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HITS AND MISSES

Women in Organised Violence



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Acronyms

DCS	Department of Correctional Services
ESSJ	Economic and Social Survey Jamaica
JCF	Jamaica Constabulary Force
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
PIOJ	Planning Institute of Jamaica
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



Executive Summary



Disrupting organised criminal violence requires an understanding of those who participate in and sustain these networks.

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.

"Nowadays it is a time of equality. We have women who do all of the crimes. Jamaican women don't really take a back seat."

Commissioner of Police Maj. Gen.

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 "gun-woman," 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 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.



Recommendations

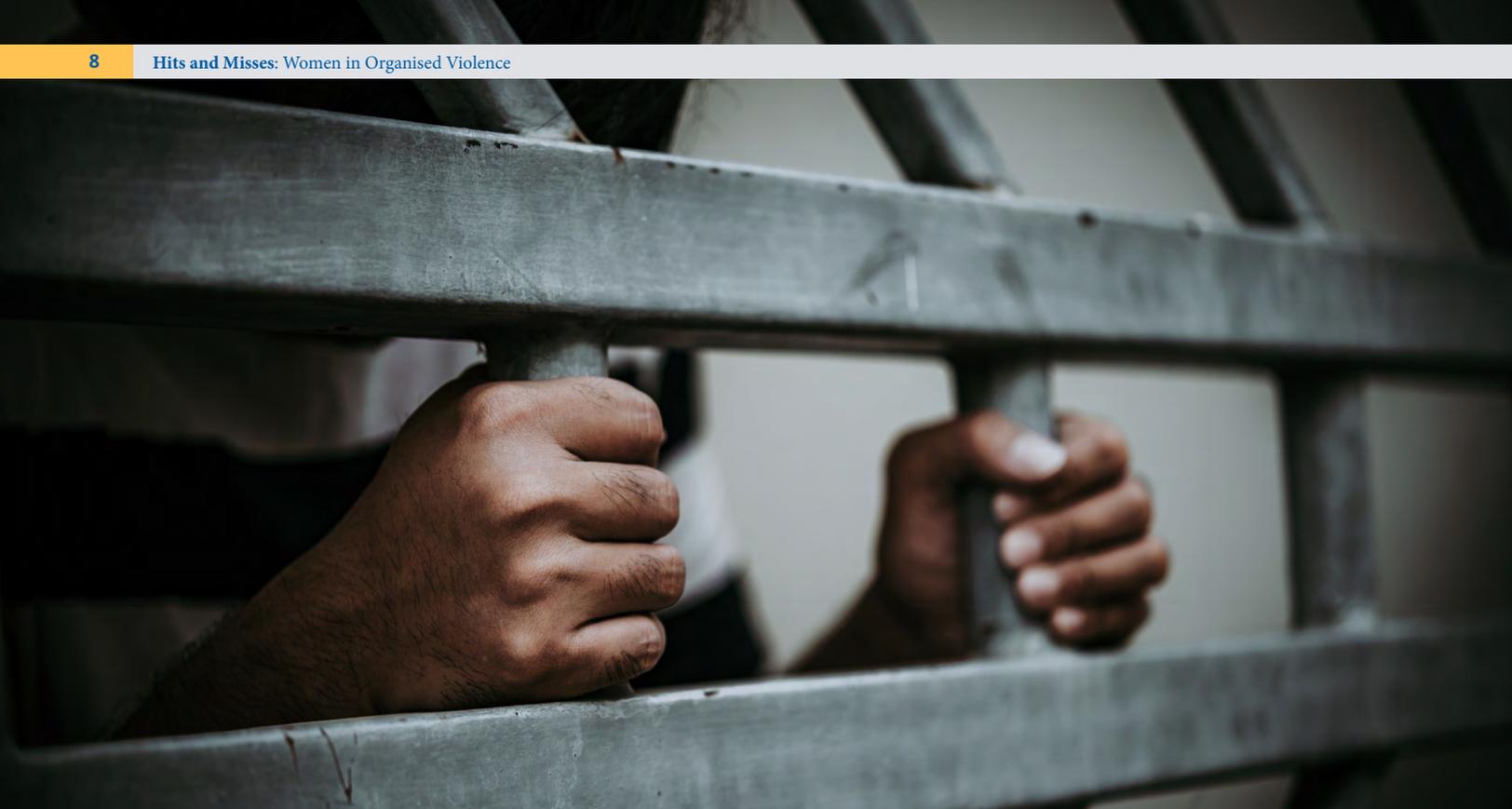
**1**

Reframe Gender Narratives in Crime Prevention – Crime prevention strategies should acknowledge the active roles women play in criminal networks. Gender-responsive approaches should be integrated into crime prevention and intervention efforts.

Increase Female Personnel in Security Efforts – Law enforcement agencies should increase the deployment of female officers in anti-gang operations to enhance intelligence gathering and enforcement.

2**3**

Structural Community Transformation – Regularising land tenure and improving governance in informal settlements will weaken the systemic conditions that sustain gangs while creating opportunities for economic empowerment. Prioritising women's inclusion in these processes will reduce their economic dependence and vulnerability to gang influence, fostering safer and more resilient communities.



1

Introduction



The belief that women play overlooked yet critical roles aligns with what scholars of women's criminality call "**the invisibility paradox**"

Violent crime is Jamaica's most pressing developmental challenge, directly and indirectly affecting citizen and national security, the economy, and overall quality of life. With a murder rate of 49 per 100,000 in 2023—one of the highest in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region—homicidal violence, primarily driven by gangs, is the primary manifestation of the challenge.¹ The state's response has largely focused on strengthening security forces, implementing new legislation, and reiterating a commitment to evidence-based violence reduction. This has led to a shift in discourse, framing the problem as “organised violence” and “criminal terrorism” reflecting the dominance of gangs, which were responsible for 68 percent of homicides in 2023.² This framing implies that reducing violence in Jamaica must disrupt organised crime and gang operations, though this approach does not consistently carry through to violence reduction initiatives.³

Disrupting organised criminal violence requires an understanding of those who participate in and sustain these networks. Organised violence in Jamaica, as throughout the world, is a male-dominated sphere, in which the majority of perpetrators and victims are male. Young men in Jamaica's criminal violence ecosystem are 136 times more likely to be killed than the general population. Between 2015 and 2022, female homicide victims consistent-

ly accounted for no more than 10 percent of annual murders, lower than the global average of 20 to 30 percent. This reflects the reality that most homicides in Jamaica occur within gang conflicts, making male-on-male violence the dominant driver of the country's homicide rate.⁴ As a result, the role of women in organised crime has remained peripheral in research and policy discourse, often overshadowed by the focus on male offenders.

Yet, while the available data suggests that women's direct involvement in gang violence is limited, there is a strong and persistent narrative in academic literature and among security stakeholders that women's participation is substantial and growing. Senior police officers, policymakers, and media commentators repeatedly claim that women play major roles in sustaining criminal organisations in Jamaica.

The then-Commissioner of Police in 2023 stated that Jamaican women are featuring more prominently in criminal activities including murder, and that females have evolved from merely aiding and abetting their male criminal counterparts. In his words, in the criminal underworld, the females are now determined to stake their claim as legitimate “gangstresses”: “Nowadays, it is a time of equality. We have women who do all of the crimes as well. We have women who are participating in all aspects of crime. Jamaican women don't really take a back seat.”⁵

In 2024, the Minister of National Security reported that 19 female gang members had been among 488 people arrested in 2,777 anti-gang operations, framing this as a reflection of the government's refined strategy to target gang networks comprehensively across all levels.⁶ While this may seem noteworthy, determining what it means—if it does mark a change in how the state is prosecuting organised violence—is impossible without comparable data from previous years. The specific mention of the arrests highlights both the growing attention that policymakers, security forces, and practitioners to women's involvement in gangs as a significant and evolving trend, and the dearth of data with which the perception could be substantiated.

The belief that women play overlooked yet critical roles aligns with what scholars of women's criminality refer to as the “invisibility paradox.”⁷ In criminology and security studies, women in organised crime are often seen as either victims or passive accomplices, while their potential for active criminal participation is dismissed.⁸ This results in a self-reinforcing cycle—if women's roles are not expected to be substantial, they are not systematically counted, and if they are not counted, their roles remain unverified. Much of the literature attributes this to the “male gaze” in crime reporting, law enforcement, and policy narratives, which tend to focus on male offenders. In some jurisdictions, this invis-

Women's invisibility has led to women becoming ideal criminal associates precisely because they are less likely to be viewed as perpetrators by law enforcement.

ibility has led to women becoming ideal criminal associates precisely because they are less likely to be viewed as perpetrators by law enforcement.⁹

However, the extent to which this applies to Jamaica remains unclear. Media reports and statements from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) regularly point to a rising trend of women's participation in violent crime. There are several accounts from security personnel speaking to women being enablers within criminal organisations, whether in their traditional reproductive roles as mothers and spouses providing support for individual violence producers, to more strategic roles as hidiers of weapons and contraband. There are several reports of all-female gangs in high schools.¹⁰ Furthermore, there are reports from other jurisdictions, including neighbouring Caribbean islands, that put forward that there is an increasing influence and role of women in organised and violent crime.¹¹

Despite the plethora of claims that women are becoming more active in violent crime, no recorded case exists in Jamaica of a woman firing a weapon during a homicide. The offences related to organised crime that women are charged with, while important to gang operations, such as gun possession, and transporting an assassin are more facilitatory rather than direct enforcement. Nevertheless, the dominant narrative suggests that the credo, “women call the shots; they do not fire the shots,” may not, in 2025, remain an apt summary of female involvement in gangs.¹² The differing perspectives and reports make it difficult to determine: are more women involved in organised crime but dominant male-centric gendered frames render them invisible? Or is the perception of women's increased and more strategic participation in gangs outweighing the reality?

Objectives

This study aims to clarify what is currently known about women's involvement in organised violent crime in Jamaica. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Examine available data—including official crime statistics, media reports, and qualitative insights—to assess the extent and nature of women's roles in criminal organisations.
2. Analyse the roles women play, distinguishing between traditional support roles and more direct participation in violent or criminal acts.
3. Interrogate stakeholder perceptions of women in organised crime, including perspectives from law enforcement, policymakers, and the media.
4. Explore whether women's involvement is increasing or if the perception of increasing female participation is simply a function of changing narratives.
5. Evaluate how knowledge of women's roles should inform homicide reduction policies, given that most murders are gang-related.
6. Assess the gaps in data collection and the challenges of quantifying women's participation in organised violence.



Methodological Framework

Given the absence of reliable datasets on women's roles in organised crime, this study employs a mixed-methods approach that triangulates evidence from multiple sources to construct a situational analysis:

- Official crime statistics from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS).
- Media reports, which provide information on recent gang-related arrests and trials, given the lack of formal documentation on this topic.
- Stakeholder interviews with justice sector professionals, security analysts, civil society representatives, and law enforcement officials to assess perceptions, experiences, and understandings of female involvement in crime.
- Academic and policy literature, which examines women's participation in organised violence in other jurisdictions, offering comparative insights.

Scope and Limitations

The absence of consistent, detailed datasets on women's roles in organised crime prevents any definitive trend analysis. Instead, this study offers an indicative exploration, drawing on qualitative insights and anecdotal evidence to assess whether female participation in organised crime is systemic or limited to isolated cases.

The study also engages with the broader narratives and expectations about female criminality. While some argue that women's roles are overlooked because of systemic bias, it is also possible that female involvement in violent crime is genuinely minimal and does not register in crime statistics.¹³ This report does not seek to validate any specific position but rather to examine the available evidence and critically assess whether women's roles are as substantial as often claimed.

This study examines the role of women in organised violence in Jamaica, a phenomenon that is central to the country's persistently high homicide rate. Throughout this report, the terms organised violence, violent crime, criminal groups, criminal violence, organised violent groups, and gangs are used interchangeably to describe

the dominant form of violent crime in Jamaica. These groups, primarily composed of first- and second-generation gangs, are responsible for the majority of homicides and remain the principal threat to citizen and national security.

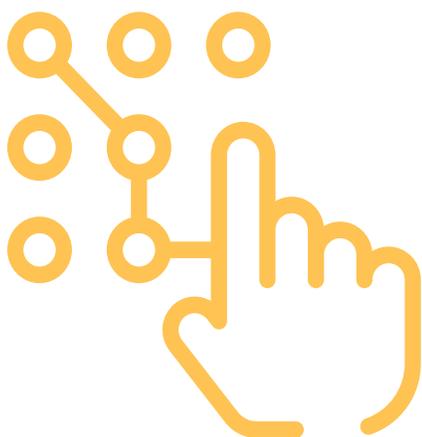
Conclusion

The interest in women's involvement in organised crime has grown, possibly shaped by media narratives and policy discussions that have advanced in the absence of robust empirical research. Within the context of the invisibility paradox, gendered narratives, and changing societal expectations, the actual scale of female participation remains unknown. Are women playing substantial yet unaccounted-for roles in Jamaica's criminal networks, or is their involvement so minimal that it cannot be captured in available data? This report does not purport to provide definitive answers but aims to clarify existing evidence and contribute to a more empirically grounded discourse on women's roles in Jamaica's organised violence.



2

The Patchy Landscape of Knowledge



Patterns of female criminality in Jamaica exhibit distinct characteristics that in some ways align with global trends, while diverging in others.

Patterns of female criminality in Jamaica exhibit distinct characteristics that in some ways align with global trends, while diverging in others. This chapter examines trends in female offending based on available crime statistics—primarily arrest and incarceration data—while, where applicable, situating them within a global context. However, these statistics offer only a limited perspective, providing snapshots rather than long-term trends and failing to capture the full scope of women’s involvement in crime, particularly within gang networks. Although juvenile offenders represent a distinct subset, their available data sheds light on the nature of crimes committed by women and the profiles of those involved, and is therefore included in the broader analysis. The absence of comprehensive, systematically collected data means that much of what is assumed about women in crime remains speculative, and the analysis is constrained by what is accessible rather than what would be most useful for a thorough understanding of the subject.

Gendered Patterns in Criminal Behaviour

In Jamaica, as throughout the world, women are a minority in the criminal justice system. Women are arrested and incarcerated at vastly lower rates than men (see Table 1).¹⁴

Women have consistently lower arrest rates than men across different countries (selected to show range).



Arrest Rates by Gender

Country	Year	Percentage of Male Arrests	Percentage of Female Arrests
UK	2019	85	15
US	2019	73	27
Colombia	2020	89	11
Chile	2022	83	17
Jamaica	2010-2020	91	9
Canada ¹⁵	2017	75	25
Kenya ¹⁶	2020	83	17
Australia ¹⁷	2022-2023	75	25

In the UK, for example, 15 percent of people arrested are female, while 17 percent of arrests were of women in the US in 2019.¹⁸ In Colombia, 11 percent of all arrests are of women.¹⁹ In Chile, 17 percent of the 311,147 people arrested in 2022 were women.²⁰

Further, the majority of the crimes women commit are non-violent, or category two crimes, such as fraud, drug trafficking, burglary, and public order offenses which do not involve a threat of harm or an actual attack upon a victim. As a snapshot, in 2021 in Jamaica, 15,277 people in total

This report does not seek to validate any specific position but examines the available evidence to critically assess whether women’s roles are as substantial as often claimed.

were arrested (men and women). Category one crimes, violent crimes such as murder, shooting, rape, aggravated as-

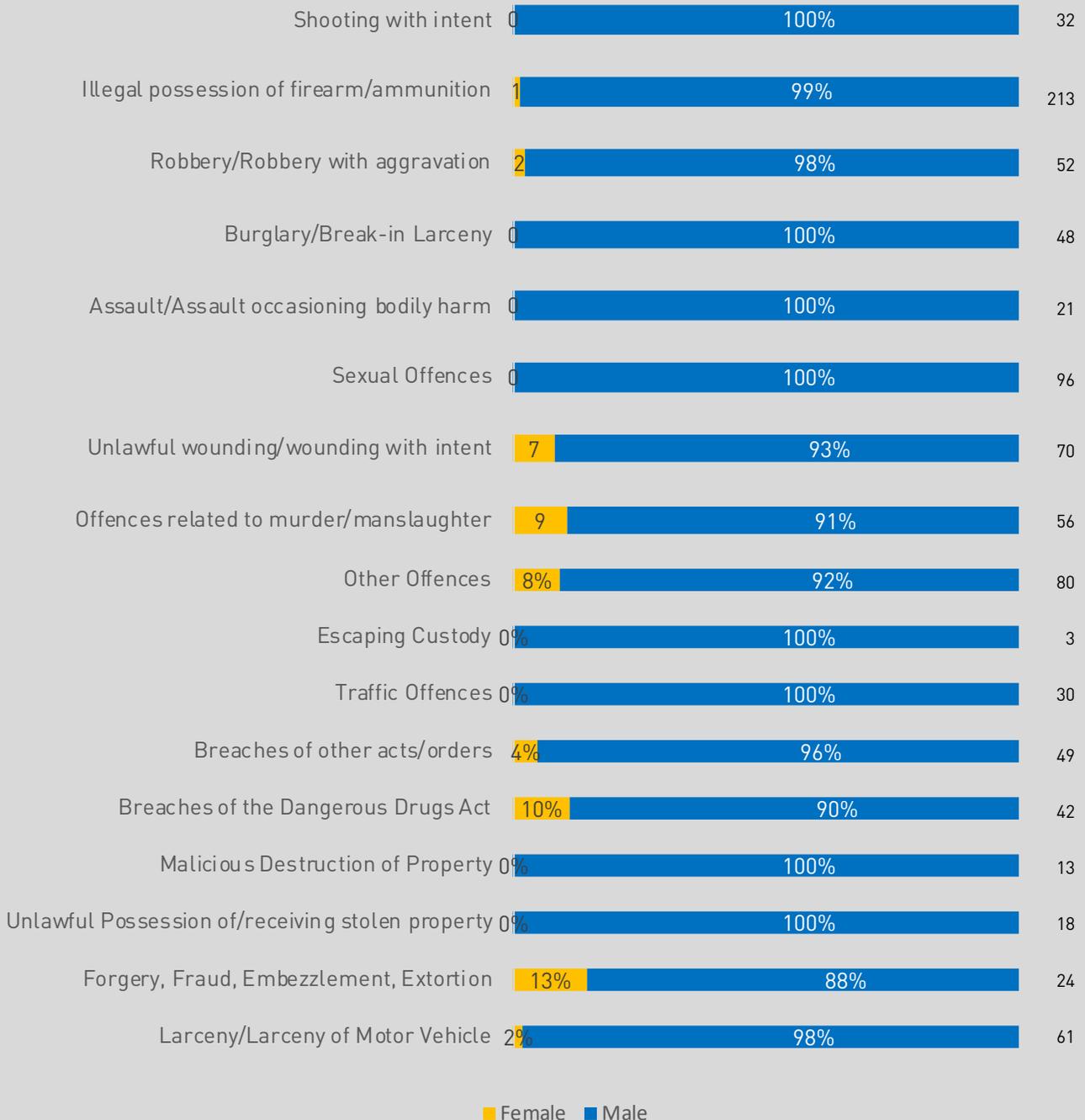
sault, and larceny, which includes extortion, accounted for 16 percent of those arrests. Of those 2,469 persons, 97 per-

cent were male.²¹ Prison admissions in 2021 tell the same story (Table 2).

