



# Women Resource and Outreach Centre (WROC)

**Strengthening Understandings of how Borders and Boundaries affect the Lives of Women and Men in the Lyndhurst/Greenwich Park Community**

**Project Sponsored by UNIFEM**

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# “Sharing the Findings”

## **Bodies across Borders: The Lived Experiences of Women and Men in the Bordered Community of Lyndhurst/ Greenwich Park**

Many of the participants described borders and boundaries as a physical barrier and or an invisible line or point of separation in communities which, as one respondent puts it “is for the monitoring of persons going to and fro in these areas”. Many of these borders are created by very young men who exercise an extra ordinary power, due to their access to guns and large amounts of cash from illegal activities.

Most persons agreed that current issues of borders and boundaries do not have much to do with politics, but more with gang leaders wanting to show power and control because of access to guns, drugs money and extortionist activities. A significant number of persons also believed that “bad-mind-ism” and grudge also play an important role in the creation and maintenance of borders and boundaries in the community.

Almost ninety five percent (95%) of the persons interviewed saw borders and boundaries as a method of protecting their community, although a large portion of this number also admitted that these borders curtail their freedom of movement, are violation of their basic human rights and are often used by dons to show power and control and to protect turf. Most persons seemed to have normalized the situation, and have come to accept that “a suh the thing set, yuh just live with it.” One woman argued that it’s not that law abiding citizens uphold the practice of borders and boundaries, “but you have to accept it in order to survive in the inner-city”. Another young man rationalized it as a means of drawing lines of opposition...the proverbial line in the sand which divides “warring factions”. He argued that it is also a way of keeping out criminals from neighboring turfs “...The intention is for a man fe know

sey yuh and him a nuh fren so him nuh suppose to pass it<sup>1</sup>. If he does he could end up in the cemetery, because he is a traitor”.

One community ‘elder’ [male about 45 years old who seemed to have some amount of clout in the community] said he is respected not so much as a don but more as someone who “keeps the order” in the community. He made it clear that “no one violates the rules of the borders. If you live in the east, stay in the east. You must know that if yuh cross the border yuh will have to pay the consequence, which is death.” The general consensus among many participants is that the dons have “dem man dem that run the road fe watch de ends and see who a cross.” If you are caught “you might not live to tell the tale.”<sup>2</sup>

The rules governing borders and boundaries are very clear, as confirmed by an ex-convict who stated that “... war going on, automatically give you boundaries. If you cross it you choose death. All dog know sey him must not cross it”. Another ex-convict in a separate conversation concurred with this statement when he said that “...he [the person crossing the border] has a choice ... don’t pass it and live, or pass it and mek him family bury him.”

It is common knowledge across age and gender, that crossing borders and boundaries mean blood. Everyone seems to know the rules. One 67 year old woman when asked what she saw as the purpose for these borders, she simply said “No invaders. If you cross deh so [pointing to an invisible line in the road] yu dead, just dead”. A younger woman [36 years old] in a separate interview said, “It’s a way of showing power and donship. The rule governing same is death.” This is the reality that was reiterated by another young female when she said “...it [borders and boundaries] is telling you not to go to certain places because it may cause you your life.” A boy child, about 11 years old explained “we have two sides of the community that are against each other...border separate them... so that people no go over the enemy side”.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated – “It’s for rival gang members to know that they are not your friends and so do not to cross the imaginary border”

<sup>2</sup> Translated- The dons have their workers who they send on the street to watch and see who is crossing the borders. If you are caught, you are likely to get killed.

Some borders and boundaries have been in existence for very long periods of time. In one section of the community a particular border is said to have been in place for over 20 years. One young man explained that “him born come see dat de border deh”, and explained how there is a pharmacy at the end of the road, but because of borders and boundaries issues he cannot go directly down the street to it. If he wants to get there he has to take a bus and “go down town and come back up”... so of course, he does not bother to use that pharmacy.

When asked how the younger generation knows where the borders and boundaries are when they are in place for long periods of time, one respondent said, “People die and the knowledge is passed on from one generation to the next. It’s just the knowledge, you will know. Whether the wars is intensive or not, from you know say that area is a border you just know that you approach it with caution...and you will have persons who won’t cross it even in peace time, because dem know that historically that was a border”.

One woman in a focus group discussion recalled that in one section of the community there was 3 years of war, and for those 3 years, children between those borders could not attend school. The implication is clear – a gap in the education of the affected children. She however explained that the don for the community later tried to garner resources from politicians and business persons in the area to help the affected children to “bridge the gap” created as a result of the 3 years of border issues.

