporting or contrasting views with prior research.

Moreover, it is recommended that future researchers employ quantitative research methodologies while collecting data and conduct statistical analysis of that data. This approach would be particularly useful in assessing the degree of agreement with lived experiences and how the adverse consequences associated with implementing an incentive-driven program have reduced homicides related to criminal gangs.

Implications

One can derive numerous social change, practical, empirical, and theoretical implications from the findings presented in the current research. These deductions are discussed below.

Positive Social Change

This study has the potential to contribute to societal change by providing a comprehensive analysis of the lived accounts of individuals involved in criminal gangs who have participated in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis. Readers can also gain insight into the adverse outcomes associated with an incentive-driven program implemented for the purpose of reducing homicides associated with criminal gangs. In particular, the research findings will positively contribute to the criminal gang members' understanding of how joining gangs will negatively affect their lives and their families. The participants have explained in the interviews regarding the high levels of homicides occurring in the criminal gang world and their devastating impact on their families.

The findings could also have implications for the family structure; they will enhance one's comprehension of the strategies that would help family members who are

associated with criminal gangs mend their ways, for instance, by starting businesses for them and ensuring they are enrolled in programs that add meaning to their lives and provide a legal source of income for essential family support. In addition, the findings of this research could be of importance to the organizations that handle the rehabilitation of criminal gangs in their quest to implement programs such as peace initiatives. These programs are essential in providing the gangs with a different life path than that of criminality and many personal and business opportunities. The findings offer information that could shape positive policy changes and address the adverse impact of poorly organized incentive-based programs used for crime reduction.

Further, the organizations can also benefit from the current research findings as they clarify how various program implementations, such as clear restructuring, provision of more opportunities to gangs, and reintroduction of face-to-face meetings, will enhance the programs to ensure they lower the homicides caused by criminal activities. Lastly, the findings presented could be useful to societies since they illustrate that criminal gangs need to be supported in their quest to be rehabilitated rather than perceived negatively.

Methodological, Theoretical, and Empirical Implications

One methodological implication of the current results is that qualitative research leads to improved comprehension of the respondents' lived experiences pertaining to the research questions, particularly when the existing body of knowledge fails to elucidate the phenomena under investigation. Another implication of the adopted methods is that they provide a dynamic research approach, enabling researchers to engage in real-time follow-up inquiries with respondents, thereby fostering meaningful discourse surrounding the subject matter. Furthermore, the qualitative data collected through the embraced

research methodology offer valuable insights into the process of investigating learning experiences that may not be effectively conveyed via numerical representation.

The theoretical and empirical implications of the given findings are that they have expanded my knowledge regarding the research area. Similarly, the results will contribute to future researchers by ensuring that their findings have practical and theoretical implications as they explore the same field of study in the same or different research settings. The results also provide a comprehensive understanding of the detrimental consequences that are associated with the execution of an incentive-based initiative designed to mitigate homicides perpetuated by criminal gangs.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study yield several recommendations that can be used across diverse organizations that provide programs to lower the rate of gang-related homicides. Firstly, based on the findings identified in the current research, I recommend that rehabilitated criminal gangs should provide a conducive environment for minors to avoid involvement in criminal activities in the later stages of their lives. In addition, from the given findings, I suggest that government and non-government organizations should alleviate poverty by providing employment to ensure potential gang members have a source of income that lowers their tendency to engage in criminal activities for a source of income.

Furthermore, based on this research's findings, I recommend that organizations with the mandate of controlling gangsters in society offer advice to people on the effects associated with criminal activities and the negative consequences that follow when one is involved in gangster behavior. Moreover, I recommend that the criminals consider

leaving gangs to make a life for themselves and provide a conducive environment for their family. By doing so, their children will not engage in similar criminal activities, as expressed by the interviewees.

Additionally, based on the results of this research, I recommend that the government of St. Kitts and Nevis ensures that criminal gangs receive high-quality rehabilitation since the implementation of rehabilitation measures, such as drug interventions, mental hospitals, and incarceration, is often regarded as a means to facilitate the conformity of individuals who deviate from societal norms. Nonetheless, the program administrators should provide awareness to society on how to handle criminal gang members to ensure they change their perceptions of this category of people. Similarly, people in society are recommended to protect their children from associating with criminal gangs, as they are likely to induce this behavior, which could negatively influence their development.

In addition, based on the findings of this research, I recommend rehabilitation organizations in St. Kitts and Nevis and other nations adopt and implement peace programs as they offer criminal gang members many opportunities and different life paths, which lowers the homicides associated with gang activities. I also advise the policy administrators of the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis or in developed countries to implement policy changes to include face-to-face meetings with rival gangs and positively restructure programs to lower the number of gang-related homicides.

Additionally, based on the identified findings, it is recommended that criminal gangs engage in the various activities outlined in the results, such as starting a business, which is a crucial source of income and will protect them from engaging in other criminal

behaviors. Additionally, I recommend that governments and societies should avoid victimizing the policy changes made by peace programs since they give criminal gangs a second chance and lower criminal activities. Lastly, I offer the recommendation that in their policy changes to their peace program, the policy administrators of the ALPP should provide guidance to criminal gangs on how to use the resources provided so that they are used for a purpose that would benefit them positively.