Women make up a negligible share of prison admissions for all crimes.



Admissions to correctional facilities^{22 23}



Source: PIOJ ESSJ 2021, comprising DCS data

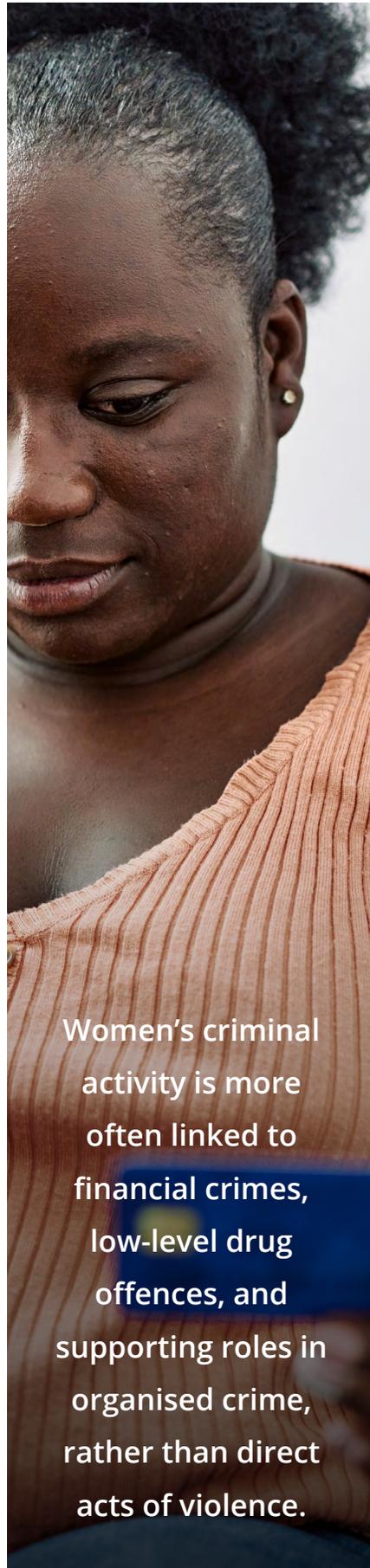
Women made up only 3.3 percent of all admissions to correctional facilities in 2021, showing their small presence in Jamaica's prison population. Men accounted for the vast majority of offenders across all crime categories, with particularly wide gaps in violent crimes. While 51 men were admitted for murder or manslaughter, only five women faced similar charges. No women were incarcerated for sexual offences, assault, burglary, or shooting with intent, which is consistent with arrest data showing that women are rarely charged with direct acts of violence. Women's admissions were highest in breaches of the Dangerous Drugs Act (four women), forgery and fraud-related offences (three women), and illegal possession of firearms (three women)—offences that suggest roles related to facilitation rather than direct involvement in violent crime. The data aligns with broader research findings that indicate women's criminal activity is more often linked to financial crimes, low-level drug offences, and supporting roles in organised crime rather than direct acts of violence.

Non-Violent Crime

Female offenders in all countries are more likely to commit economic and white-collar crimes, more than any other category or type of crime.²⁴ This gender-specific pattern of criminality is true for Jamaica.

Drug trafficking is one of the most common crimes for which women are imprisoned in Jamaica; between 2016 and 2019, drug possession or dealing was the second most common offense for which 15 percent of women were convicted.²⁵ Jamaica is the largest Caribbean source country of marijuana and a transit point for cocaine trafficked from South America to North America and other international markets. Most women incarcerated for drug crimes in the Caribbean are couriers, sometimes known as "mules" who carry drugs in their luggage or on their person while taking commercial flights.²⁶ Jamaican women are also imprisoned overseas, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, for drug-related offenses.

More than half of the white-collar crimes reported in Jamaica over the last eight years have been committed by men; however, there has been an increase in the number



Women's criminal activity is more often linked to financial crimes, low-level drug offences, and supporting roles in organised crime, rather than direct acts of violence.

of female perpetrators, and women have featured prominently in high-profile cases of white-collar crime over the period.²⁷ White collar crimes are non-violent, financially motivated crimes such as fraud, embezzlement, insider trading, money laundering, bribery and corruption, and forgery, including, in Jamaica, "smishing" and "phishing" fraud schemes.²⁸ More recently, these include newer crimes such as extortion, scamming, and computer-aided crimes.²⁹ The lottery scamming enterprise, though ostensibly non-violent, contributes to Jamaica's high rate of violence.³⁰

Women accounted for 24 percent of all arrests for financial crimes in 2018, up from 10 percent in 2014.³¹ From 2015 to 2022, females were found to be more likely to commit embezzlement than males, while males were more likely to engage in larceny by trick and larceny by finding.³² Larceny by servant, when workers steal from their employers, is the most prevalent white-collar crime committed in Jamaica; females are more likely to commit larceny by servant than males, to an even greater extent than with embezzlement.³³

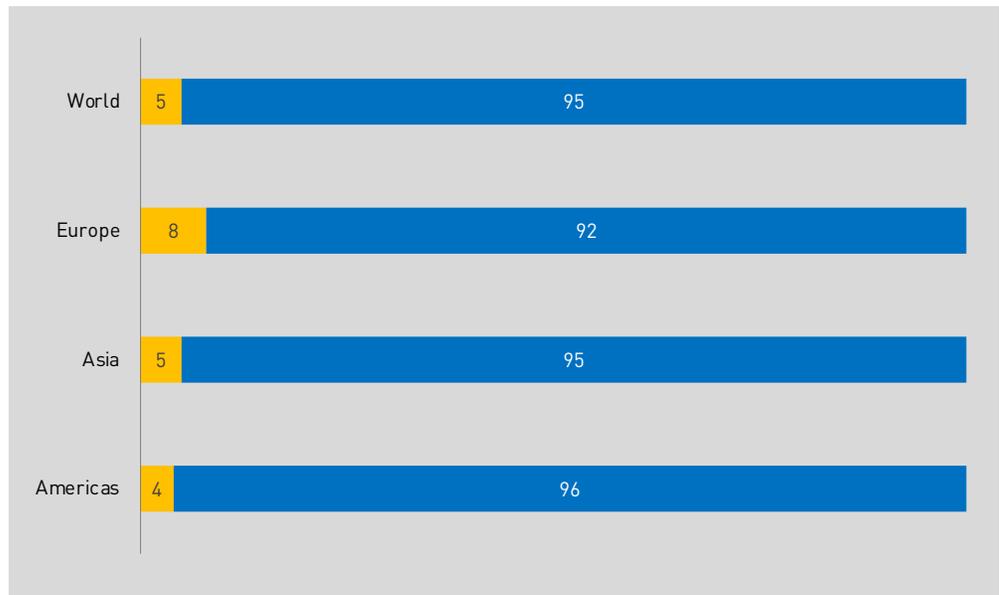
Violent Crime

Men commit violent crimes at higher rates than women worldwide, as reflected in their dominance in arrest and incarceration statistics for such offences. On average, women account for only 5 percent of murder convictions globally. In the Americas—the region with the highest homicide rate, at 18 per 100,000 inhabitants, three times the world average of 5.6 per 100,000—the share of convicted murderers who are women is even lower than in other regions (see Figure 3).³⁴

Women in the Americas make up a lower percentage of convicted murderers than in the rest of the world.



Percentage of women convicted of intentional homicide (2011)³⁵



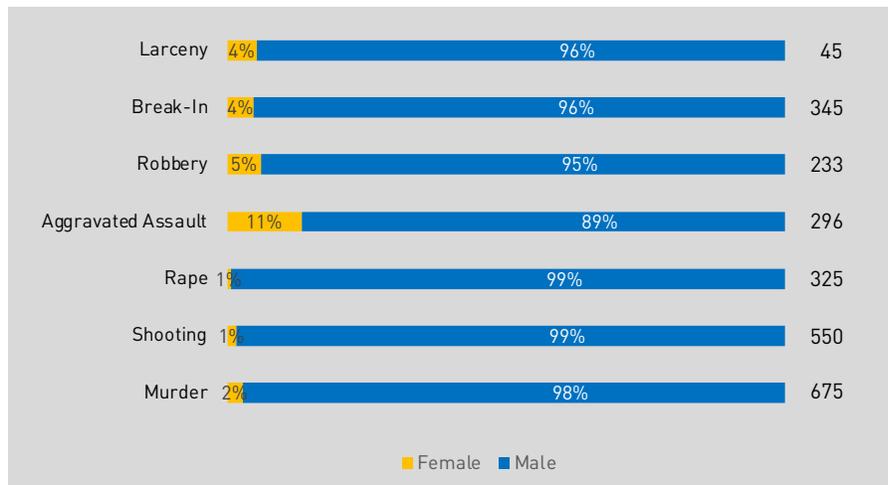
Source: UN-Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems

In Jamaica, women represented less than 3 percent of perpetrators arrested and charged for category one crimes (murder, shooting, rape, aggravated assault, robbery, larceny, and break-ins) in 2021; for murder alone, only 2 percent of all arrests were women (see Table 3).³⁶

Men far outnumber women in committing violent crimes.



Arrests for Violent Crimes (2021)³⁷



The majority of the crimes women commit are nonviolent, such as fraud, drug trafficking, and burglary which do not involve a threat of harm or an actual attack.

Source: JCF data, cited by PIOJ in ESSJ 2021.

* this will speak to the total (number of incidents)

The relative rarity of women committing murder may explain why, when it does happen, it attracts disproportionate media and law enforcement attention.

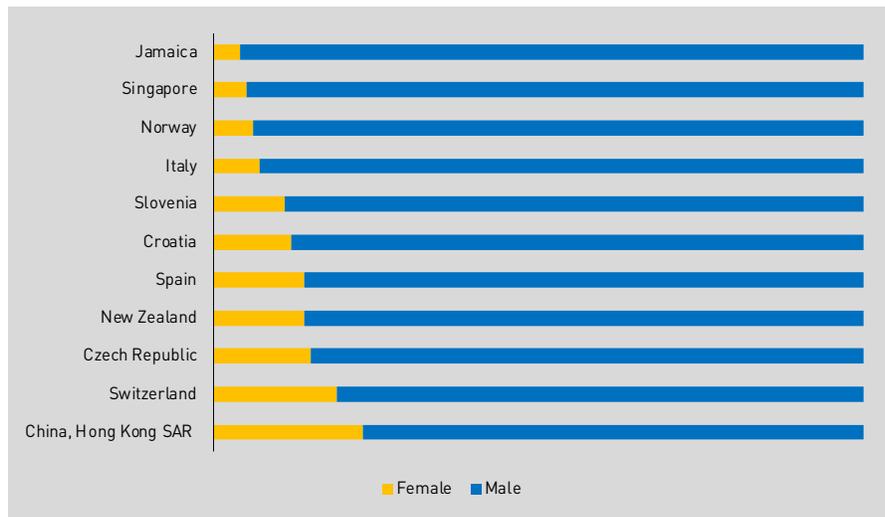
Compared to a selection of low homicide countries, Jamaica also has a lower percentage of women arrested for or charged with committing murder (See Figure 5).



Jamaica's share of intentional homicide by women is lower than those in Europe and Asia.



Percentage Distribution of Murder Suspects, by Sex, Selected Countries, 2009-2011³⁸



While this could suggest that Jamaican women are less likely to engage in violent crime, a more relevant interpretation is the extent to which gang violence dominates Jamaica's homicide landscape. The sheer volume of murders committed by men in connection with gang activity distorts Jamaica's homicide patterns, diverging from global trends in female involvement in homicide.

Globally, most violent crimes committed by women occur in domestic settings and involve intimate partners or relatives.³⁹ Women also participate in crimes such as "honour" killings, terrorism, and human trafficking.⁴⁰ They have been both perpetrators and conspirators in violent acts, including crimes against other women and even their own relatives. In some cases, their involvement extends to spreading harmful rumours that incite violence.⁴¹

Human trafficking is the one violent crime where women are disproportionately represented as offenders.⁴² In nearly 30 percent of countries reporting sex-disaggregated data on traffickers, women make up the largest share.⁴³ In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, it is common for women to

traffic other women.⁴⁴ Their gender affords them advantages in recruitment, as they are perceived as more trustworthy, can more easily connect with potential victims (typically women and girls), and attract less suspicion. When women are involved in trafficking, it is usually in sexual exploitation, where they force women and girls into providing sexual services and collect payment.

In Jamaica, women accounted for more human trafficking convictions than men between 2010 and 2017, and Jamaican women have been prosecuted for trafficking in countries such as Antigua and The Bahamas.⁴⁵ However, convictions remain rare. In 2023, officials investigated 61 trafficking cases—48 for sex trafficking, six for labour trafficking, and seven unspecified—mirroring the 60 cases from 2022. They prosecuted eight suspects, similar to the prior year's seven, and continued cases against those seven defendants.⁴⁶ That report did not state whether those prosecuted were male or female.

Interpersonal and Domestic Violence

In Jamaica, interpersonal violence refers to conflicts occurring outside the context of other crimes, such as robbery or rape, and ostensibly unrelated to gang activity. It typically involves individuals who know each other and arises from personal disagreements, social interactions, or domestic conflicts. Interpersonal violence accounted for 20 percent of all murders in 2023.⁴⁷ Women's involvement in this category primarily relates to domestic violence, which encompasses various forms of family-related violence, including intimate partner violence, child abuse, sibling conflicts, and certain types of gender-based violence.⁴⁸ These observations highlight that women's violent crimes are typically driven by emotional and personal factors rather than systemic or organised violence.⁴⁹

While men are typically the perpetrators, women also commit acts of gender-based and intimate partner violence, often instigating conflicts through emotional abuse or, in extreme cases, resorting to physical violence.⁵⁰ Such physical violence often

includes stabbing, stone-throwing, or the use of blunt objects and is frequently linked to personal grievances or crimes of passion.⁵¹

Most homicides committed by women occur in domestic settings and involve intimate partners or relatives. These incidents are generally thought to be rooted in situational factors such as childhood abuse and neglect, poverty, or dysfunctional personal and intimate relationships.⁵² Security stakeholders note that domestic conflicts sometimes escalate into violent crimes, including retaliation against the abuser, assaults against other women and even large-scale community gang wars.⁵³ In cases where domestic or intimate partner violence intersects with sexual competition or conflicts over romantic partners - often referred to as "matey wars" - violent confrontations may arise, including assaults against the rival.⁵⁴ A tragic example of such a phenomenon was in June 2023, when an eight-year-old girl was fatally attacked when her throat was slashed, reportedly in retaliation for her father's alleged transmission of HIV to the perpetrator. The offender pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life imprisonment in December 2024, with eligibility for parole after 27 years and four months.⁵⁵

Beyond direct interpersonal violence, domestic violence can also trigger violence that extends beyond the immediate parties involved, sometimes evolving into larger family disputes and even full-scale gang conflicts. Security stakeholder interviews reveal that longstanding grievances related to unresolved or poorly handled cases of domestic and gender-based violence have, in some instances, escalated into violent community conflicts.⁵⁶ Investigations into violent incidents have uncovered cases where gang warfare originated from disputes rooted in domestic violence, with individuals uninformed in the original conflict taking sides based on family or community loyalties, often without knowing the initial cause of the feud.⁵⁷ This highlights how domestic violence, when left unaddressed, can serve as a catalyst for broader community violence, including contract killings and gang warfare.⁵⁸

Battered Woman Syndrome is a psycho-

logical condition that has been used in legal settings as a defence or mitigating factor (as self-defence) in cases where female victims of abuse commit crimes against their abusers, particularly in cases of self-defence.⁵⁹ In Jamaica, there are several well-documented cases of women who reached the "tipping point" and killed their abusers.⁶⁰ By framing the woman's actions in the context of her experiences of prolonged abuse, Battered Woman Syndrome can lead to acquittals under self-defence, or to reduced charges from murder to manslaughter under provocation. However, the woman would have had to commit the act while she was being abused, out of fear for her life, rather than long after the abuse had taken place.