## Women between Borders and Boundaries

When there is peace, women can cross most borders fairly freely, but in times of war they have to be very careful. According to one participant, if a woman has an intimate partner who is involved in “gun firing, if they can’t catch him they can lure her [the girlfriend] to places across the border and kill her”. But most times women are killed because their relatives have “betrayed” the community. In these cases the don may target the girlfriend or the mother in order to “make a statement”. The thinking is that if they kill the persons closest to them they can “lure” the betrayers back to the community “to be dealt with.”

But women are not always unsuspecting victims. They are active participants and perpetrators of violence too. This was confirmed in a focus group discussion where participants unanimously agreed that women do play pivotal roles in the perpetration of crime and violence. Not only do they traffic guns in baby carry-bags, diapers, thermoses and prams but some also get involved in violence as a way of life. These women are often referred to as “cow girls” or “gun girls” who go on ‘the battle fields’ just like the guys. They are just ‘one of the guys’. They ‘carry out their operations’ just like the guys and are sometimes regarded as even tougher than the guys.

In making this point one woman related an incident about a recent shooting that took place in the community by a **woman** who “everyone knows as being vicious a way...who just start fire some shot and who fe get shot get shot.” She then disappeared from the community, but that same night they killed her father. The other eight members of her family had to flee immediately under police escort, taking nothing except the clothes on their backs! Their house was subsequently vandalized and fire boomed.

In most instances women who are intimately involved with dons and “shottas” have no choice but to be a part of the violence. Refusal could be very dangerous for them. One woman explained that if the don is going out on ‘a mission’<sup>3</sup> she might be asked to be a ‘look-out’<sup>4</sup>, or

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<sup>3</sup> “A mission” refers to criminal activities

<sup>4</sup> A person who keeps watch to see if the police or ‘enemy/spies’ are coming, and alerts the criminal/s accordingly

to rent the car they need to carry out the robbery/murder, to get sale for stolen goods, to maintain “the link” with gang leaders and other criminal elements overseas who still control communities here, or to clear guns and ammunitions at the wharves, etc.

Sometimes women are used to carry and get information to and from bordering communities. One participant explained “....Dem de pon the street fe know things<sup>5</sup>...whatever they have to do to get the information, they must come back with information. Some of them have to give sex to get information”. Females may also be required by their male partners to kill if it becomes necessary, but more often than not they are not involved at that level.

Then there are those women who are just ‘accessories to crime and violence’. These women would block the roads when young men in the community get killed by the police. Some of them know that these men are criminals, but they feel they do not have a choice but to publicly protest, for fear of being branded as traitors or police informers – the consequence of which could be death for herself and her family.

One other female participant related how when she was growing up there were periods when she would wake up in the mornings and a familiar sight would be men hauling dead bodies nearby to her window. Sometimes the bodies were tagged; sometimes they were in crocus-bags. Dead bodies were a familiar sight. She grew up believing that gunmen had power and were the only persons who could offer her protection. As a result, when she became an adolescent she only dated gunmen. Today, she is transformed and is one of the model mothers of the community.

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<sup>5</sup> The women are on the streets to get information  
Prepared by: Violet Ferreira-Sutherland

## **Men between Borders and Boundaries**

Men are usually the ones who create borders and boundaries in order to separate space [turf] and to establish their sphere of control. As mentioned earlier, many of the borders are created by very young men who exercise a lot of power. One participant observed that “no big man not involved in the creation of borders and boundaries...sometimes is 15 years old....some of who are illiterate!”

Men are not allowed to cross these borders, especially during times of war. Sometimes in order to cross, they dress up as women, but if caught they are in serious trouble.

Men are the ones who typically train the younger boys to be gang leaders. Usually they are “brought under the fold” from a very early age. In fact one respondent told us that from as early as three years old, a boy child could be asked to “bring the gun come”. By 8 years old, he is cleaning and assembling guns. By the time he is 11, 12 or 13, he can carry out his own “mission”. In fact, these are the same boys who run parallel versions of the community gang and border issues in schools<sup>6</sup>.

But often too, these are boys who lost their fathers [and/or other close family members] violently from a very young age, and have become very angry, aggressive and resolute to avenge for these deaths. These are the ones who are “on a mission to kill” and do not need much coaching or prompting to do so, and are often not open to reason.