Conclusion

The LAC region is characterized by the most violent population globally, exhibiting a significant homicide rate among its inhabitants. The enormity of this issue is both remarkable and enduring. Of the 50 cities with the worst levels of violence globally, 42 are located in the LAC region. The primary objective of crime prevention in LAC is to analyze policy interventions that have impacted antisocial behavior throughout the early stages of life and criminal activity patterns among young individuals and adults.

I emphasize contemporary studies that meticulously show a causal relationship between the interventions under consideration and their outcomes. Criminal gang members are characterized by their association with violence, and the act of joining a gang amplifies the criminal behavior of the members to a degree that surpasses both their pre-membership and post-membership criminal activities, even in individuals with a history of extensive offenses. However, criminal gang organizations fulfill particular community needs relating to security and stability, as they offer financial support to families, ensure safety in hazardous circumstances, and facilitate the distribution of drugs and other commodities to interested buyers.

Subsequently, these communities extend a hospitable reception to certain gangs, introducing a sense of security and stability to their surroundings. Nonetheless, most scholarly investigations in gang research have focused on identifying the risk factors associated with gang affiliation. These studies have typically compared individuals involved in gangs with those who are not, with the aim of understanding the elements that contribute to gang membership. However, they have not examined the distinctions among various levels of gang involvement.

As a result, the subject of lived experiences of criminal gang members and the aim of various programs to lower homicides associated with gang membership has garnered growing governmental and media scrutiny in recent times. Statistical data are disturbing and show a heightened incidence of youth and middle-aged people engaging in gang activities. However, the multiple methodological obstacles encountered in societies hinder the task of comprehensively grasping the prevalence and characteristics of gang affiliation. In addition, the conceptual boundaries of a "gang" remain ambiguous, encompassing a broad spectrum of groups that span from transnational organized crime syndicates to gatherings of youth in public spaces.

Despite the demarcation of the starting point of a "gang" lacking clarity, numerous definitions link gangs with engagement in illicit activities. Even though the impact of gang participation on young individuals is disproportionately significant, as evidenced by the findings of previous studies, extensive research has demonstrated that there is a correlation between gang participation in programs and reduced levels of severe offending traits. Therefore, I investigated the lived accounts of gang members who have been enrolled in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis. Moreover, I have provided a

comprehensive understanding of the detrimental consequences linked to the execution of an incentive-based initiative designed to mitigate gang-related homicides.

Through the findings, I was able to provide answers to the identified research questions. For instance, based on the findings deduced from the analyzed data, I concluded that the first research question was answered and revealed that the lived experiences of criminal gang members included the factors that contributed to them joining gangs, such as limited alternatives, exposure to a gang-affiliated upbringing, societal pressures, and impoverished circumstances. The motivations for leaving gang involvement include pursuing personal improvement and creating a more favorable future for oneself, as well as prioritizing the well-being of one's children and family. I also concluded that the general perception of gangs within society is often negative, associating them with criminality, violence, disruptive behavior, adverse influence on others, and a source of discomfort within local communities.

Similarly, the lived experiences of criminal gang members also encompass various advantages, including generating financial profits for enterprises, avoiding mistreatment, and gaining the ability to protect oneself. Nonetheless, from the given results, one can infer that the second research question was answered and concluded that adopting a peace policy yields various advantages, such as providing gangs with ample opportunities and alternative life trajectories. In addition, I conclude that in order to implement this peace program effectively, it is crucial to incorporate certain modifications, including the provision of personal development initiatives, leadership training, and a financial management course as viable options for gang members. It is also important to restructure the program and reintroduce face-to-face meetings, which

can offer valuable insights into the development of program policies aimed at reducing gang-related homicides.

Lastly, based on the provided findings, I conclude that the third question of this research was answered and showed that peace policy has several drawbacks or ramifications. Firstly, the peace policy lacked a concrete structure due to the officials' lack of interest, infrequent meetings, and inadequate program management. Secondly, there were instances of political victimization, where the program founders were marginalized, program leaders showed a lack of commitment, and a negative narrative was propagated about the program. Thirdly, the peace program enabled societal victimization, which was characterized by negative statements and a lack of acceptance or support.

Finally, there were issues with the mishandling of funds, stemming from poor financial management as well as unsuitable payment methods employed in the policy changes of the program. Overall, the general takeaway from the findings of this research is that they have provided insights into the puzzling phenomenon of the lived accounts of criminal gang members who have been enrolled in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis. They also provided a comprehensive understanding of the detrimental consequences linked to the execution of an incentive-based initiative designed to mitigate homicides related to criminal gangs. These insights from this study are valuable contributions to the existing body of literature since they provide empirical evidence that supports the claim that the lived experiences of criminal gang members enrolled in the ALPP in St. Kitts and Nevis include the causes of joining gangs, the causes of leaving gangs, the perception of society toward gangs, and the benefits of being in a gang. The detrimental consequences of

employing an ALPP include the absence of a well-defined framework, being victimized by government and society, and mismanagement of financial resources.

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