Violence against children is the most prevalent form of domestic violence perpetrated by women in Jamaica, with 80 percent of children experiencing violence at home. This places Jamaica at the higher end of the global spectrum for child abuse. In 2018, for example, rates ranged from 48 percent in Albania to 89 percent in Bangladesh.⁶¹ Jamaica has 12,000 cases reported annually; a peak of 15,068 in 2022 was likely influenced by pandemic-related lockdowns.⁶² However, these figures may underestimate the true extent of abuse, as societal norms often regard physical punishment, particularly by mothers, as an acceptable form of discipline.⁶³

In Jamaica, an overlooked intersection of interpersonal violence, gender, and organised violence is evident in the practice of resolving personal disputes through murder-for-hire. Personal conflicts, such as those involving romantic rivals or disputes over property, are sometimes escalated to lethal violence by engaging the services of professional killers. An example of this was in 2023 when Jody-Ann Jackson, a 28-year-old bar operator and nail technician of Anchovy Land Settlement in Portland, was alleged to have rented a car, contracted a hit man, driven the hit man to a location where her romantic rival was at a bar, and identified the rival who was heavily pregnant, supposedly with Jackson's partner's child. The hit man shot and killed the pregnant woman and an unrelated bystander.⁶⁴

The overwhelming presence of gang violence in Jamaica creates an "impunity effect," where low clear-up rates for homicides—only one in every two murders was solved in Jamaica in 2022 and 2023—understandably foster a belief that committing murder carries minimal risk of detection or punishment.⁶⁵ This diminished deterrence reduces the perceived cost of using violence to resolve personal grievances and enables individuals predisposed to such actions to act with relative ease.⁶⁶ Moreover, the demand for contract killers sustains their availability, embedding their services into the criminal landscape and perpetuating the cycle of violence.⁶⁷

Family property disputes, colloquially referred to as "dead leg," highlight the role of gender and familial dynamics in this phenomenon. For example, in 2020, Nadeen Geddes and her two daughters were charged with hiring a hitman to murder Nadeen's sister, reportedly over a conflict related to the dwelling shared by all four individuals.⁶⁸ Similarly, in 2024, a woman in St. Catherine was sentenced to six and a half years in prison for hiring a hitman to kill her brother during a disagreement over a family house.⁶⁹ These cases are examples of how the availability of contract killers, combined with the perception of impunity, makes resorting to lethal violence seem like a viable option for resolving personal disputes. Such cases are thus inextricable from the broader problem of organised violence in Jamaica; however, they do not constitute women's participation in gangs.

If we look to the data for what it reveals about women perpetrating non-interpersonal violent crime, or the crimes associated with gang activity, the data aligns with the Kingston Central Police Division's report in 2022 that there has been

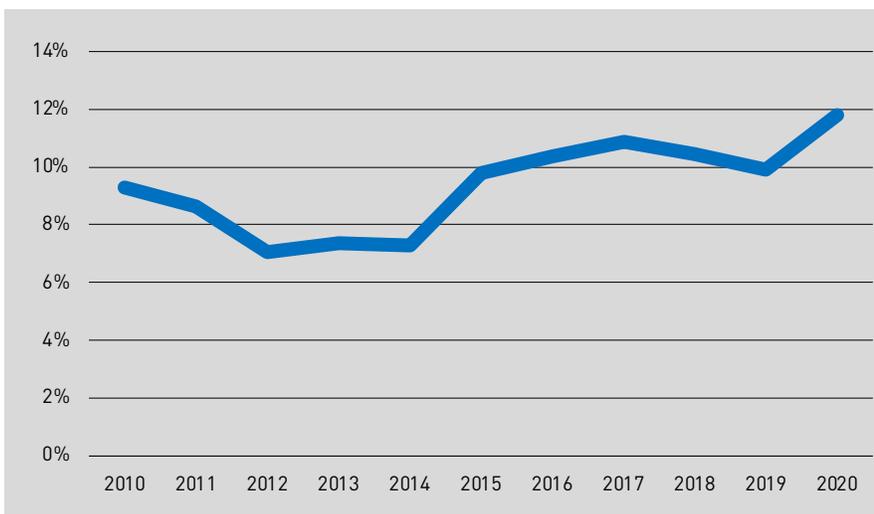
an increase, albeit a modest one of only three percentage points, in the direct involvement of women in criminal activities, that report being one of several similar from across the island in recent years.⁷⁰ The arrest data shows that between 2010

and 2020 there was an increase in arrests of both males and females but a greater increase for females (see Figure 6).

There has been an increase in women's participation in gang-related violent crimes.



Share of Women Arrested for Violent Crimes

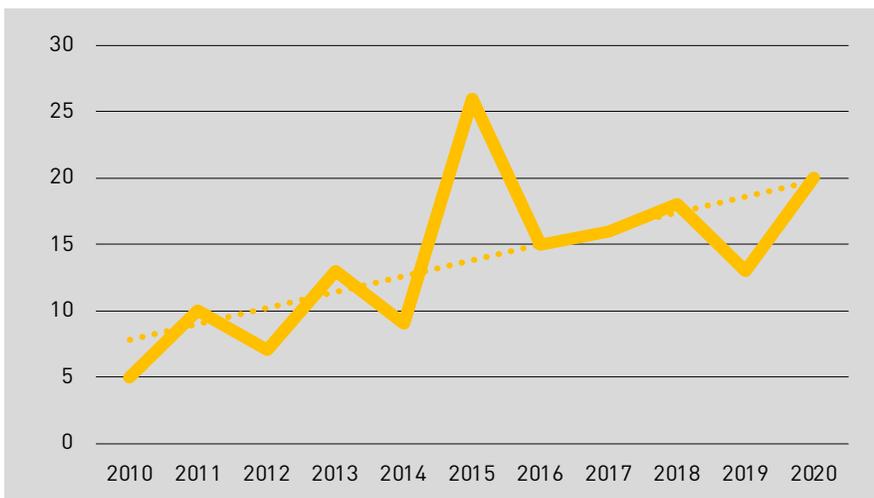


Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force

The number of women arrested for homicide has trended up.



Number of Women Arrested for Homicide



Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force



The relative rarity of women committing murder may explain why, when it does happen, it attracts disproportionate media and law enforcement attention.



However, examining the data for shootings over the same period suggests that the increase in female arrests is

not linked to gun-related murders, which dominate gang violence, but is more likely associated with domestic or

interpersonal conflicts (see Table 4).

Female arrests for murder have increased slightly from 2010 to 2020, but consistently low arrests for shootings suggest limited direct involvement in gang violence.



Persons Arrested by Gender for Murder, Shooting, and Manslaughter, 2010-2020

	Murder		Shooting		Manslaughter	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
2010	5	294	0	285	0	2
2011	10	448	5	421	0	1
2012	7	407	1	426	0	3
2013	13	472	4	478	0	3
2014	9	429	1	376	1	4
2015	26	611	2	441	1	2
2016	15	686	3	470	0	3
2017	16	671	1	506	0	2
2018	18	660	0	528	0	4
2019	13	543	5	459	1	2
2020	20	666	8	520	0	3

Source: Jamaica Constabulary Force

The data does not support the claim that women's perpetration of violent crime has been increasing in any consistent or clear trend. While there are fluctuations in the number of women arrested for murder over the years, these numbers remain low relative to men and do not indicate a sustained upward trajectory. The highest number of women arrested for murder in a single year was 26 in 2015, but this was followed by a decline in subsequent years.

More tellingly, when looking at shootings—dominant in gang violence—wom-

en's arrests remain negligible, with only occasional instances recorded. In multiple years, no women were arrested for shootings at all, and the highest recorded number was just eight in 2020. Given that gang violence overwhelmingly involves firearms, this suggests that women are not participating in organised violence at levels that would support the perception of increased female involvement in gangs as active perpetrators.

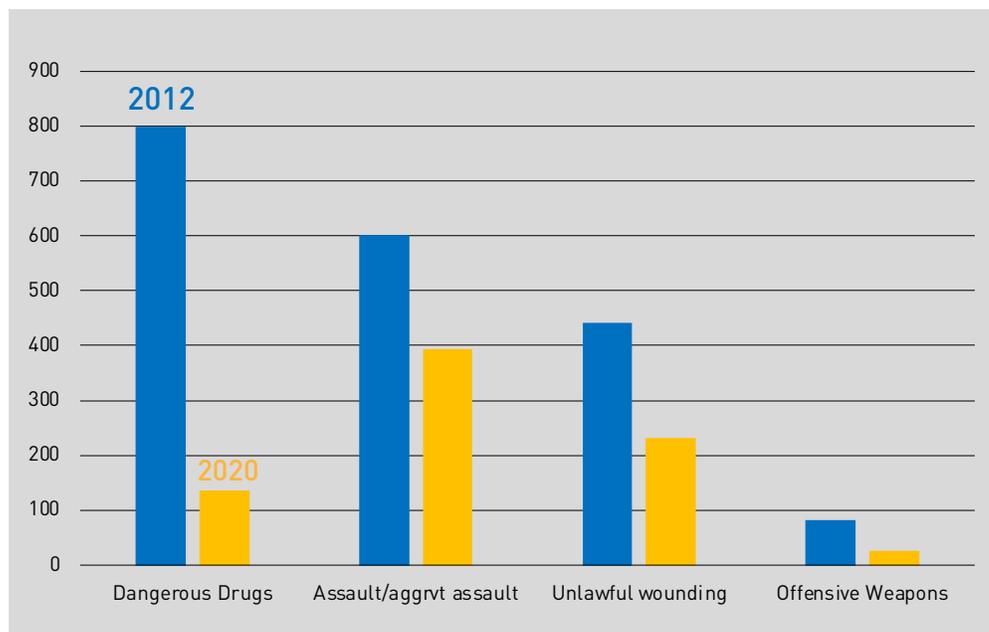
By contrast, the category of manslaughter, which is more likely to include domestic violence incidents, also shows

minimal female arrests, further indicating that women are not a growing force in violent crime. This is substantiated by the data showing declines over the period in other categories of violent crime (see Figure 8).

Female arrests for violent crimes have decreased.



Female Violent Crime Arrests, 2012 and 2020



The data suggests that women's involvement in serious violent offences remains low and inconsistent, particularly in relation to Jamaica's primary form of homicidal violence—gang-related shootings. This also aligns with the general downward trend in crime and violence across all major categories, except for murders and shootings.⁷¹ As we shall see for incarceration data, that also does not indicate an increase in women's violent criminality or overall criminal involvement.

Women in Prison

The world prison population rate, based on United Nations estimates of national population levels, was 140 per 100,000 in 2021.⁷² While men are still far more often criminal offenders, since the beginning of the 21st century around the world there has been a rise in the global female prison population, in female incarceration rates, and in the proportion of women in prison (relative to men).⁷³ The global incarceration rate of women and girls in 2022 was 9.7 per 100,000, in comparison to a rate of 6.0 in 2015.⁷⁴ Just as prison population rates vary widely worldwide and even within continents—for instance, in Africa, the median rate is 44.5 for western

African countries and 248 for southern African countries—so do women's incarceration rates.⁷⁵ Africa has the lowest rate, at three per 100,000 of the national population, and the Americas the highest, at 30 per 100,000 (14 excluding the USA).⁷⁶ The current rate of global female imprisonment outpaces both population growth and the rate of increase in male imprisonment. At the same time, UN survey data on crime trends between 1980 and 2006 shows that female crime has been rising. All of these trends suggest an increase in female involvement in crime at the global level.⁷⁷

In contrast, in the Caribbean, women's incarceration rates and numbers over the last two decades have either remained stable or declined. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, the total female prison population declined from 212 in 2008 to 117 in 2018, representing a rate decrease from 11.2 to 8.5.⁷⁸ In the Eastern Caribbean, islands like St. Vincent and the Grenadines have maintained their female prison population in the single digits. However, the country saw the rate per 100,000 of the population increase from 7.4 in 2001 to 12.6 in 2020. In Barbados, the total female prison population has re-

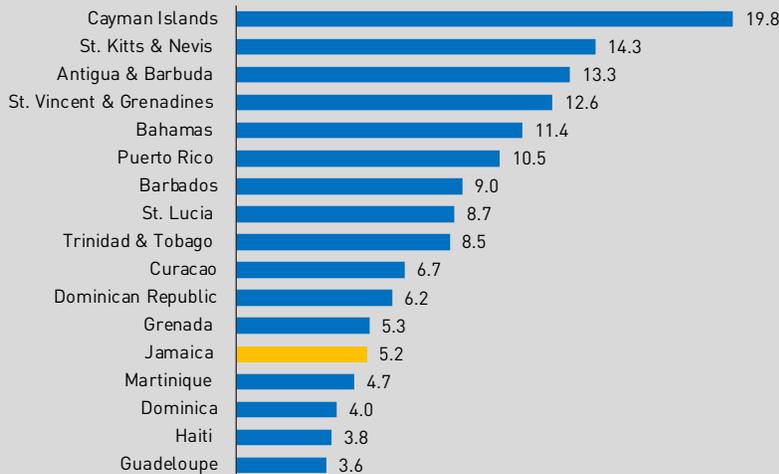
mained around an average rate of 9.0 per 100,000 over the last two decades (Figure 8).⁷⁹



Violence against children is the most prevalent form of domestic violence perpetrated by women in Jamaica, with **80%** of children experiencing violence at home.

Jamaica’s female prison population rate is amongst the lowest in the Caribbean.

8 Female Incarceration Rate



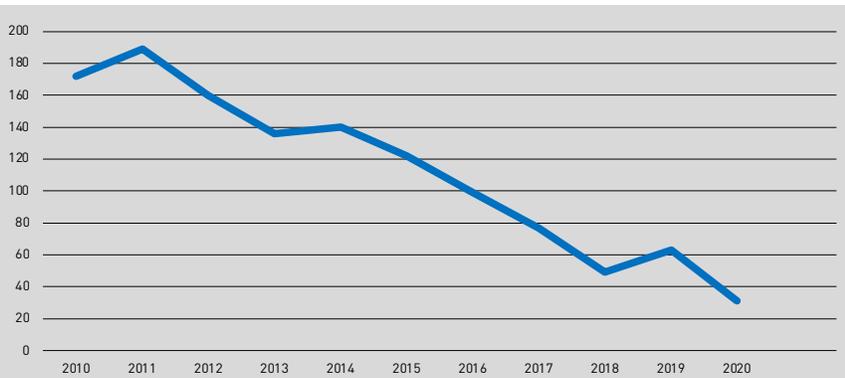
Source: Compiled from the World Female Imprisonment List, most recent year available for each country.

In the context of the global female incarceration rate of 9.7 per 100,000 in 2022, the Caribbean exhibits notable variability across countries, with rates both above and below the global average. This variation across the Caribbean highlights a diverse regional landscape, where some countries align with or surpass global incarceration patterns for women, while

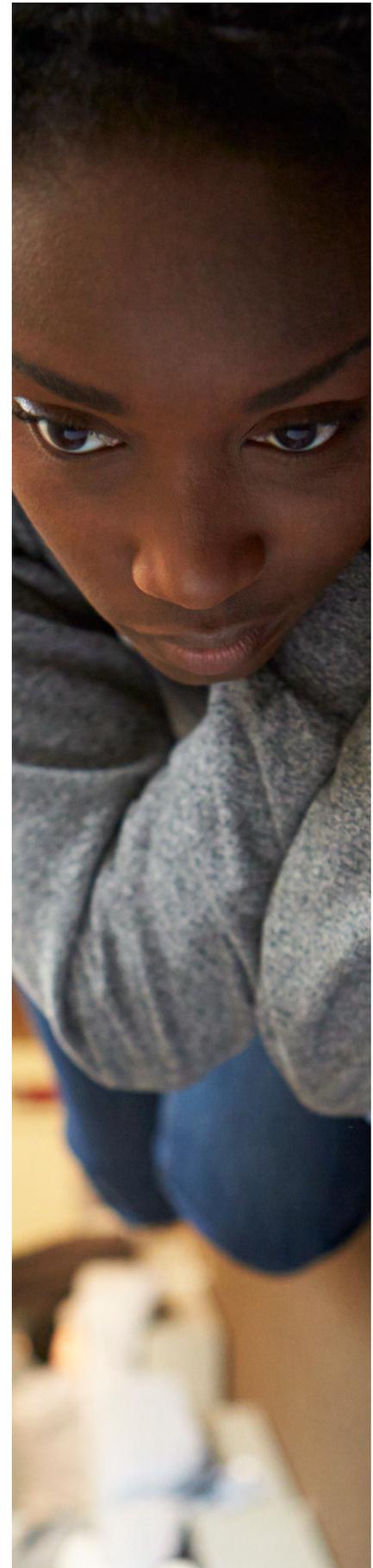
others exhibit significantly lower rates. The data for Jamaica in particular shows a clear divergence from the global trends. Since 2012 there has been a decrease in the numbers, percentage, and rate of women in prison, and women continue to account for less than 10 percent of Jamaica’s custodial population (Figure 9).⁸⁰

The number of women that have been incarcerated has been declining.