Some young men noted that sometimes the dons themselves are tired of this issue of borders and boundaries, because when they are in vogue, they are forced to be constantly on the lookout, working round the clock on shift to ensure that there are no invaders. They have to be constantly on the lookout for the police, hiding outside community [and sometimes in some dark uncomfortable places inside the community] away from family and friends.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the Gaza and Gully issue in some schools.

## The Police within Borders and Boundaries

A young child's response to the question about the effectiveness of the police within borders and boundaries was "Some police put up with the gun men..." However a significant portion of the respondents say borders and boundaries do not affect police doing their work because they can move freely across borders. The police have confirmed this. Borders and boundaries do not affect them doing their work as they can go anywhere at any time.

The general consensus was that, community members are willing to work with the police and provide support for police work. The community elder, whose role is to 'keep the peace' said, "we and the police live good ... we and the police work hand in hand to keep the peace. Police respect me. If a community member don't want to tek talk<sup>7</sup>, me hand dem over to the police". He said he does not believe in taking justice in his own hand, but explained that "You will hear say dis and dat bad man start dead...sometimes a we just point out the trouble maker to the police for them to deal with them".

A number of respondents admitted that the community members in general will not cooperate with the police because they do not trust the police. One woman said "Dem and de gunman dem a friend", sometimes dem tek sides and they [the community members] do not want to be seen as informers. One young man noted that "The police can't fix dis. They are not a part of the solution; they are more a part of the problem....most bad man have policeman in a dem back pocket". This sentiment was confirmed by a self-proclaimed bad man who said "...you know sey mi a bad man, and me know sey police a gunman like miself. One woman claimed that "Police cannot maintain law and order cause some of them a gunman in government clothes".

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<sup>7</sup> That is, to take counsel/advise  
Prepared by: Violet Ferreira-Sutherland

## **The Elderly between Borders and Boundaries**

Generally, older persons can cross borders – even during war. One participant noted however, that nowadays “dem killing old people too ...If the grudge is high enough, they will go after the elders too”. No one is immune.

One woman mentioned that sometimes the dons send the older persons as spy and to “map out the area”, and take back information. Sometimes too, the elderly are required to hide guns and /or transport the guns for their sons and grandsons. Many of the elderly interviewed, said the situation is traumatizing. They often feel very tense and nervous, which tends to bring on numerous other ailments, but some are quite indifferent because of fear and/or because they benefit from the criminal activities of their sons and grandsons.

## **Children between Borders and Boundaries**

As mentioned before, boys from as early and 3 years old are trained to hold guns. By 8 years old they clean and build guns. However, many of the participants believe that fathers do not generally recruit their own sons into crime, and in fact can be very protective of them. But they explained that under extraneous circumstances, they will do so. For example, if a number of family members have died from the gun, one man explained “...the next generation jus know sey they have to defend themselves.” So you may have a family that has a reputation for violence or being involved in gang activities.

Children [especially the girls] are often used by the dons for sexual favours as soon as “dem touch dem prime”. As a result, some a de mada dem just ship dem [the girls] out of the community and report dem missing”, as one young woman noted.

## Justice within Borders and Boundaries

One respondent explained, "... Just like any country, you have government and you have rules...so it is in the community, you have the dons and they lay down the rules. People in the community will hear about these rules and automatically learn them, whether they are law abiding citizens or not".

According to the rules and regulations within the borders and boundaries, each violation warrants a different punishment. One participant explained that if for example, "you a go eat food"<sup>8</sup>, the general rule is that "you do not trouble anyone in the community; you must go outside of the community .... So if you rob someone in the community and the don seh that yuh foot fe bruck<sup>9</sup>, you foot a go bruck, trust me. A one pick-axe stick that and you foot bruck...as simple as that. And if you bruck the shop tonight, by tomorrow morning, the don knows who did it, and justice is served right away...Yeah de justice quick inna de community" she said, nodding her head in a contemplative mood.

Usually the don does not execute the punishment himself. "The don have him man dem<sup>10</sup> ... and even if you are a part of the gang and you break the rules you are going to be treated the same way as anybody else". This reality is collaborated by another participant who said that "If the violation merits a gunshot, you a go get it, and if you fe dead, you are going to be killed, whether you are a gang member or not. You are going to be dumped elsewhere and you will be tagged<sup>11</sup>. So when the police come, they know why you were killed ...Often time the funeral home just come and take away the body, you don't even hear about it over the news."

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<sup>8</sup> "Eat food" means robbing someone.

