

CAPSULE

February 2025 | R2501



CAPRI

HITS AND MISSES

Women in Organised Violence



This report examines the role of women in organised crime and violence in Jamaica, particularly their involvement in gang-related activities. While violent crime is widely considered male-dominated, law enforcement and media reports increasingly suggest that women play active roles in organised criminal groups. However, arrest and incarceration data do not support claims of rising female participation in violent crime. This study evaluates the extent of women's involvement in gang violence, the structural factors influencing their participation, and whether the perception of increased female criminality aligns with actual trends.

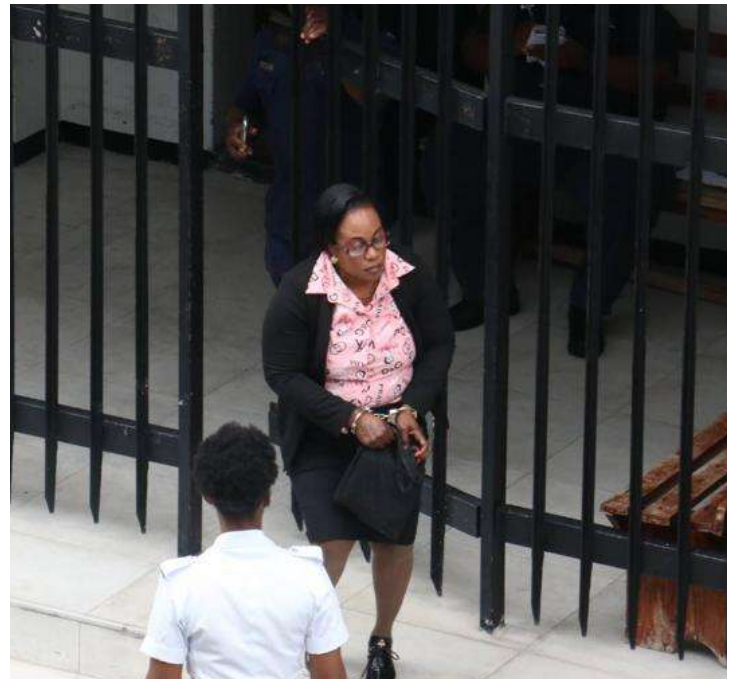
Women remain a small minority in Jamaica's criminal landscape, with arrests and incarcerations primarily for non-violent offences such as drug trafficking, fraud, and money laundering. Female arrests for violent crimes, including murder and shooting, are rare and typically involve domestic or interpersonal conflicts rather than gang-related violence. Despite this, law enforcement and media reports suggest that women act as facilitators, financial operatives, and couriers for drugs and weapons, and in some cases, hold decision-making roles within criminal networks. However, no recorded case exists of a woman firing a weapon in a gang-related homicide, reinforcing the perception that "women call the shots but do not fire the shots," even as their roles in gangs evolve. Women's involvement in criminal networks is shaped by structural and socio-economic conditions. Informal and semi-formal communities, characterised by irregular land tenure and weak governance, provide environments where criminal organisations thrive. In these areas, women often navigate between legal and illicit economies, sometimes assuming roles that provide financial stability in the absence of legitimate opportunities. Many women enter criminal networks through familial or romantic connections. Women in gang-affected communities often have relatives involved in crime, increasing their likelihood of participation. Some engage in illicit activities for financial security, whether by facilitating gang operations, laundering money, or participating in lottery scamming. Additionally, women sometimes join gangs in search of belonging, protection, or status in communities where gangs function as de facto governance structures. However, the lack of detailed, gender-disaggregated crime data makes it difficult to determine

the true extent of female involvement in organised crime.

This study identifies a range of roles that women occupy within Jamaica's criminal networks. Women provide logistical support, such as hiding weapons, transporting contraband, or managing finances. They handle money laundering, extortion proceeds, and other financial transactions for criminal organisations. Some gather intelligence, infiltrating rival groups or monitoring law enforcement. Women often act as couriers, using their perceived lower risk of police scrutiny to transport drugs, weapons, and cash. While rare, some women hold leadership positions, coordinating gang activities and making strategic decisions. Although these roles demonstrate women's agency within organised crime, their participation remains largely facilitatory rather than as direct enforcers of violence.

Several case studies illustrate the evolving roles of women in Jamaica's criminal networks. Stephanie "Mumma" Christie, a high-ranking member of the Klansman-One Don Gang, managed the gang's financial operations and secured legal representation for members. Sudeen "Pinky" Hylton, described as Jamaica's first "gunwoman," did not fire a weapon but played an instrumental role in orchestrating murders. Kenisha Moodie's involvement with the King's Valley Gang highlights how romantic relationships with gang leaders can serve as pathways into organised crime. Sheryl McCallum and Tishell Bernard, alleged members of the Only the Family (OTF) gang, were arrested for stockpiling firearms and ammunition, reflecting the increasing presence of women in operational roles. These cases show that while women in organised crime may not be the shottas, they play key roles in sustaining criminal networks.

The study concludes that where women are involved in organised crime in Jamaica, beyond what the data shows, that involvement is influenced by structural conditions, economic realities, and social networks, therefore requiring policy approaches that address the underlying conditions. Strengthening governance in gang-affected

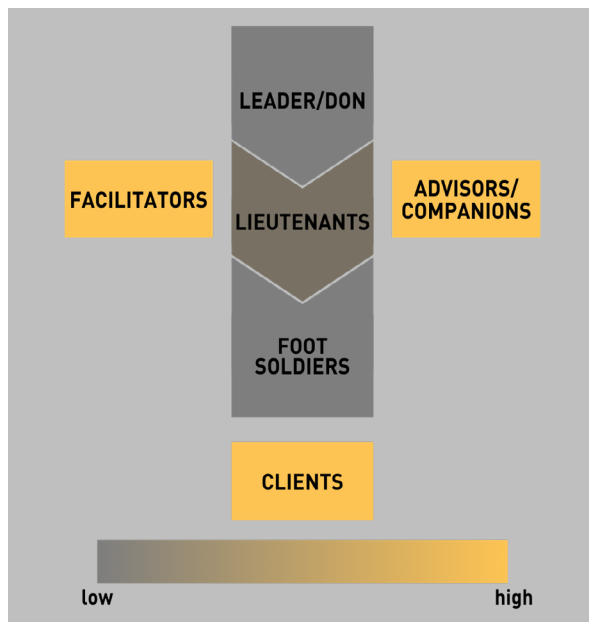


Young women who grow up in communities that have been captured by gangs are particularly vulnerable to gang recruitment.

communities through regularising land tenure will improve opportunities for economic empowerment, thereby reducing both direct and indirect female involvement in criminal networks. While women's direct participation in gang violence remains limited, their roles in sustaining organised crime warrant policy attention.

Women do not occupy all roles in gangs.

Women's Involvement In Criminal Organisations



Recommendations

1. In moving beyond the assumption that women in gang-affected communities are only victims, Recognise the active roles of women as facilitators, financial operators, and couriers, for example, rather than just focusing on male gang members.
2. Develop and disseminate training materials for stakeholders in the anti-gang and gender and security sectors, highlighting the active roles women play in gangs.
3. Deploy more female personnel in anti-gang operations, to perform thorough searches and to recognise and handle gender-sensitive situations.
4. Include women in land regularisation and community development to promote economic empowerment, reduce dependence, and lower vulnerability to gang influence.



876 970-3447

capricaribbean.org | Info@capricaribbean.org

The fragmentation of larger, hierarchical gangs into smaller, more localised groups may have created new opportunities for women to engage in criminal activities.