9 Number of Women Admitted Under Custodial Sentences, 2010 – 2020



Source: DCS



Both the number of incarcerated women, as well as the female prison population rate (per 100,000 of the population) have decreased since the start of the millennium; the number and rate of incarcerated men has also gone down.⁸¹ In 2021, there were 147 females representing 4 percent of the total prison population, a rate of 5.2 (per 100,000 female population).⁸²

That is, in contrast to global trends and reports from security forces and the media suggesting a rise in women's criminality, data from the English-speaking Caribbean, including Jamaica, indicate a decrease in both the absolute number of female prisoners and their proportional representation within the overall prison population. This evidence would appear not to support the notion that women's criminality is increasing. Indeed, at first glance, it appears to challenge the prevailing assumption of a rise in women's involvement in crime. However, as this chapter will explore, there are additional factors that may account for this apparent mismatch.

Who are the Women in Jamaican Prisons?

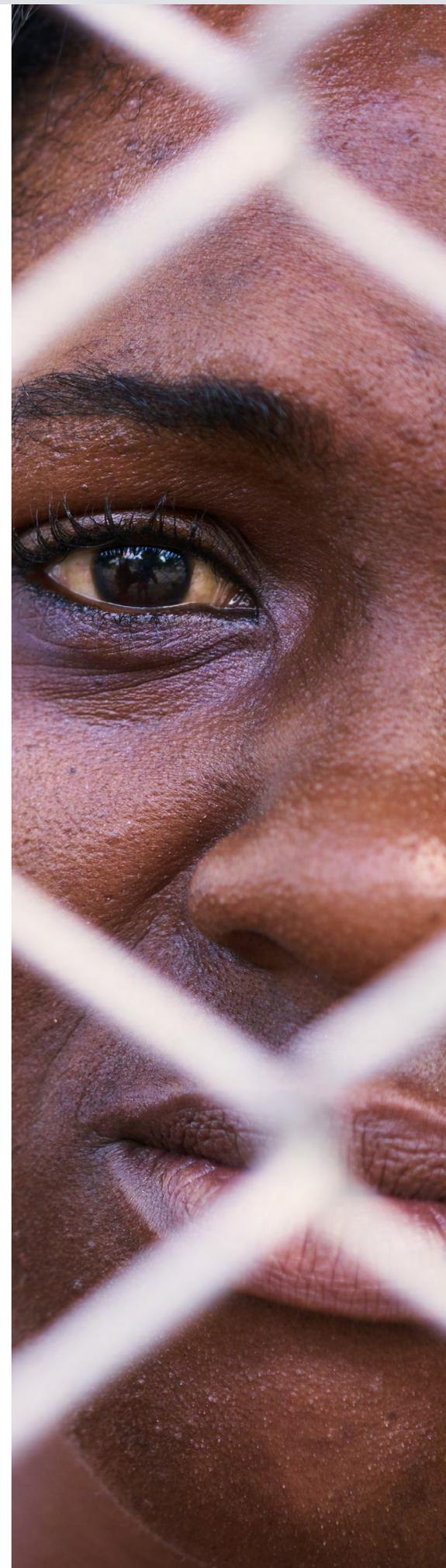
Data on Jamaica's prison population is limited, and what is available largely reflects the assumption that socio-economic factors such as poverty, victimisation, and low educational attainment are key drivers of criminality. Further, data on women and crime tends to be collected and analysed in an essentialist frame, which considers women as victims and as not possessing agency.⁸³ Additionally, the prison population is not representative of the broader criminal population due to adverse selection effects. Among these effects are Jamaica's low incarceration rate and the low clear-up rate for known crimes, which support the notion that the prison population constitutes only a small subset of the overall criminal population. The circumstances leading to incarceration may also highlight notable differences between those imprisoned and other offenders.

For instance, data show that individuals from lower socio-economic strata and with limited educational attainment are overrepresented in prisons compared to

the general population. This overrepresentation may stem from their inability to afford legal representation, which could have influenced the outcomes of their convictions and sentencing. It may also reflect other factors, such as heightened vulnerability to arrest, that distinguish them from others engaged in criminal activity who avoid incarceration.

A socio-economic lens does not consider the structural drivers of violence and crime, which in Jamaica are empirically shown to be the predominant causal factors leading to the high homicide rate.⁸⁴ Data that accounts for factors such as irregular land tenure, governance deficits, political clientelism, and the deliberate cultivation of dependence by political actors as significant enablers of organised violence is not available. These systemic elements foster environments where crime thrives, regardless of individual socio-economic circumstances. The overemphasis on socio-economic variables risks obscuring these broader dynamics, which limits the formulation of policies that effectively address the root causes of criminality.

The data we do have is thus concentrated on socio-economic variables, and tells us what we might expect, that Jamaica's prison population, men and women, is disproportionately poor, illiterate, and unskilled, and the majority incarcerated for violent crimes.⁸⁵ In the late 20th century, approximately 90 percent of the female prison population hailed from the lower socioeconomic strata, and were unemployed or underemployed.⁸⁶ More recent data shows that although incarcerated women may often be characterised as poor and unskilled, 71 percent were employed a month prior to their arrest, with a notable proportion (18 percent) being self-employed.⁸⁷ The average age of female inmates, as determined by a 2019 survey, stood at 36.2 years, with 31 percent falling within the 25 to 35 age bracket and 23 percent aged between 18 and 24. Male inmates, at an average of 34.4 years, are slightly younger.⁸⁸ A "significant number" of them had been victims of abusive relationships (1989 data), whereas four in ten women from the general population have experienced some sort of intimate partner violence.⁸⁹ Both women and men in prison are less





educated than those not in prison. In the ordinary population, 34 percent of Jamaican women enrol in higher education programmes, as do 20 percent of men. Educational attainment among the female prisoner studied varied, with almost 10 percent having completed university education and 6.6 percent commencing but not completing such studies. Most incarcerated men (86 percent) have some secondary education, but many did not complete it. About 51 percent of men reported incomplete secondary education, and only 3 percent reached post-secondary or university levels.⁹⁰ Among juveniles, compared to boys, girls tend to have stronger reading skills.⁹¹ For most incarcerated women, prison is their first experience with the justice system—95 percent were in prison for the first time, excluding those with juvenile records (10 percent).⁹² Data from the mid-2000s suggests that around 20 percent of Jamaica's female prison population were foreign nationals (mainly United States, United Kingdom, and Canada).⁹³

For children in conflict with the law, boys and girls, they attribute their actions to idleness and peer influence and usually come from low-income families led by single mothers with multiple siblings. Financial hardships, such as missing school due to lack of bus fare or lunch money, are common, as are frequent moves, school suspensions or expulsions for fighting, and having relatives involved in crime. Residing in urban areas like Kingston, they are exposed to gangs, community violence, and have likely witnessed shootings or been involved in neighbourhood conflicts. Experimentation with alcohol and marijuana is typical, and many have suffered personal losses, such as the death of a family member.⁹⁴ High exposure to violence is a common factor, with many reporting personal connections to victims of murder. According to a 2011 study, 77 percent of children in conflict with the law had witnessed or heard someone being shot, underscoring the prevalence of gun violence in “garrison” communities—in formal and semi-formal settlements—in which these children often live.⁹⁵ While girls share much of this profile, they are more likely to have experienced abuse.⁹⁶

Perception vs. Reality: Women and Violent Crime

The fact that there has been a decline in the number and rate of women in prison does not necessarily mean that the perception that women are increasingly involved in organised crime is incorrect. Some scholars argue that women are overlooked in crime statistics and law enforcement narratives, not because they are absent from criminal activity but because prevailing frameworks for understanding crime often focus on male offenders.⁹⁷ This perspective suggests that traditional assumptions about women's roles as passive participants or victims contribute to their relative invisibility in data collection, policing, and academic research. The argument extends to law enforcement practices, where investigative priorities and biases may lead to an underestimation of women's involvement in organised crime. However, this view remains contested, as the lack of statistical evidence could also indicate that women's participation in violent crime is, in fact, minimal.

In a related vein there is a noted phenomenon in many countries that, despite increasing social equality, police and judicial systems still tend to be more lenient with female than with male offenders.⁹⁸ Stakeholders in Jamaica also suggest that sentencing guidelines that take into account aggravating and mitigating factors, may result in women receiving lighter and/or noncustodial sentences.⁹⁹

Other explanations for the disconnect between the perception of women's increasing involvement in violent crime and data showing a decline in arrests and incarceration rates, can be explained by the broader context of incarceration rates, and the changes in the organised violence “industry” in Jamaica.

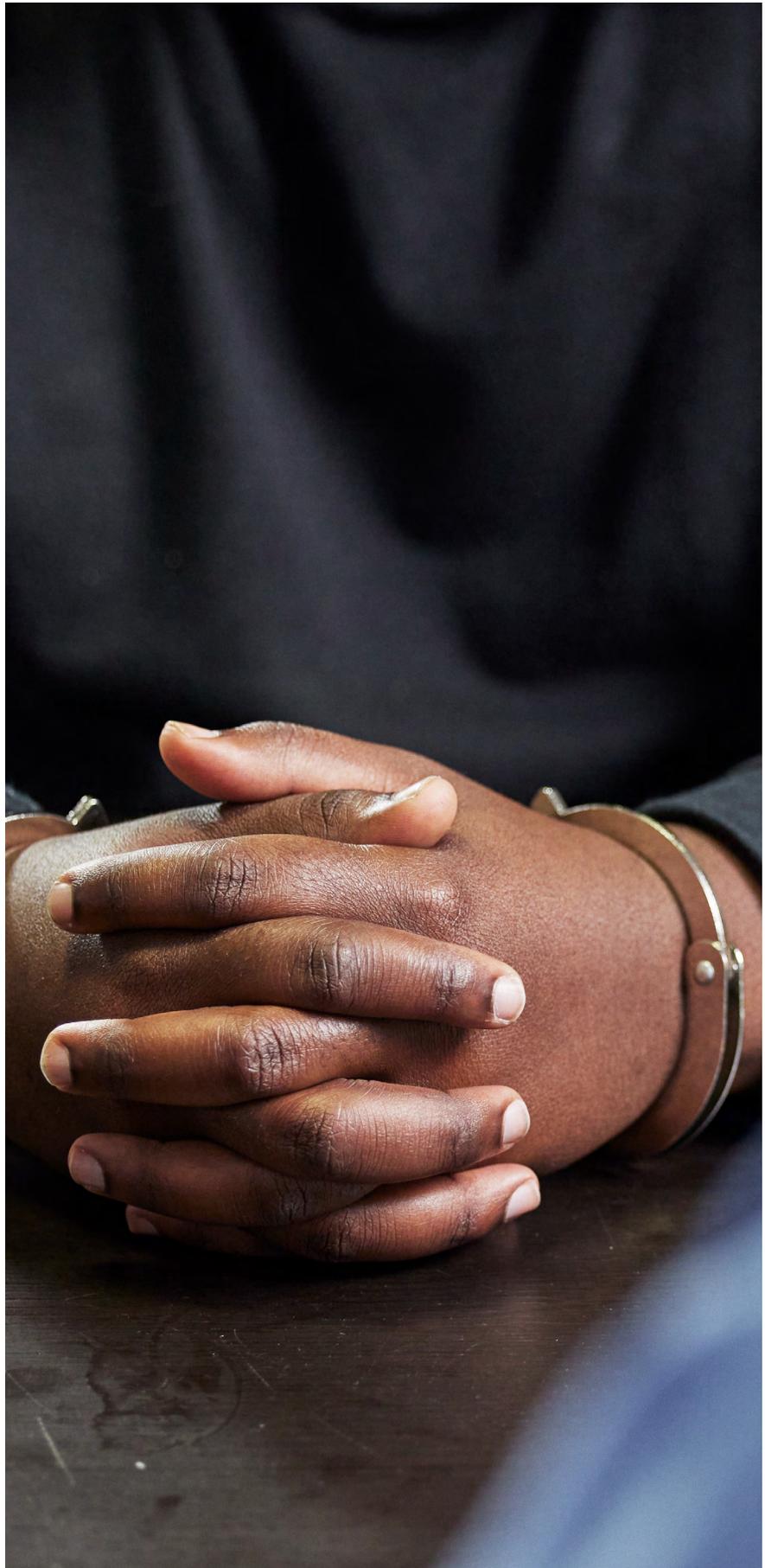
Jamaica's incarceration rate stands at only 125 per 100,000 people; only Haiti (63) and Guatemala (123) are lower.¹⁰⁰ Considering Jamaica's generally high crime rates, this suggests that a substantial proportion of offenders, both male and female, go unpunished. Therefore, the number of women in prison at any given time does not accurately reflect the total

number of active female criminals across the country. Furthermore, the majority of women historically imprisoned have been convicted for offences that have declined over time. Major crimes, excluding murders and shootings, decreased by 60 percent between 2013 and 2023, which would naturally lead to a decline in the number of women arrested for such crimes.

The perception of increased female involvement in crime is largely associated with organised crime. While current data does not substantiate this perception, the possibility that women's roles within organised crime are underreported or under-detected cannot be ruled out. However, without more definitive data, any assertion of increased female participation remains speculative and requires further research to verify.

Other contextual factors and knowledge may provide some validation. Gangs operate as businesses, and organised crime functions as an industry, albeit an illicit one. The structure of this industry influences the composition of its participants. A notable shift occurred in the industrial organisation of organised crime in Jamaica following a 2012 crackdown on gangs, which resulted in major hierarchical gangs splintering into smaller, more dispersed entities across the country. This restructuring may have created new opportunities for women to engage in gang-related activities.

Broader labour market trends may provide further context for the perception that more women are involved in organised violent groups. The increased participation of women in this illicit industry may parallel their growing presence in the formal economy, where their workforce participation has been rising at a faster rate than men's.¹⁰¹ In some industrialised countries, the increase in female criminality has been linked to the narrowing of socio-economic gender gaps. As women gain greater autonomy and access to opportunities, their involvement in various spheres—including criminal activity—may also expand.¹⁰² Security forces' and stakeholders' understanding of who is considered a participant in organised crime has also evolved



over the past decade. For example, the approximately 800 women in prison for drug trafficking in 2012 were often viewed as drug mules for organised criminal groups rather than as active participants within those groups. By contrast, women involved in gang-related scamming today are increasingly recognised as occupying key roles within organised crime.

The enactment of the 2014 anti-gang legislation was a landmark development, as it classified those performing supportive roles for gangs as members of those criminal groups, thereby implicating more women in the underground criminal economy.¹⁰³ Further analyses by state security forces led to amendments to the anti-gang legislation in 2021, which expanded the range of supporting roles considered part of gang activity. This evolution in legislative and investigative frameworks has broadened the scope of security forces' operations, leading them to identify individuals beyond the primary violence producers within gangs. This shift has been supported by improved intelligence collection capabilities, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the roles women play in organised crime. That shift may not yet be reflected in arrest and incarceration data, due to the inevitable time lag.

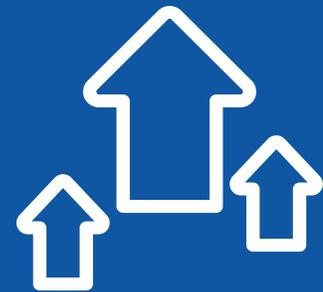
Conclusion

The analysis of available data on women's criminal behaviour and incarceration shows that women account for a smaller proportion of arrests and imprisonments than men across almost all categories of crime. Women are more commonly involved in non-violent offenses, such as drug trafficking and financial crimes, and commit far fewer violent crimes than

men. Furthermore, women's involvement in violent crimes is largely confined to domestic settings or personal disputes.

There is no statistical evidence that women's involvement in organised crime is increasing. Arrest and incarceration data do not support claims of greater female participation in gangs, contradicting public perception and media narratives. However, many gang-related activities have only recently been classified as crimes under anti-gang legislation, meaning official records may not fully capture the extent of women's roles. Shifts in the structure of organised violence—such as the fragmentation of gangs and the increased recognition of supportive roles within criminal networks, and labour force participation rates where women's participation is increasing faster than men's, may have created new opportunities for women to engage in illicit activities not yet reflected in arrest or conviction data. Additionally, contextual factors, such as low incarceration and clear-up rates, contribute to the underrepresentation of female offenders in official statistics, complicating efforts to accurately assess their involvement.

While public discourse and media reports suggest that women play active roles in organised crime, these assertions are not reflected in crime data. This chapter presents the best available statistics on female offending, while the next chapter examines alternative sources—media reports, policy literature, and expert insights—to determine whether women's participation in organised violence extends beyond what official records indicate.



The global female imprisonment rate is rising faster than population growth and male incarceration, while in the Caribbean, women's incarceration has remained stable or declined over two decades.

Since 2012 there has been a decrease in the numbers, percentage, and rate of women in prison, and women continue to account for less than 10% of all prisoners.



3

Women's Roles in Organised Violence



Residing in urban areas like Kingston, children in conflict with the law are exposed to gangs, community violence, and have likely witnessed shootings.