<sup>9</sup> Meaning that if you break into a shop in the community and steal

<sup>10</sup> Other members of his gang

<sup>11</sup> That is the nature of the crime committed will be outlined on a piece of paper and attached to the dead body

Participants observed however, that sometimes when the rules and punishments become unbearable, gang members will go to other communities and join opposing gangs. From there they are able to take revenge and the cycle of crime and violence continues.

Sometimes when a 'trouble maker' is constantly being hunted by the police, this becomes a threat to the gangs in the community and so gang leaders will 'give these persons' over to the police so as to prevent the police from constantly coming into their community. Too much police presence is never welcomed by the gangs.

However, one participant noted that "...this is not just about trouble makers. Sometimes you have to make sacrifice out of a man. As long as the police inna de area too long, you just have to give up somebody to make dem [the police] ease off the community ... or the gang members may leave their own community, and go to another community go start up something in order to divert police attention away from his community".

### **Respect within Borders and Boundaries**

Respect in Jamaica is very important, and it is no less so within the communities. In order to gain respect within these bordered communities you have to live by the rules – "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil...and don't make anything bother you...just mine your own business".

If they [the gang members] respect you they will call you and alert you if violence is about to flare up in the community.

Respect also comes from the police. One participant noted that sometimes “when things gwaan in the community, de police automatically know sey him no fe deal with it .... He knows that he must refer de matter over to the don for him to handle it... or else a pure murder!”<sup>12</sup>

## **How Borders and Boundaries affect Community Development**

Borders and boundaries seriously affect the development of the social infrastructure of communities. For example, when there are internal conflicts and the issue of borders and boundaries is rife, garbage collectors will not risk their lives to enter the community. Under these circumstances, “garbage have to pack up in people’s homes...” said one female, because they [the residents] are too afraid to go outside to even burn or otherwise dispose of it.

One young man said, “...Jah know sey it bad, but at the same time, yuh dont know who fi trust, cause mi can let in the garbage man and a enemy come in pon di truck! ... a dead mi dead just like dat!” “Sometimes the men from the other side come in on the garbage trucks, so when we draw old fridge cross way the road, it is to prevent that”, said a young female.

One man observed that “No one comes in to maintain the drainage system ... because a garrison we inna...we no count!”<sup>13</sup>

Jamaica Public Service (JPS) and the National Water Commission (NWC) do not go into these communities very often, and when they do, they often require police escort. As a result services are frequently disconnected, leaving families without [legal] connections to light and water. A lot of “bridging takes place in here,” observed one woman.

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<sup>12</sup> When criminal activities take place in the community, the police know that for the safety of the victim and his/her family, they should refer the matter to the don who will carry out his own system of justice. Failing that, the individual involved will be labelled a ‘police informer’ and that could mean death for many persons (reprisal).

<sup>13</sup> Implying that if you live in the garrison no one cares about how you live.

When there is war “...people scared to go to the supermarket. If they leave they might not make it back alive” said one female. People cannot go to work, so they stand the risk of losing their jobs, children cannot go to school, which adds to the problem of illiteracy which is already high, especially among the youth [primarily young men].

In many instances when there is borders and boundaries, people are not able to get transportation in and out of the community. “Sometimes the same gunmen will hijack the car dem... a when you get into the car, a dat time you know say it is being hijacked”<sup>14</sup> said one female participant in a focus group discussion. And sometimes when gunmen want to catch someone, if they can’t catch the person they want, they target the taxi he/she normally takes. As a result taxi operators are usually very reticent to venture into communities with borders and boundaries, especially during times of war. Those who take the risk charge more for the fare and in so doing increases the financial burden of community persons who are already financially stretched.

The problem of borders and boundaries are worst at nights. Often there are no street light,s due either to neglect in maintenance, but more often because criminal thugs remove the light bulbs in order to hide under the cover of darkness.

During war, from as early as 4:30pm the community looks like “ghost town” said one woman. Shops in the community are closed by 6:00pm and often open later than usual in the mornings because of fear. The economic implications of this are obvious.

Social activities are also curtailed. Children cannot go outside to play; church attendance and other recreational activities are restricted, etc.

One participant advised though that all is not lost, because there are usually informal networks of communication through which they advise friends and family of pending/ eminent flare-ups of violence so that people can retreat to safety or just stay out of the community.

