

The Impact of Small Arms on Children and Adolescents in Central America and Caribbean: A Case Study of El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago

Key Findings:

- The Latin America and Caribbean region has the highest rates of armed violence in the world and 42% of all homicides globally.
- Small arms are widely available in the region and the trade in arms is highly lucrative, with a \$USD 3.5 – 10.1 million market for the legal trade and much more for the illegal trade.
- The widespread availability of firearms among children is due in part to strong cultural tolerance of violence and a skewed understanding of masculinity.
- Children are far more frequently the victims than the perpetrators of armed violence. Contrary to public perception, data from the police and justice sectors of all four countries in the study shows that child involvement in armed crimes represents only a small percentage of all violent armed acts.
- In just one year, 900 children in the four countries were victims of homicide. Almost 700 of these children were killed by firearms.
- Armed violence impacts children directly through death and injury, and also harms them deeply by creating psychological wounds, restricting access to education and other services and acting as an obstacle to economic development.

Jamaica:

- Over the past five years, more than 300 children, mostly boys, have been murdered.
- Boys under 18 account for 60% of victims of violence-related injuries.
- Data from 2004-2007 shows a steady increase in the numbers of children killed by firearms.
- Just a five per cent reduction in violent injuries would save an estimated US\$75,000 per year.

Key Recommendations:

- Stronger commitment by all actors, both government and non-government, to counter armed violence – requiring better coordination and cooperation.
- Greater emphasis on preventive efforts, including strengthening of parenting skills, constructive lifestyles promotion and male image-building.
- In-depth analyses of gun violence at schools, gangs and the relationship between guns, violence and masculinity, to provide a better understanding and more accurate focus for violence-reduction interventions.