This chapter explores women's roles in the business of organised crime, given its centrality to Jamaica's security challenges. Existing data on women's criminality primarily emphasises socio-economic factors but is shaped by selection effects, which influence who from the broader criminal population is incarcerated. These effects and other factors render the prison population an unrepresentative sample of all individuals engaged in criminal activity. Women's involvement in organised violent crime remains particularly underexplored, with limited reliable data available. This gap may stem from underreporting or under-detection, compounded by the tendency to essentialise women as victims rather than recognising their active participation in criminal networks.¹⁰⁴

Jamaica's high homicide rate is predominantly driven by organised criminal gangs, which use violence strategically to control territories, enforce compliance, suppress informants, and dominate rivals. Global research suggests a rising trend of female perpetrators engaging in violent acts.¹⁰⁵ In Jamaica, there is a general perception among security stakeholders, the media, academics, and social commentators that women are increasingly playing more prominent roles in these gangs, but there is little data to substantiate these claims.

Drawing on media reports, court proceed-

ings, and interviews with stakeholders and practitioners, this chapter offers insights into how women participate in organised violence, whether as facilitators or active contributors. However, without a deeper investigation into the structural factors sustaining gang violence and organised criminal activity in Jamaica, these insights provide only a partial understanding of the issue.

Jamaica's Gang Violence and High Homicide Rates

Organised violent gangs pose the greatest threat to Jamaica's security. Gang violence originated in the 1940s when political parties used armed groups to secure electoral support. This escalated in the 1970s with intensified political conflicts and the influx of firearms, pushing Jamaica into global homicide rankings. By the 1980s, as political influence over gangs declined, these groups shifted to extortion and drug trafficking.¹⁰⁶

Operation Kingfish, launched in 2004 to dismantle major drug-trafficking organisations, successfully extradited gang leaders and disrupted operations. However, this left many armed criminals leaderless and unemployed, driving them to other violent activities. Murders peaked at 1,683 in 2009. Between 2010 and 2014, a sustained anti-gang crackdown led to a temporary

drop in homicides, reaching 1,005 in 2014. However, the crackdown caused gangs to splinter into smaller, more volatile groups, and by 2017, the murder count had risen again to 1,647.¹⁰⁷

Since 2022, murders have declined from 1,498 to 1,139 in 2024. While the reasons remain unclear, the decline coincides with a reduction in criminal gangs from 350 in 2016 to 170 in 2024, alongside increased national security investment. The security budget rose from \$59.2 billion in 2016/17 to \$78.5 billion in 2018/19. Initiatives such as Zones of Special Operations, States of Emergency, and the Joint Anti-Gang Task Force, introduced in 2021, have likely contributed to this reduction.

Increased use of anti-gang legislation may also be contributing to the decline in murders. Between 2014 and 2019, the law resulted in only two convictions. A 2020 trial secured a conviction for a gang leader, but 15 co-defendants, including a police officer, were acquitted due to unreliable witness testimony.¹⁰⁸ In 2023, however, a landmark case saw 15 individuals convicted, which authorities described as a major blow to one of Jamaica's most powerful gangs.¹⁰⁹

Roles in Gangs

The core business model of organised crime revolves around the use of violence

Data on women and crime tends to be collected and analysed in an essentialist frame, which considers women as victims, and not possessing agency.

to extract revenue from individuals and entities within a controlled territory, primarily through extortion.¹¹⁰ Criminal enterprises such as scamming, drug trafficking, and prostitution are not inherently gang activities but often operate under their influence, either as targets of extortion or clients of gang “protection” services. While gangs may sometimes integrate these activities into their operations, their primary function remains the production of violence. Within this framework, women’s roles in organised crime are shaped by their position in these economies—whether as intermediaries in financial operations, facilitators of logistics, or participants in extortion schemes—rather than as direct enforcers of violence.

Organised violent crime in Jamaica predominantly thus comprises networks of small street gangs primarily engaged in extortion, with secondary activities that may include contract killings, arms trading, drug trafficking, prostitution, and various iterations of advanced fee fraud commonly referred to as scamming. Though some gangs may have political affiliations, in the cases where these do exist, they are unlikely to be the gangs’ main purpose, and the gangs’ profit motive is likely to supersede any political objective in their resource allocation and decision-making. That is, these gangs are primarily profit-driven, violent criminal groups, who engage in various illicit activities, and for whom violence is a primary tool of business.¹¹¹

Gang composition in Jamaica, as in most other parts of the world, is heavily gendered: most are young males from urban and urbanising informal or semi-formal (government housing) communities. These “at-risk” young men are generally unemployed (in the formal sector), undereducated, and below the age of 35.¹¹²

The main roles in gangs such as those found in Jamaica are:¹¹³

1. **Don/Leader:** The top authority who oversees the gang's operations and coordinates with other influential entities.
2. **Banker:** A high-ranking, trusted member, usually with close ties to the community, who manages proceeds from criminal activities, and arranging funds for legal and illegal activities.
3. **Lieutenant/Enforcer:** Trusted members responsible for enforcing the gang's will on other members; might be referred to as a “top-tier” member.¹¹⁵
4. **Foot Soldier:** Individuals who carry out the gang's criminal activities.
5. **Shotta:** A shooter, killer, assassin; a foot soldier but specialised in violence, and is somewhat higher ranked than a mere foot soldier.
6. **Facilitators:** Persons who enable gang activity, in a variety of ways, such as providing shelter and sustenance, hiding weapons or evidence, and carrying out specific tasks.
 - **Courier:** Individuals tasked with transporting illicit goods and messages between locations or to clients. These may also be drivers.
 - **Collector:** Collect monies from persons and businesses belonging to the gang.
 - **Informant/spy:** Members who infiltrate rival gangs or inform on gang members.
 - **Lookout:** Usually junior members assigned to monitor for law enforcement or rival gangs either appear.¹¹⁷
 - **Spotter:** they target individuals to be robbed and might be involved in the robbery.
 - **Recruiter:** Individuals responsible for enlisting new members into the gang. They may not have a presence.¹¹⁹ Recruitment of a child or adult is an important part of the gang's growth.
 - **Gunsmiths and armourers:** maintain and service the gang's weapons.
 - **Choppa:** An individual involved in lottery scamming or other forms of fraud.

The roles may overlap, and someone can “move up” in the gang hierarchy.

operations, makes strategic decisions, and maintains connections with political figures or

personal ties to the don, who manages the gang's financial resources, including handling legal representation.¹¹⁴

enforcing the leader's directives, managing day-to-day activities, and supervising lower-ranking

activities, such as extortion and acts of violence.¹¹⁶

used in killing. A shotta may further specialise in killing witnesses. Specialised killers are

of ways, including providing logistical support services that aid in the gang's operations, carrying/transmitting information. More specific facilitation roles include:

s, such as firearms, but also cash, and other supplies necessary for gang business, between

being extorted.

stitutions to gather intelligence beneficial to their group's interests.

or law enforcement presence or rival gangs, tasked with providing early warnings should

benefit from the proceeds.¹¹⁸

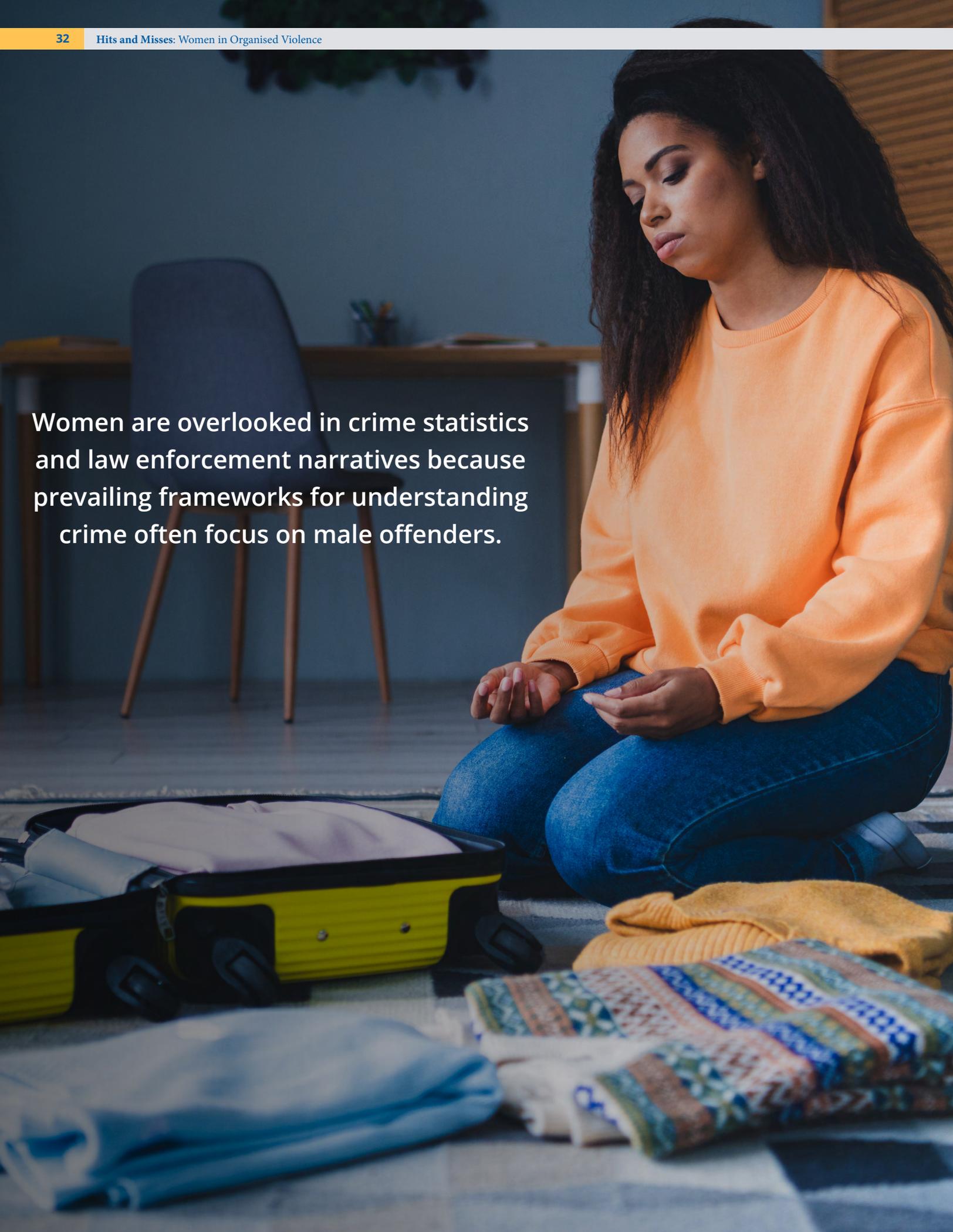
members, often targeting vulnerable youth from or within communities where gangs already
offense in the anti-gang legislation.

ng's artillery.

therwise conning people out of their money.

gang, from lookout man to courier of guns, and then to become a killer/assassin.¹²⁰

Women are overlooked in crime statistics and law enforcement narratives because prevailing frameworks for understanding crime often focus on male offenders.



Women Roles in Violent Criminal Gangs

The roles of women in violent gangs vary depending on the nature of the gang's activities. In some contexts, such as gangs engaged in illicit drug manufacturing and trafficking in East Africa, women's roles have evolved from peripheral tasks to central responsibilities as dealers, coordinators, and even "cooks."¹²¹ Their activities may include laundering money, arranging travel for mules, coordinating attacks on delivery vehicles, trafficking arms and drugs, acting as spies and information gatherers, conducting surveillance, tracking targets for kidnapping, and carrying messages. A study of gangs in Central America's Northern Triangle found that male gang members often regard women as more effective in certain tasks, particularly those requiring discretion or building trust.¹²²

In Jamaica, women and girls are thought to perform many of the roles in a gang (listed above), with the exception of shot-ta (shooter) or foot soldier. They are no longer only considered as victims, but are known by security stakeholders to be "active participants in murderous schemes, including ensuring directives sent by gangsters behind bars are carried out; they are integral to the communication, payment and collection of blood money, and are at times used to lure unsuspecting targets into the path of danger."¹²³

Though the mention of women in the organised violence discourse seems to date back to the early 2010s, evidence from Jamaica dating back two decades indicates that women have played pivotal roles in facilitating and sustaining gang operations. In 2004, popular Jamaican musician Tanya Stephens wrote and recorded the song "Gangsta Gal," in which women are portrayed as active and indispensable participants in violent crime.¹²⁴

The 2004 song "Gangsta Gal" by Tanya Stephens refers to several roles that support and sustain criminal operations. These include:

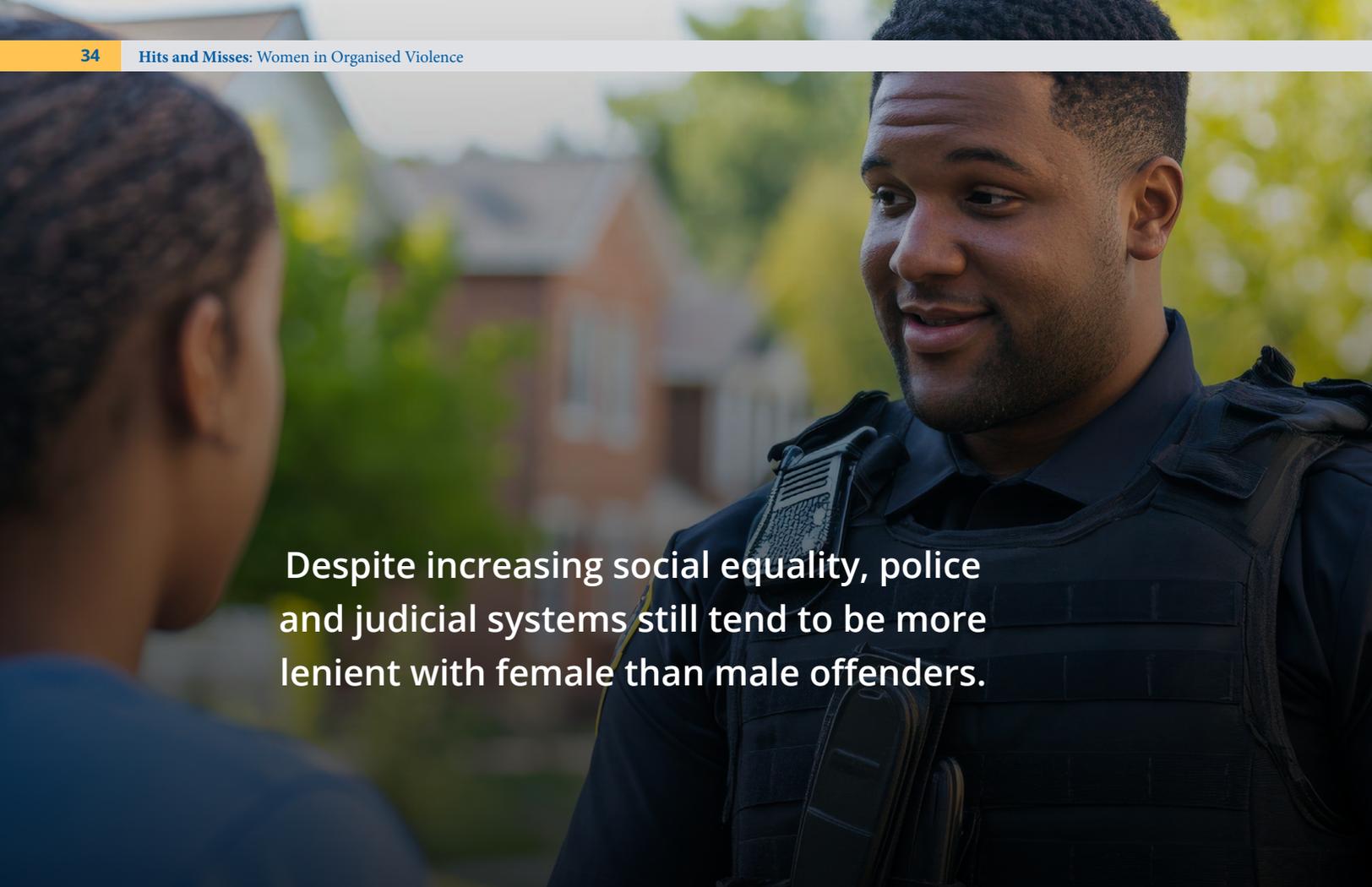
Logistical support: The woman is involved in preparing and handling weapons, as indicated by her cleaning bullets, loading clips, and oiling guns. This reflects a hands-on role in ensuring the tools of crime are operational and ready for use.

Cover and concealment: She hides the weapon while evading law enforcement, showcasing her role in shielding the gang's activities from detection.

Financial and legal support: The lyrics describe her preparedness to provide bail money and secure legal representation ("get Johnny Cochrane pon the case"), demonstrating her role in managing the financial and legal repercussions of criminal activities.

Trusted partner: The man explicitly identifies her as a crucial ally ("every thug haffi hav dem second"). She is entrusted with significant responsibilities, such as access to the safe, underscoring her reliability and importance within the partnership.

Overall, the song details women's agency and active participation in supporting and facilitating criminal activities, going beyond traditional passive roles to include direct engagement in logistical, financial, and operational aspects of violent crime.



Despite increasing social equality, police and judicial systems still tend to be more lenient with female than male offenders.