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<sup>14</sup> It’s when you are already in the vehicle that you realize it is being hijacked  
Prepared by: Violet Ferreira-Sutherland

## **Feelings of Safety within Borders and Boundaries**

A significant portion of the participants believed that their community is safe, despite police statistics to the contrary, which indicate that this police division recorded the highest crime rates in 2007 and 2008. In fact, a young professional man from the community indicated that his family does not typically lock their doors during the days, even when they are not there. The rules in the community prevent anyone from within the community to break in, and borders and boundaries prevent anyone from outside to invade. He said he feels safer in his community than when he is outside. Ironically though, 28% of participants believe that crime and violence is a major problem in the community despite this perception and feeling of safe. This implies that the problem of crime and violence is very nuanced and must be understood contextually.

Part of this false sense of safety stems from the rules and regulations laid down by dons, that forbid people to break into other community member's homes, and the process of swift justice. Many participants believe that once you abide by these rules, you are safe.

A growing number of young men in this community, as in many other inner-city communities, are aspiring to become area leaders/dons in order to gain respect, to develop a sense of belonging and family, to "get rich quick" and not least of all to impress the females.

## **The Causes of Crime and Violence**

Unemployment among youths was the single most important factor (31.5%) that participants expressed as contributing to crime and violence. Discrimination by employers of persons living in the inner-city was a major issue. Poor parenting and school dropout/illiteracy were also frequently cited as major contributors.

Some also cited issues of low self-esteem and hopelessness as major causes of the problem. This they say is what causes a number of youth to just 'hang out on the corner', "knead out den

hand middle, scheme out criminal activities and chat foolishness". One man observed that "there is nothing more lethal than a youth without hope...memba me tell yu dat!"

Other participants mentioned what they expressed as a devaluation of the meaning of life as part of the problem. Many youth today do not expect to live beyond 22 years. To be 25 years old in the community is to be considered an 'elder'. This low life expectancy influences how they live their life and how they value the lives of others. They are more reckless with their own life, willing to take more risk, and as one young man proclaimed, "me nuh watch no face...dis man have no fear!" As such activities which were once sacrosanct, for example taking the lives of women, children and the elderly, is today common place. Everyone is now equally at risk.

Some participants also pointed to poor anger management skills as a major problem. They argue that because these dons are often young, hot-headed and illiterate they tend not to be opened to reason. Education and opportunities to engage in anger management training towards behaviour change, they believe, is critical.

A large number of the youths in the community are angry and grieving, and see revenge as a reason to live - having experienced the death of their fathers, uncles, brothers, friends at the hands of violence. One of the easiest ways to achieve this revenge, they believe, is to become a don, or a member of a gang. Others enter the police force, as one woman opined, and become "legal, legitimate gun men".

Lack of male role models and the absence of males from the family circle, in particular, are also seen as critical elements contributing to the problem of crime and violence.

## Opinions on Fixing the Problem

Thirty one percent (31%) of participants believed that the **people who live in the community** are best positioned to correct the situation and are willing to be a part of that process; but many are scared to take the initiative because of the problem of lack of trust, not only of the police but also of each other, and fear of reprisals.

Twenty six percent (26%) believes that the **Member of Parliament** is best suited to fix the problem, because “they are a part of the problem in the first place”, as one participant opined. Twenty two percent (22%) thinks the pastors or **religious leaders** would do a good job because they are respected and are believed to be neutral. Approximately twelve percent (12%) believes that **the dons** who have helped to create the problem, and who have the inside knowledge and experience of “how the thing run” can help to fix the situation. **Only nine (9%) percent believes that the police and be of any help.**

Some participants also believe that if we **work closely with the children and women** we could start seeing some changes - women because they are often the main agents and conveyors of behavioral and cultural changes.

They also argued that women must come to the place where they “...don’t have to wait pan a man<sup>15</sup>; because often times that’s where it starts. Women must know that they don’t have to feel belittle to do anything [legitimate] in order to survive. Dem can go do domestic work or go hold a stall or something” said one young female participant. The suggestion is that very often, women’s involvement in crime and violence comes through their desire to live a certain lifestyle without having to work. As a result they get controlled by dons and caught up in crime and violence, with their girl child having to provide sexual favours for the dons.

A large percentage of the young women in the community have skills, although many are not certified, but highly skilled in areas such as hair dressing, as nail technicians, cookery and pastry

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<sup>15</sup> Dependency



- During war, Lower Rousseau Road is the border line for the community of Roam and Lincoln
- The corner of Lincoln Ave and Lincoln Crescent [when there are wars].
- Onetta Food Shop serves as border line for Black Rose and Shop Side.
- Bunny Bar on Lincoln Crescent is border for New Lincoln Road and Lincoln.

It is critical to note that in many instances these points of borders and boundaries are less than a block away from each other, emphasising the extent to which people's freedom of movement is restricted.