Reports of women taking on roles beyond traditional support functions, such as providing shelter or laundering money, date back to at least 2011.¹²⁵ In 2013, a prominent anti-violence civil society organisation proposed that women played various roles in gang dynamics, often indirectly fuelling conflicts and sustaining operations, particularly in inner-city communities. As heads of households, some women exercised authority over sons involved in crime and, at times, actively escalated tensions between rival groups.¹²⁶ Law enforcement officials also observed that women provided logistical support, including hiding weapons and laundering money, while communities legitimised their own gangs and vilified rivals, reinforcing gang control at both household and community levels.¹²⁷ In 2015, it was reported that a group of students at a prominent corporate area all-girls institution had formed a gang within the school, engaging in activities such as bullying, extortion, and other forms of intimidation against their peers.¹²⁸

Research from Trinidad & Tobago, a country with similar gang violence dynamics, has identified shifting trends in women's gang involvement. A 2013 study suggested that while women were traditionally seen as messengers or functionaries, their roles were expanding.¹²⁹ By 2024, security officials noted an increase in female involvement, with gang intelligence data suggesting that women were assuming advisory roles and, in some cases, leading operations.¹³⁰ Some criminologists predicted that female-dominated gangs may soon emerge in the Caribbean, as has already been observed elsewhere.¹³¹ Women are increasingly engaged in transshipment, weapons storage, and operational coordination. Reports also indicate that female students are self-reporting gang membership at unexpectedly high rates, with some countries showing near-equal gender representation in gangs.¹³²

Recent research states that “women act as sentries and even shields for criminal

men; some commit violent crimes themselves.”¹³³ Public officials have highlighted women's complicity in protecting and facilitating gang activity, reinforcing the role of households and communities in sustaining organised crime.¹³⁴ Women are no longer limited to support functions but are directly participating in criminal operations, including acting as lookouts, gathering intelligence, and coordinating activities.¹³⁵ Some have risen to leadership positions just below the level of a don, with terms such as “gangstresses” emerging to describe their roles in the evolving structure of organised crime.¹³⁶

Based on recent evidence from media reports and JCF and other stakeholders' and practitioners' statements, a rubric of the ways in which women are engaged in organised criminal violence, consists of:

- 1. Top Tier Leadership:** Women occupy leadership roles just below the level of a don, coordinating gang activities and exercising significant authority. For example, Shanique Thompson, referred to as the spouse of Tesha Miller and mother of his child (for several years Miller was the leader of the Clansman gang and one of the most feared and powerful gang leaders in Jamaica), was identified as a high-ranking member facilitating its financial operations, contributing to the sustainability of criminal organisations by enabling the "business side" of gang activities, illustrating leadership-level involvement. She was charged with money laundering and possession of criminal property in 2020.¹³⁷
- 2. Banker:** A top tier leadership role, managing gang finances. Like Shanique Thompson, Stephanie Cole-Christie was a top tier leader who performed several roles in Clansman gang, including managing money (the case study on her goes into more details).
- 3. Lieutenant/Enforcer:** Women act under gang leaders' instructions to carry out and engage in transactions advancing gang operations and strategy. A 2018 study found that in gang-dominated communities, 32 percent of women acted as "triggers" for initiating conflicts, and 8 percent were involved in planning violence.¹³⁸
- 4. Lookout /Spotter:** Women serve as lookouts, monitoring for law enforcement or rival gang activity and providing early warnings.¹³⁹ For example, one study described women's involvement as telephoning gang leaders or enforcers to inform about the location of a male who would later be the victim of violence such as a shooting or homicide.¹⁴⁰
- 5. Collector:** Women collect illicit funds from victims, obtained through extortion. A witness in the Clansman trial gave testimony that the mother of the alleged gang leader was involved in collecting extortion money on behalf of the criminal enterprise, corroborating other reports of this key role that women play.¹⁴¹

6. **Recruiter:** Women may act as intermediaries in recruitment, facilitating the incorporation of new members into gang structures, though direct evidence of this was not obtained.
7. **Informant/Spy:** Women infiltrate rival gangs or provide intelligence to their own group, supporting gang interests. They may do this as a lure, often referred to as a "honeypot" or "kerosene" in Jamaican parlance. Women in these roles build personal or intimate relationships with men, gaining their trust to exploit vulnerabilities.¹⁴² In Jamaica, media reports about kerosenes describe them as entrapping and/or luring unsuspecting men to specific locations, where they are ambushed, tortured, robbed, and often killed.¹⁴³ For example, a woman once cultivated a romantic relationship with a man over several months to enable her accomplice to murder him. She went to prison for her involvement in his murder.¹⁴⁴
8. **Facilitator:** Facilitation is a broad category which encompasses many roles. Anything that serves to support the gang's existence and interests is considered facilitation and is a crime under the anti-gang legislation. This can include serving as conduits for information and resources, and logistical support of various types. Women often act as intermediaries between gangs and external networks, managing firearms and other resources crucial to gang operations. They also withhold information that could lead to arrests.¹⁴⁵
 - **Reproductive Labour:** The traditional facilitation role that women played and continue to play is that of provider of logistical support through reproductive labour, such as cooking, providing companionship, or washing bloodied clothes.
 - **Harbouring fugitives:** Women provide refuge to criminals and arrange logistical support for injured members. In the 2019-20 Uchence Wilson Gang trial, female defendants faced charges for roles that included concealing participants.¹⁴⁶
 - **Migration and diaspora networks:** A less considered aspect of facilitation may also involve aiding the migration of criminals, such as through marriage, providing them with an avenue to leave the island and set up or join branches

of gang networks within the diaspora.¹⁴⁷ Although the mechanisms by which diaspora members contribute to gang activities remain under-researched, security officials regard them as significant sources of firearms, financial resources, and operational directives.¹⁴⁸ Women in the diaspora are involved in the straw purchasing of firearms and smuggling those weapons to Jamaica. The sender of an intercepted shipment of firearms and ammunition intended for a Montego Bay gang shipment was the former assistant to the councillor for the Granville Division, and was still being paid for this role up until the month before the shipment.¹⁴⁹

- **Couriers** - Women transport illicit goods, including firearms and ammunition. Witness testimony from the Klansman-One Don Gang trial (2021 – 2023) trial indicated that the gangsters attended political meetings, and claimed that women carried guns into the meetings.¹⁵⁰ Security practitioners note that women’s roles as couriers are particularly valued as women tend not to be searched during security operations and are therefore more likely to be able to successfully transport contraband items for themselves or male gang affiliates. If there is not a female security officer present, male security officials are constrained from conducting thorough searches.¹⁵¹ In the Uchence Wilson Gang trial, female defendants faced charges for facilitating firearm transfers.¹⁵² Several news reports chronicle arrests of women’s involvement of women in the possession and trafficking of weapons. In 2022, a woman in Trelawny was arrested with 13 firearms and over 500 rounds of ammunition.¹⁵³ In 2023, a St. James woman was charged with stockpiling and dealing prohibited weapons, possessing over 400 rounds of ammunition, and using premises for firearm storage.¹⁵⁴ In 2024, six women and one man were arrested in St. Andrew after a submachine gun, ballistic vest, and ammunition were seized.¹⁵⁵ Women have also been implicated in international gun trafficking. A notable case in 2017 involved a 25-year-old woman from Trelawny as the consignee for a shipment intercepted in Miami containing 119 firearms and over 200 rounds of ammunition intended for a Montego Bay gang.¹⁵⁶ According to the JCF, nine girls were arrested in 2017 for illegal possession of firearms.¹⁵⁷ This is a particularly important role as shootings dominate gang-related violence and guns are a key tool of gang activity.¹⁵⁸

- **Scamming:** As gangs have increasingly gotten involved on lottery scamming as a source of income, women act as accountants, lead list procurers and compilers, and matriarchal figures in lottery scamming operations. While men dominate direct interactions with victims (choppas), women occupy key supporting roles, such as accountants, collectors, couriers, and compilers of lead lists.¹⁵⁹ In 2017, there were reports of a female gang at a St. James high school that engaged in lottery scamming (and gun running), amid claims of affiliations with criminal gangs such as the G-City, and the Nation Crocs.¹⁶⁰ Media reports frequently highlight women's involvement in scamming operations, with some women acting as matriarchal figures in these enterprises.¹⁶¹

Of all the traditionally male roles that women assume in organised violent groups, one remains absent from the evidence: shotta. Despite being labelled "Jamaica's first female gunwoman," Sudeen Hylton, who was charged with murder for her role in a shooting, did not pull the trigger herself—though she orchestrated the killing and personally transported the gunmen to the scene.¹⁶² The adage, "women call the shots; they do not fire the shots," continues to reflect the prevailing gendered norm in organised violence.¹⁶³

Conclusion

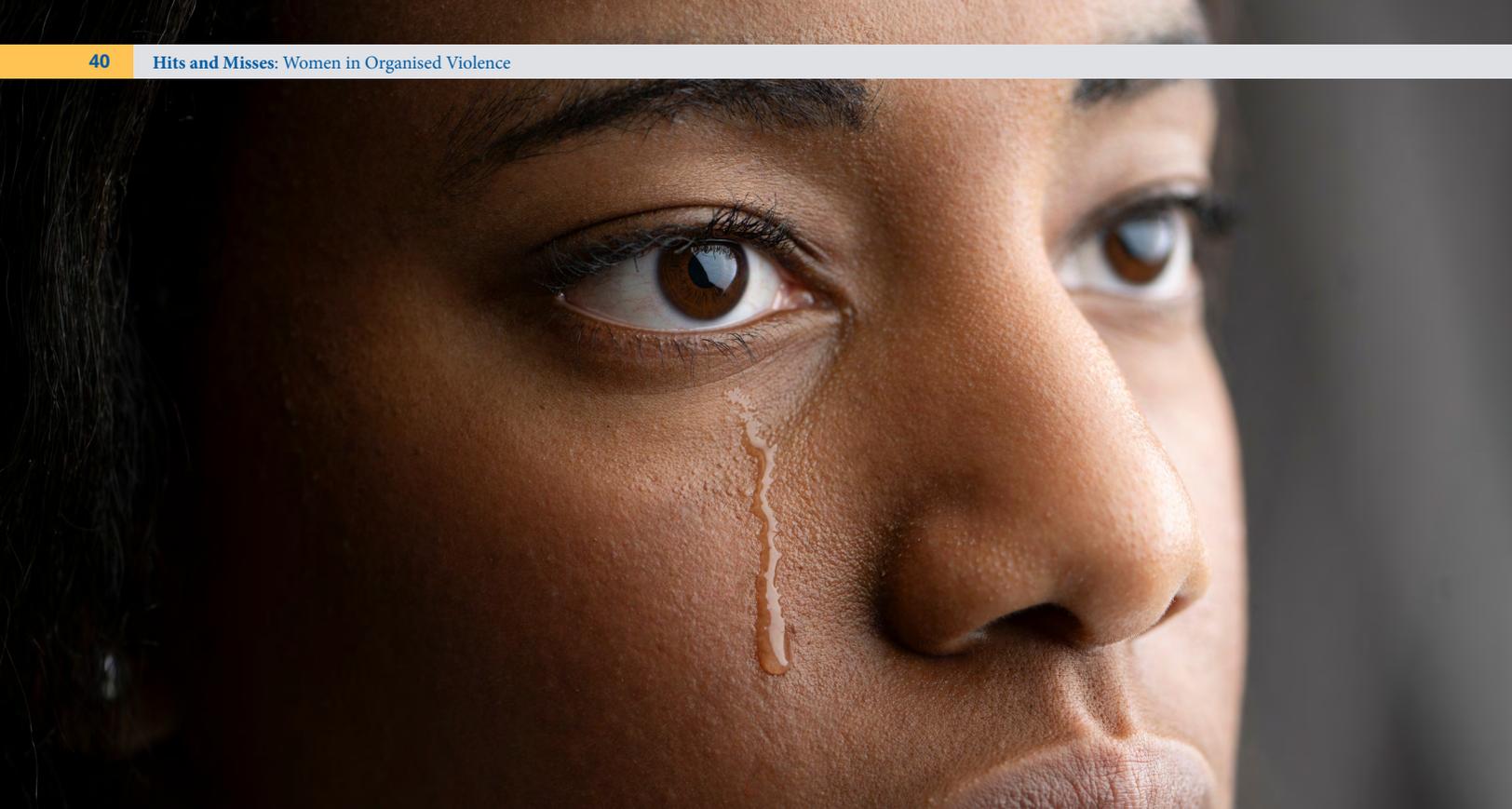
The roles of women in Jamaican gangs are said to be evolving, challenging residual perceptions of women as passive or solely victimised figures. Evidence from gang trials, media reports, and stakeholder insights suggests that women increasingly occupy both operational and strategic positions, including roles as facilitators, instigators, and high-ranking members. Their involvement in such a wide range of roles supports the argument that women exercise agency in sustaining and advancing organised crime. With the exception of the roles of don, shotta/foot soldier (killer or assassin), the available evidence indicates that women occupy all other positions within gang structures traditionally associated with men.

A close examination of the available evidence also indicates that community dynamics play a role in facilitating and promoting women's involvement in organised crime and violence. These dynamics include local support systems that, directly or indirectly, shield and protect individuals engaged in criminal activities. In this way, any intention or initiative to disrupt women's participation in gangs and the roles they play must prioritise understanding and addressing the contextual factors of community dynamics that facilitate and support the existence and reproduction of gang structures.

The following chapter will further examine the drivers behind women's participation in organised violence, drawing on existing literature and Jamaican-specific evidence to provide a deeper understanding of these dynamics.



Global research suggests a rising trend of female perpetrators engaging in violent acts.



4

What Drives Women to Violent Crime



Gang composition in Jamaica, as in most other parts of the world, is heavily gendered: most are young males from urban informal communities.

While the factors driving women's participation in gangs often overlap with those influencing men, distinct gender-specific dynamics also play a role. Research on women's gang participation primarily highlights economic push factors, formative family and community environments, individual vulnerabilities—often linked to experiences of gender-based violence—and a search for belonging. However, the discourse on women in gangs also appears to account for contextual factors in a more comprehensive way than some analyses of women's criminality. It moves beyond a primary focus on socio-economic determinants to include systemic considerations, such as the political geography and governance structures of the communities where women are active in gangs. This broader focus may offer a deeper understanding of women's involvement in gangs compared to the narrower emphasis on personal and social variables often highlighted in discussions of women's criminality.

For example, a study conducted on women in gangs from Central America's Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) found that common correlated factors for both men and women entering a life of crime are social inequality, sexual violence, child abuse, unemployment, and easy access to drugs and firearms. That study includes the role of structural vari-

ables and notes that these factors must be considered in tandem with growing up in volatile, gang-affiliated communities.¹⁶⁴ In addition to the exposure of obtaining immediate rewards for one's "work", for such women becoming a member of a gang may also be the path of least resistance, because of the readily available opportunities that the existing gangs put forward.¹⁶⁵

Informality

A key structural factor in the persistence of organised violence in Jamaica is the prevalence of informality, particularly in urban areas. Informality, in this context, refers to informal communities, settlements that exist outside formal land tenure, state oversight, and regulatory frameworks. Informal and semi-formal communities in Jamaica, which may comprise social housing, captured land settlements, and/or unplanned developments, lack proper infrastructure, formal property rights, and consistent state presence. These conditions create environments where gangs can thrive, offering alternative governance structures in the absence of legitimate state authority.

The relationship between informality and organised violence is central to understanding gang dynamics and, by extension, the roles women play within these criminal networks. Informal and semi-formal settlements serve as safe havens for gangs,

providing both a physical base of operations and a social ecosystem that enables gang activity. Women in these spaces often navigate between legal and illicit economies, taking on roles that support gang structures, from logistical support to financial management. Any comprehensive analysis of women's involvement in gangs must therefore account for the structural and contextual impact of irregular land tenure, as it shapes both the opportunities and constraints that define their participation.

Family Connections

Growing up in a gang-dominated community increases the odds that a girl will have family or relatives involved in a gang. Young women who adopt a criminal lifestyle are often introduced to it through extended family, siblings, or peers.¹⁶⁶ Being the intimate partner or mother of a gangster are avenues to women's participation in gangs.¹⁶⁷ Research on girls in gangs highlights that their involvement frequently stems from exposure to environments where gangs serve as the primary social structure for young people. In such contexts, limited alternatives exist, and those that do are often less appealing or lack the resources that gangs provide.¹⁶⁸ Female gang participation, according to the evidence, is also heavily influenced by family circumstances and socialisation within settings where delinquency is nor-

The core business model of organised crime revolves around the use of violence to extract revenue from individuals and entities within a controlled territory, primarily through extortion.

malised and viewed as an accepted part of everyday life.¹⁶⁹ That is, factors such as perceived limited alternatives or the convenience of participating in what is often seen as the "family business" further reinforce women's participation in these networks. This dynamic is a well-documented pathway for gang recruitment among boys in Jamaica, and evidence from similar contexts suggests it likely applies to girls as well.¹⁷⁰

Related to family is a socio-emotional factor that is widely considered a driver of female gang participation: women join gangs in search of a substitute family and support system.¹⁷¹ Gangs can serve as a pseudo-family for girls and women, offering a form of protection for those who feel unsafe or unsupported in their home environment.¹⁷² An exploratory study of women in gangs in Trinidad and Tobago found that women's involvement in gangs could also be linked to men's absence due to death or arrest, where they seize an opportunity to fill a void in the criminal organisation.

Economic Dependency

A factor that bridges both structural and individual socio-economic dimensions, often identified as a push factor for women's engagement in violent crime, is economic dependency—whether on the proceeds of illicit activities or on spouses or family members involved in such activities. In this context, women may act as facilitators, for instance, by remaining silent about their knowledge of criminal activities (a crime referred to as misprision of felony) due to the financial benefits they receive.¹⁷³

That economic dependency is all the more likely in contexts of no- or low-home ownership. Gangs in Jamaica operate throughout the country's urban informal and semi-formal settlements, which are characterised by insular social dynamics conducive to gang domination and recruitment.¹⁷⁴ Households in such communities lack full legal rights to the land they occupy, and thus their ability to transfer that property in exchange for capital they can use to obtain new housing elsewhere, at will, is diminished. Consequently, these communities experience

low residential turnover compared to formal communities, with the same families having inhabited these areas for multiple generations, and few new families added to the mix. The resulting social insularity provides a hospitable environment for gangs that may emerge or capture these communities, and households that may wish to escape gangs cannot do so without surrendering their landholdings, which may constitute their lifelines. Young women who grow up in these captive environments are thus particularly vulnerable to gang recruitment.

Related to economic dependency is the driver of the pursuit of economic gain.¹⁷⁵ A 2011 study of Jamaican girls, while dated, found that envy, a desire for immediate wealth, and the need to be trendy drew them into criminality. Poor self-esteem, lack of proper guidance, and poverty are contributors, as is the influence of males involved in criminal activities.¹⁷⁶ Women may also participate in gangs to attain power, status, and respect within their communities.¹⁷⁷ Research from Trinidad and Tobago indicates that women convicted of drug crimes were not solely motivated by financial rewards; some made autonomous decisions to engage in criminal activities, drawn by the promise of excitement and the potential to exert power over their peers or unsuspecting victims.¹⁷⁸ Additionally, the literature highlights instances where women are coerced into a life of violence.¹⁷⁹

Conclusion

This chapter has explored, through the literature and the available data, the factors driving women's involvement in violent crime and gangs in Jamaica, highlighting the individual, structural, and socio-economic dimensions. The discourse on women in gangs does account for contextual factors such as the governance structures and political geography of gang-dominated communities. These structural dynamics, including the social insularity and economic dependencies within informal and semi-formal settlements, provide both opportunities for gang recruitment and barriers to disengagement.

Women's participation in gangs is often shaped by familial and social networks, origins in and exposure to gang-con-

trolled environments, and perceived limited alternatives. While some women are drawn to gangs for economic gain, status, or protection, others are coerced or influenced by intimate relationships. Economic dependency—whether on illicit proceeds or gang-affiliated individuals—further entrenches their roles within these networks. Gangs also serve as pseudo-families for many women, filling socio-emotional voids created by unstable home environments or absent male figures. These drivers largely align with those influencing male involvement in gangs, although economic dependency appears to play a more prominent role for women. These findings provide some indication of the ways in which women engage in organised crime, and could inform consideration of how women might be diverted from participating.



Women play various roles in gang dynamics, often indirectly fueling conflicts and sustaining operations, particularly in inner-city communities.





5

Case Studies



Women in the diaspora are involved in the straw purchasing of firearms and smuggling those weapons to Jamaica.

The following case studies provide real-life examples of conceptual and theoretical insights into women's roles in organised criminal groups. They draw on information from media reports, gang trials, and are informed and contextualised by the stakeholder interviews.

Case Study 1: Top Tier Female Gangsters

Stephanie "Mumma" Christie was the sole woman among 33 defendants in the landmark 2021-23 Klansman-One Don Gang trial, a momentous case in Jamaica's law enforcement and criminal justice efforts against one of Jamaica's most powerful and deadly criminal organisations. As the gang's liaison officer and "fixer," Christie wielded considerable influence, managing its business affairs and strategically advancing its criminal objectives.¹⁸⁰

To the public, Christie projected an image of a Christian pastor, businesswoman, wife, and mother. Within the gang, however, she held a senior leadership position, outranking male foot soldiers tasked with acts of violence and lower-level operations.¹⁸¹ Its oldest member, Christie's role challenges traditional stereotypes of women in gangs as passive participants, instead highlighting her active agency and strategic involvement.¹⁸²

As a "fixer," Christie arranged legal representation, paid legal fees, and secured bail for arrested gang members.¹⁸³ Christie was also trusted to deliver sensitive messages for Andre "Blackman" Bryan, the gang's leader, particularly when he deemed it unsafe to communicate directly.¹⁸⁴

One of Christie's key functions was to collaborate with corrupt police officers. She tracked the private police vehicles in the St. Catherine area to aid gang members in evading capture.¹⁸⁵ She extracted sensitive information to protect the gang's interests, including details about investigations, potential informants, and police activities.¹⁸⁶ For instance, she identified a businessman, who was being extorted by the gang, as a potential informant after learning he had been questioned by the police.¹⁸⁷ On another occasion, her police sources enabled her to identify an eyewitness against former Klansman gang leader Tesha Miller who was then in jail charged as an accessory to the 2008 murder of former Jamaica Urban Transit Company Chairman, Douglas Chambers.¹⁸⁸ Her influence extended to bribing law enforcement. In 2017, she offered J\$100,000 to secure Bryan's release from custody.¹⁸⁹ In a recorded conversation played during the trial, Christie voiced frustration at Bryan's detention, exclaiming, "A kill mi waan kill dem (the police), yuh soon bus off."¹⁹⁰

While there is no evidence that Christie ever pulled a trigger herself, her leadership position gave her the authority to direct others to enact fatal violence. During the trial, a recording of a conversation was played in which another gang member complained that the group's level of violence was too low. Christie not only agreed but endorsed the call for brutality, exclaiming, "Suh wi want chap chap dem up!" Perhaps most revealing was a remark she made at the end of the conversation: "Anyway, I'm stepping back into church". This statement starkly revealed the disconnect between her dual life as a religious community leader and her a facilitator of organised gang violence. Further contradicting her façade as a devout Christian woman were reports of her extramarital relationships with several senior gang members, including Bryan.¹⁹¹

Christie's criminal involvement dates back at least a decade before the trial. Public records show that in 2012 she was reported for collecting money under false pretences for visas.¹⁹² She was later charged with intent to defraud after attempting to use fake identification cards to bail a murder suspect.¹⁹³ While it is unclear whether she was connected to the Klansman gang at the time, she grew up in the same Jones Avenue, Spanish Town neighbourhood as Bryan, an informal community, a connection and context that likely facilitated her entry into the gang.¹⁹⁴ Christie was also linked to

Women in the role of "honeypots" or "kerosenes" may infiltrate rival gangs by building personal or intimate relationships with men and gaining their trust to exploit vulnerabilities and/or provide intelligence for their own gang's interests.

another notorious gang, the Shower Posse, through her child with Leighton “Livvity” Coke, brother of former Shower Posse leader Christopher “Dudus” Coke.¹⁹⁵

During the trial, the defence sought to portray Christie as a victim of circumstance, relying on traditional gender roles ostensibly to elicit sympathy. Her lawyers described her as a religious leader, devoted mother, and caregiver who had “found herself being part of a negative social group” rather than actively choos-

ing to participate.¹⁹⁶ They highlighted her nickname, “Mumma Christie,” to frame her as a nurturing figure, downplaying her criminal activities and agency. The defence also appealed to her community contributions, continued involvement in ministry, while in custody, and her caregiving responsibilities for her teenage daughter and ailing mother as grounds for leniency.¹⁹⁷

In the judge’s final ruling, Christie was described as a willing participant who

utilised her skills to advance the gang’s criminal objectives.¹⁹⁸ This verdict confirmed her pivotal role within the organisation, contradicting the defence’s portrayal of her as a passive or coerced participant. At 48 years old, Christie was convicted under the Criminal Justice (Suppression of Criminal Organizations) Act for her leadership role in the gang, including planning and facilitating crimes of murder and arson between January 1, 2015, and June 30, 2019. She was sentenced to nearly 10 years in prison.



Case Study 2: Jamaica’s First Official Gunwoman

In 2021, Sudeen “Pinky” Hylton, a 30-year-old woman from St. James, was charged with the drive-by shooting murder of Richard “Jimmy” Baker.¹⁹⁹ Before her arrest, there had been no known cases of women in Jamaica being directly involved in gang-related gun attacks, making Hylton Jamaica’s first official “gun-woman.”²⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the reports about Hylton do not have her actually firing a gun. Hylton was reportedly affiliated with 14-52/Gym Team Gang through her familial ties to its reputed leader.²⁰¹ This case highlights how kinship networks serve as pathways for women’s entry into organised violent crime.

Hylton’s pathway into organized crime was likely influenced by both family ties and romantic relationships within the gang. She was the aunt of Dwayne “Twelle” Minto, the reputed leader of the 14-52/Gym Team Gang based in Glendevon, St. James.²⁰² Glendevon is an informal community on the outskirts of Montego Bay that has long been considered a “breeding ground” for criminals.²⁰³ Reports also depict her as a “kerosene,” who had strategic romantic involvements with gang members.²⁰⁴ These relationships may have facilitated her deeper involvement in the gang’s operations, moving beyond traditional enabling roles into direct participation in violent crime.

On August 12, 2021, Hylton played an active role in the murder of Richard Baker. She was the driver of the vehicle used in a drive-by shooting while one of the passengers opened fire, fatally wounding Baker.²⁰⁵ Despite his injuries, Baker managed to reach a nearby police checkpoint and provided information that led to the apprehension of Hylton and her co-accused, Ceon Knight.²⁰⁶ Some of the vehicle’s occupants fled, but Hylton was captured, arrested, and charged with murder.

Hylton’s role as the driver in a targeted execution marked a departure from the traditional, supporting roles often associated with women in gangs. Unlike women who typically facilitate gang operations through indirect involvement, such as

transporting weapons or laundering money, Hylton actively participated in a pre-meditated killing.

Following her arrest, Hylton's prominence within the gang hierarchy made her a target. In December 2021, she survived an assassination attempt when gunmen on a motorcycle ambushed her vehicle with rifle fire.²⁰⁷ The attack took place as she traveled along the Mount Peto main road after reporting to the Ramble Police Station—a condition of her bail.²⁰⁸ The assailants, allegedly seeking revenge for Baker's murder, pursued her even after she sought police protection, resulting in a bullet wound to her leg.²⁰⁹ This incident prompted a court directive restricting media coverage of the case due to security concerns.²¹⁰

On March 14, 2024, after being released on bail (set at JM\$1 million), Hylton was found and murdered by gangsters at her business establishment in Westmoreland.²¹¹ Three men armed with handguns opened fire on her, inflicting multiple—reportedly as many as 40—fatal gunshot wounds to her head and upper body.²¹² The assailants fled towards Bethel Town.²¹³ At the time of her death, Hylton was 32 years old and left behind at least one child.²¹⁴

Hylton's murder was widely assumed to be the result of an ongoing gang conflict involving the 14-52/Gym Team Gang and other criminal factions in St. James.²¹⁵ Days after her killing, her brother, also a known gang member, was shot and killed in an exchange of gunfire with police.²¹⁶ The violent deaths of both siblings underscore the risks associated with gang involvement and the extended threats posed to family members.

Hylton's case challenges the long-standing assumption that women in gangs do not directly engage in violent crime. Historically, law enforcement has recognised women's involvement in crime in terms of aiding and abetting male counterparts, but her case "brought to the forefront the issue of women being directly involved in shootings and murders."²¹⁷ Media reports and law enforcement reactions reflected widespread surprise, with a former top crime-fighter stating, "I have no personal experience of tangling with any so-called

'gunwomen' in all my days. I have heard of them, but I have never had that experience personally."²¹⁸ Similarly, an ex-gangster interviewed by *The Gleaner* described her case as "taking the [violence] thing to another level."²¹⁹

Reports have long suggested that women in gangs frequently transport weapons for their male partners or hide them in spaces where police searches are less likely. However, Hylton's role went beyond logistical support—she was an active participant in a homicide. Her case highlights the evolving nature of women's involvement in organised crime and suggests that, while rare, direct female engagement in violent acts is a reality.

Hylton's case provides insights into the pathways through which women enter organised crime, the roles they assume, and the consequences they face. Her trajectory underscores the influence of familial and romantic ties in drawing women into criminal networks and demonstrates the heightened risks they encounter when they cross into overtly violent roles.

Case Study 3: Romantic Relationships and Female Gang Involvement

Kenisha Shanice Moodie's involvement in the King's Valley Gang provides insight into how romantic relationships with gang leaders can serve as pathways to criminal activity for women. At the time of her arrest, Moodie was a 19-year-old Jamaican woman and the girlfriend of Derval "Lukey/Flex" Williams, the leader of the King's Valley Gang, which mainly operates throughout the Grange Hill community—an area replete with informal settlements. She was the sole woman among seven individuals arrested during a Counter-Terrorism and Organised Crime Investigations Branch operation targeting the gang in Westmoreland in May 2020.²²⁰ She was arrested at Derval Williams' residence. Moodie was charged under the Criminal Justice (Suppression of Criminal Organisations) Act for being part of a criminal organisation and faced an additional charge of illegal possession of ammunition after being found with ammunition in her purse.²²¹

Moodie's relationship with Williams positioned her as an active participant in the gang's operations. JCF investigations revealed her involvement in the sale and distribution of guns and ammunition for the King's Valley Gang.²²² Her role as a "gun bag" allowed her to discreetly carry weapons in her purse, taking advantage of the reduced suspicion typically afforded to women in such contexts.²²³ Additionally, Moodie served as an intermediary, delivering sensitive messages on Williams' behalf, particularly when he deemed direct communication unsafe. Despite his incarceration, Williams maintained control over the gang, issuing instructions that Moodie and other members executed.²²⁴

While there is no confirmed evidence that Moodie directly engaged in acts of violence, her support for the gang's violent activities is apparent through her role in facilitating the distribution of weapons and her association with Williams, who was facing a murder charge.²²⁵ Her proximity to the gang's leader highlights the relational dynamics that often influence women's participation in organised crime.

In December 2023, Moodie's life ended in tragedy. She was out on bail when she and her brother, Kerrick Moodie, were reported missing. Shortly after their disappearance, a video circulated on social media showing a man burying two individuals, later confirmed as the Moodie siblings, in a shallow grave. The video, which showed blood-stained clothing and physical markings matching the siblings, was verified by their mother, Stephany Edwards.²²⁶ Reports suggest that they were murdered by a contract killer from the Uchence Wilson Gang over disputes involving scamming money.²²⁷

Moodie's death highlights the vulnerabilities women face when involved in gang activity. Her romantic relationship with Williams not only facilitated her entry into the King's Valley Gang but also placed her in harm's way. The publicised brutality of her murder could also have broader implications for the King's Valley Gang trial, potentially intimidating witnesses and informants and thereby hindering the prosecution's ability to secure evidence and testimonies.



This case exemplifies how romantic relationships can draw women into organised crime and how their roles within gangs often differ from those of their male counterparts. Moodie's position as a "gun bag" and liaison could be said to be gendered strategies employed within criminal organisations, where women may use their perceived innocence or femininity as a cover for illicit activities. At the same time, these roles expose women to heightened risks of exploitation and violence, as demonstrated by Moodie's tragic fate.

Moodie's story illustrates the dynamics of a romantic relationship that involved criminal facilitation and led to the death of a young woman by Jamaican gang violence. Her involvement reflects the pathways through which women become embedded in organised crime, often at the cost of their lives.

Case Study 4: Women in Male Spaces and Roles

The arrest of three alleged members of the Only the Family (OTF) gang highlights the growing involvement of women in organised crime, challenging traditional stereotypes that frame such activities as predominantly male-dominated.²²⁸ Among those arrested were two women: 48-year-old businesswoman Sheryl Mc-

Callum and 21-year-old customer service representative Tishell Bernard. This case draws attention to the evolving roles women play in criminal enterprises and raises questions about gender dynamics within organised crime networks.

The OTF gang operates in Green Heights Mews, a section of the largely informal Green Pond community in St. James and is considered a second-generation gang.²²⁹ Green Pond is another of Montego Bay's informal areas known as a "breeding ground for criminals."²³⁰ Allied with the Vietnam Sparta Gang and the Big Yard Gang, the OTF gang is embedded in a complex web of local criminal networks. Its operations reportedly extend beyond Jamaica, with several high-ranking members residing overseas, indicating transnational connections. The gang's primary activities include the trade of illegal weapons and ammunition, contract killings, and lottery scamming.²³¹ The seizure of firearms, ammunition, cash, and electronic devices during the arrests reflects the gang's diverse criminal portfolio. In July 2023, the Joint Anti-Gang Task Force conducted a raid that led to the arrests of McCallum, Bernard, and 26-year-old businessman Remoy Farquharson.²³² The raid uncovered six firearms, and over 200 rounds of ammunition, reinforcing

suspicious of their involvement in the local trade of illegal weapons.²³³

McCallum, Bernard, and Farquharson were subsequently charged with multiple offences, including possession, stockpiling, and dealing of prohibited weapons; unauthorized possession of ammunition; possession of firearm parts; unauthorized use of premises for weapons storage; possession of criminal property; and affiliation with the OTF gang.²³⁴ These charges show their alleged roles in the gang's operations, particularly in facilitating the flow of weapons and ammunition, which are essential to the gang's criminal activities.

The trial for the OTF gang members has not yet commenced. However, the upcoming proceedings are expected to shed light on the specific roles played by McCallum and Bernard within the gang and provide insights into gender dynamics within organised crime. The case also raises broader questions about whether women's involvement in such networks is treated differently from men's, both in legal terms and within the structure of the criminal organisation itself.

McCallum and Bernard's arrests make clearer the current landscape of organised crime, where women are no longer

confined to peripheral roles but are increasingly implicated in activities that are central to the functioning of criminal enterprises. This case exemplifies the growing prominence of women in organised crime and the need to examine how their involvement intersects with broader criminal networks, societal norms, and law enforcement responses.

Case Study 5: Family Instability and the Search

“Keisha,” a Jamaican woman from St. Catherine, shared her story during an interview conducted for this study. Her self-reported, unverified account provides valuable insights into the social, economic, and emotional factors driving female criminality, offering a personal perspective on how she became entrenched in criminal networks during her teenage years and her reflections on the motivations behind her criminal activities.²³⁵ The analysis of what drove her behaviour and actions are her own.

Keisha grew up in a quiet, low-crime neighbourhood, but her family life was marked by domestic violence, particularly frequent conflicts between her parents, which ultimately led to their separation. After the separation, she alternated between her parents’ homes, creating a sense of instability that amplified her feelings of isolation and insecurity. She recalls experiencing heightened anxiety and unresolved anger, which left her vulnerable to deviant behaviour. At the age of 10, following a punishment from her mother, she committed an act of arson at home, leading to her first arrest and initial contact with the justice system.

By high school, Keisha’s exposure to violence had shaped her belief in the necessity of self-protection. This belief, coupled with earlier traumas, prompted her to begin carrying a weapon for defence. She gravitated toward older male peers who were involved in gang-related activities, driven by a need for belonging and security. Initially, her criminal activities were minor and unplanned, involving physical altercations that gradually escalated in severity.

Her deeper association with gang members led her to take on roles such as trans-

porting small quantities of drugs, hiding and holding weapons, and gathering information about rival groups. On one occasion, she entered a relationship with a rival gang member at the instruction of her male associates to gather intelligence. These activities provided her with a sense of belonging and a perceived status within the gang.

As her involvement intensified, Keisha assumed more significant roles, though she remained in the background compared to her male counterparts, who engaged in direct confrontations and weapon sales. Her position as a facilitator allowed her to participate in supporting the gang’s existence and interests while avoiding the front lines. However, this perceived safety was ultimately illusory, as her deepening involvement in gang operations heightened her exposure to danger and exploitation.

While women in gangs are less likely than men to engage in overtly violent acts, Keisha’s propensity for violence grew over time. Her involvement in gang conflicts, including those involving weapons, was partly motivated by a need to assert her status and solidify her identity within the group.

Keisha was involved in several fights at school. In one of the most serious incidents, an altercation escalated when a knife was introduced, and she ultimately used it to stab the other person. She later documented the incident in her journal. Her mother, who had been concerned with her behaviour, found the journal entry, as well as other violent writings that Keisha had made. Her mother took her to the police and she was remanded for uncontrollable behaviour. She also got into a fight while incarcerated, and was then transferred to another remand centre. When she finally went before a judge, the charges were dropped, and she was released to her family under a supervision order that lasted three years.

By the time of the interview, Keisha, now in her thirties, had long moved away from her criminal past. For the past 10 years, she has been making a life for herself as an entrepreneur.

Keisha’s story illustrates several of the roles and drivers identified in this report. Fam-

ly instability and a lack of consistent emotional support are noted as key risk factors for female youth involvement in crime.²³⁶ Keisha’s account also raises the social and relational motivations behind young women’s pathways into criminality.²³⁷ Like their male counterparts, women often join gangs not only for economic gain but to forge connections, seek protection, and establish a sense of identity within familiar networks.

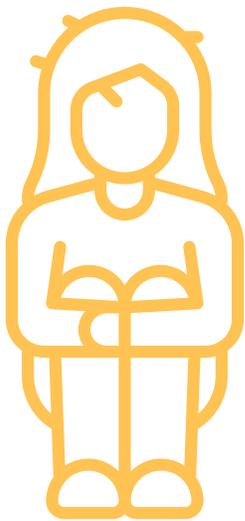
The report’s findings affirm that women in Jamaican gangs frequently occupy enabling roles, supporting male members in ways that allow them to operate more freely and discreetly.²³⁸ Keisha’s ability to “play both sides” highlights the skills women bring to gang operations, which provide them with influence but also leave them vulnerable to violence and incarceration.²³⁹ Her story reflects the duality of agency and exploitation that characterises many women’s experiences within gang dynamics.

Conclusion

The case studies presented illustrate the roles of women in organised criminal networks in Jamaica. From leaders like Stephanie Christie to facilitators such as Kenisha Moodie, and individuals like Sheryl McCallum and Tishell Bernard, these examples demonstrate that women are integral to the functioning of gangs. Their roles include facilitating operations, distributing weapons, and leveraging key relationships to advance gang objectives. These roles defy traditional gender stereotypes, especially those which designate women as victims, and lacking agency. The pathways through which women enter and navigate criminal networks are shaped by various factors, including community dynamics, familial ties, romantic relationships, economic incentives, and the search for social belonging, all which these case studies provide examples of. With these case studies, the report offers further details and insights into the pathways that lead women into criminal networks and the specific roles they undertake.



6 Conclusion



Economic Dependency

– whether on the proceeds of illicit activities or on spouses or family members involved in such activities – is a common push factor for women’s engagement in violent crime.

This report has examined women's involvement in crime in Jamaica, focusing on their roles in organised crime and violence, particularly within gang structures. Arrest and incarceration data show that women account for a small proportion of those charged with violent crimes, and their participation remains largely confined to non-violent offenses such as drug trafficking and financial crimes. Where women are arrested for violent crimes, these are primarily domestic or interpersonal in nature rather than gang-related. The data does not substantiate claims of increasing female involvement in organised crime, yet police statements, media reports, and some academic and policy literature suggest that women are playing broader and more strategic roles within gangs. The fragmentation of larger, hierarchical gangs into smaller, more localised groups may have created new opportunities for women to engage in criminal activities. Within this context, women have been identified in media reports as occupying a range of roles, including key financial operatives, intelligence gatherers, and in some cases, senior figures who wield influence comparable to male gang leaders.

The structural conditions of gang-dominated communities shape these dynamics. The absence of state governance, the normalisation of gang influence, and the

prevalence of land tenure insecurity create an environment where criminal networks thrive. Within these conditions, women's involvement in organised crime is not only a function of personal choice but also a reflection of the realities of survival and economic opportunity in informal communities. Despite these factors, official statistics largely fail to capture the extent of women's roles, whether due to underreporting, under-detection, or entrenched narratives that position women primarily as victims or facilitators rather than as active participants.

The study was constrained by the absence of detailed and systematically collected data on women in organised crime, limiting the ability to quantify their involvement or establish trends over time. Existing crime statistics do not fully account for the evolving nature of women's roles in criminal networks, nor do they reflect the structural conditions that underpin gang operations. As a result, this report does not seek to make definitive claims but rather to outline what is known based on available data while acknowledging the gaps that persist.

While women remain a small minority in organised criminal activities compared to men, their involvement raises policy considerations. Addressing women's participation in organised crime requires moving beyond the assumption that they are

merely coerced or passive actors. Instead, interventions should acknowledge the conditions that shape their engagement, particularly the role of informal communities in sustaining criminal networks. Policies that strengthen governance in these areas, regularise land tenure, and expand economic opportunities may serve to reduce both direct and indirect female involvement in organised crime.



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

Comprehensive analysis of women's involvement in gangs must account for the structural and contextual impact of irregular land tenure, as it shapes both the opportunities and constraints that define their participation.

Recommendations

In addition to the commonly emphasised need for improved data collection on the roles women play in organised crime and the factors driving their involvement—data which can inform the development of evidence-based policies and interventions to address the root causes of female participation in gang activities—and the standard call to enhance and expand anti-gang policing efforts to dismantle criminal networks and prevent their resurgence, the following recommendations are proposed. These recommendations are informed by the findings of this study and existing knowledge on gang dynamics and effective strategies for reducing murder rates.



1

Reframe Gender Narratives in Crime Prevention – Stakeholders, in particular the state security apparatus (Ministry of National Security, Jamaica Constabulary Force, Jamaica Defence Force) should adopt approaches that acknowledge the roles women play in organised violence, moving beyond traditional perspectives that frame them solely as victims. This includes integrating gender-responsive strategies into broader anti-gang policies and programmes.

- In moving beyond the assumption that women in gang-affected communities are only victims, interventions should recognise their active roles as facilitators, financial operators, and couriers, for example, rather than just focusing on male gang members.
- Develop and disseminate training materials for stakeholders highlighting the active roles women play in organised violence. This is to highlight the several roles women occupy, including as facilitators, informants, and operational members, rather than viewing them solely as victims.

Increase Female Personnel in Security Efforts – The JCF should increase the deployment of female personnel in anti-gang operations, which can enhance the effectiveness of security efforts, particularly in handling gender-sensitive situations and ensuring thorough enforcement.

- Recruit and deploy more female officers in operations teams and patrols in gang-plagued communities to perform thorough searches and to recognise and handle gender-sensitive situations.

2





3

Structural Community Transformation – Regularising land tenure and improving governance in informal settlements will weaken the systemic conditions that allow gangs to thrive while creating opportunities for economic empowerment. As gangs diminish and economic independence expands, women will be less likely to engage in organised violence. Community transformation initiatives must prioritise women, ensuring they are counted, engaged, and enfranchised.

- Prioritise land tenure regularisation to eliminate the safe havens gangs exploit.
- Ensure women's inclusion in land regularisation and community development to promote economic empowerment, reduce dependence, and lower vulnerability to gang influence.

Appendix: Methodology

The research was conducted over a three-year period, from 2021 to 2024, by several researchers who contributed to different aspects of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to examine women's involvement in organised crime and violence in Jamaica. Given the scarcity of comprehensive datasets on this subject, the research relied on triangulating various sources to construct a broad yet grounded understanding of the issue.

Data Sources and Limitations

Quantitative data was sourced from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) and the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ). However, significant gaps in official crime data, particularly concerning gender-disaggregated information on organised crime, limited the ability to identify trends over time. The available datasets provide only snapshots of female involvement in crimes such as murder, shooting, and manslaughter, rather than a continuous, longitudinal record that could facilitate deeper analysis.

The study also incorporated secondary sources, including media reports, academic literature, policy documents, and submissions to parliamentary committees. Media reports were particularly useful in identifying cases where women were arrested or prosecuted for gang-related offences, offering a basis for analysing their roles within criminal networks. However, reliance on media coverage carries inherent biases, as reporting often reflects law enforcement narratives and societal assumptions about gender and crime.

The Need for More Robust Data

A more comprehensive study on this topic would require access to datasets that do not currently exist in Jamaica or are not publicly available. Essential data for a deeper and more systematic understanding of women's involvement in organised crime would include:

- **Longitudinal crime data** that tracks female offenders over time, capturing their criminal histories, patterns of involvement, and recidivism rates.
- **Gender-disaggregated data on organised crime involvement**, including roles, ranks within gangs, and functions beyond traditional support roles.
- **Arrest and conviction records** with detailed breakdowns by gender and type of offence, allowing for an analysis of whether women's involvement in crime is increasing or simply receiving more attention.
- **Financial intelligence data** on women's participation in money laundering, extortion networks, and financial crimes associated with organised criminal groups.
- **Corrections data** that provides insights into women's pathways into crime, their experiences within the criminal justice system, and the nature of their offences.
- **Survey data** capturing the perceptions and self-reported experiences of women involved in crime, ideally gathered from both convicted offenders and those in high-risk communities.

Qualitative Research and the Ideal Study

Qualitative research was central to this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including law enforcement officials, legal practitioners, researchers, and civil society representatives working on crime and security issues. These interviews provided insights into perceptions of women's roles in organised crime, the extent of their participation, and the challenges of detecting and prosecuting female offenders. Given the limitations of available data, stakeholder perspectives assisted in filling gaps in understanding.

A key limitation of this study was the absence of firsthand accounts from women involved in organised crime. Direct engagement with female gang members or former offenders was not feasible due to safety concerns and access constraints. As a result, the study does not provide an exploration of the lived experiences of women within these networks. Instead, it relies on stakeholder accounts, official data, and media reports to infer patterns and roles.

An ideal study would go beyond the available data by incorporating direct qualitative research with women actively involved in gangs. This would require a rigorous ethnographic approach, including:

- **Sampling active and former gang members** and conducting in-depth interviews on their roles, motivations, and experiences.
- **Fieldwork within affected communities** to understand the broader social, economic, and political contexts that facilitate female participation in organised crime.
- **Participant observation and ethnographic studies** to capture how women navigate their roles within criminal networks.

Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of women in organised crime, their pathways into gang involvement, the power dynamics within these groups, and the specific functions they perform. However, such an approach would necessitate significant resources, robust ethical considerations, and security measures to ensure the safety of both researchers and participants.

Contribution to This Study

Despite these limitations, this study aims to provide a clearer picture of women's involvement in organised crime, challenging assumptions and highlighting areas that warrant further investigation. By collating available data and stakeholder perspectives, it seeks to contribute to a more evidence-based discussion on the gendered dimensions of organised violence in Jamaica. While the data currently available does not allow for definitive conclusions, it highlights the gaps that need to be addressed and lays the groundwork for future research in this area.

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The Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI) is a not-for-profit, public policy think tank dedicated to the production and dissemination of impartial, evidence-based knowledge to inform economic, governance, sustainable and social policy decision-making in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean.

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CAPRI's vision is to contribute to the promotion of informed dialogue on socio-economic development in the Caribbean, in which decision-making in public policy and the private sector is based on relevant and transparent information grounded in verifiable evidence.

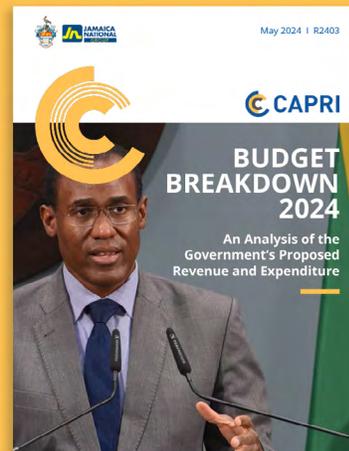
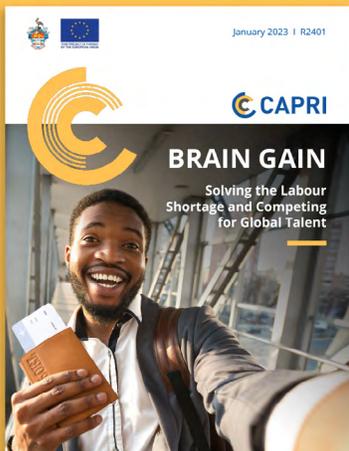
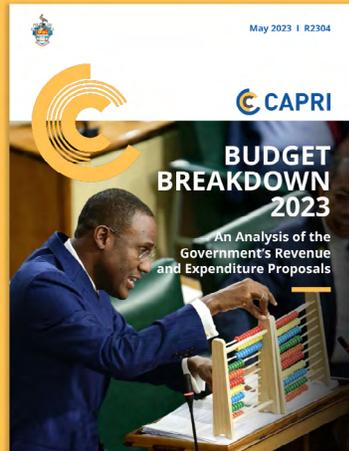
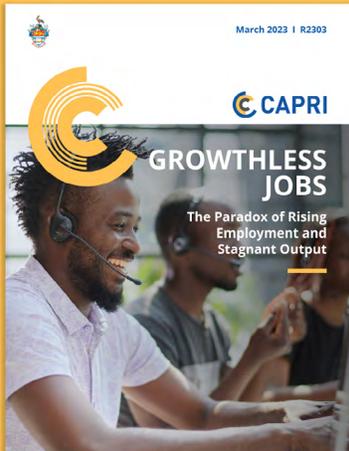
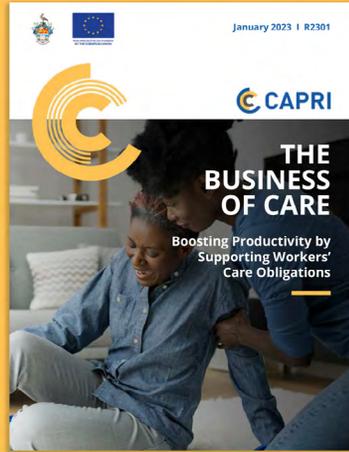
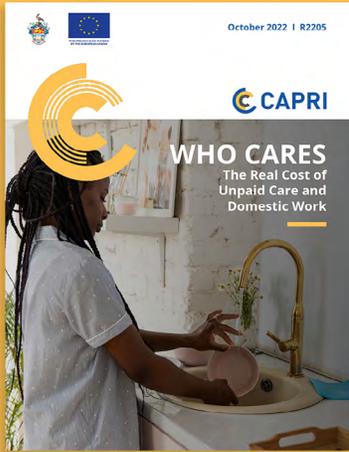
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CAPRI's methodology puts the constituents of each policy proposal at the heart of its investigation and this guides the research methods adopted in order to effectively execute sound and relevant research, and its dissemination, with the aim of contributing to the social and economic development potential of Jamaica and the Caribbean at large.

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