

The GANG situation in Belize City Schools



Research By: Ian *"Butch"* Cacho

From sources found in the Leo Bradley Library and the patrons and students who utilize the library.

Date: October 27th, 2001
Revised 2005

Dedicated to the memory of...

*Paul, Clifford "B.G.", Deyon "Indian", Horace "Guana" Jermain "5 cent" and
Sherwin "BOWIN"*

R.I.P.



"BuTcH"

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Updated: 2005

Introduction:

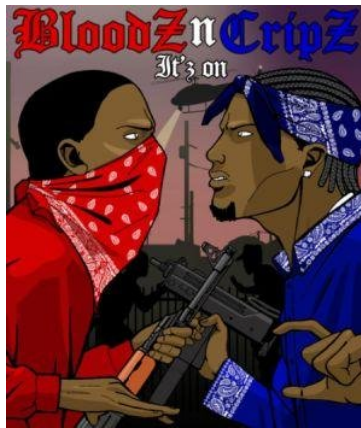
This paper is based on a three-month research study that was carried out between August-October, 1999 to assess if there is a gang problem in the schools of Belize, more specifically Belize City and if so, to what extent. The research was conducted in the Leo Bradley Library in Belize City utilizing the resources that were available and the opinions and thoughts of some of the patrons and students who use the library.

The instrument that was used in conducting the research was a questionnaire, which was formulated specifically for the project. Eighty (80) - questionnaires were distributed to different individuals who attend schools in Belize City. Seventy-seven (77) of the questionnaires were returned for analysis. The students who took the time to be a part of this exercise attended the following schools and collages:

- University College of Belize (U.C.B.)
- Saint John's College (S.J.C.)
- Pallotti High School
- Gwen Lizarraga High School
- Nazarene High School
- Center for Employment Training (C.E.T.)
- Anglican Cathedral College (A.C.C.)
- Saint John's College Sixth Form
- Edward P. Yorke High School
- Excelsior High School
- Wesley College
- Belize School of Nursing
- Sadie Vernon High School
- Belize Technical College (B.T.C.)
- Canaan High School

This however only represented a small percentage of the students attending high schools throughout the city.

The questionnaire was issued so that a wider cross section of students and schools could be reached. The Leo Bradley Library was used because of its ideal location on Princess Margaret Drive, which is located in the heart of the school district in Belize City. The library is open from 9a.m. to 7p.m. from Monday to Friday and 9a.m. to 1p.m. on Saturday. It is normal for up to 300 students to visit the library each day, making it an ideal institution in which to conduct my research.



Chapter: 1.

**Refer to the glossary on page 24 for some of the terminologies that are used in this chapter.*

Literature Review / Background:

The research background is based on materials and studies that were carried out from 1990 to 1997. Most of the materials were not written in Belize but do however provide information that is pertinent to gang formations in Belize.

There are several definitions of the word 'gang'; the one used here is taken from the Cambridge International Dictionary of English, which states:

"Gang - a group of criminals or of young people, especially young men who spend time together and cause trouble."

According to Barden (1990), the major factors that have contributed to gangs are poverty and racism. Barden states that poverty encourages young people to believe that gangs can provide the road to a better life. Poverty itself means going without important things but for some people, the worst thing about being poor is having to ask and depend on other people for help. Prosperity for many can mean paying their own way. Poor but proud people are often drawn to gang life to get money and to not have to ask others for help. For many, this benefit alone is more important than the things money can buy. Barden goes on to state that gang members are typically members of the same ethnic group, and they often band together as a reaction to racism. Hatred of people of another race is called *xenophobia* (zen-o-foe-bee-uh), and gang members themselves are inclined to be xenophobic. This is because sometimes the people who are victims of racism become racists themselves. For example, rap music, inspired in part by racial prejudice encountered by young African-Americans, often features lyrics that are deliberately offensive to Jews, Asians, and women.

The gang situation in Belize began with the lack of family stability and the loss of Belize's full agricultural potential. This is based on the fact that a great deal of people have migrated from rural areas to urban centers in order to seek employment in less agricultural fields. Thus a great deal of farming land in the villages were left abandoned for farming was seen as a less prestigious job.

Phillips (1996) states,

“The high Afro-Belizean emigration rate, typically reflecting emigrants in the prime working age groups, has not only depopulated many rural communities, it has dramatically altered the age distributions of the residual populations. Frequently, small children are left behind with their grandparents, older siblings, or other relatives. Absent parents often provide remittances to their families out of wages earned in the host country. Remittances create a dependency on foreign earnings in these communities for even basic necessities, many of which were formerly produced as subsistence outputs.”

Statements made by Muhammad, Phillips, Adams, and Esquivel about the gang situation of Belize are all comparative. Muhammad's (1997) outlook of the situation centers on the breakdown of society due to the direct migration of Belizean parents to the United States in search of employment, and for other economical reasons. This migration caused a serious breakdown in the family structure, because by being left with grandparents who were usually old and most of the time not able to keep up with all the issues affected young people, children were usually cheated out of traditional family values, culture, and customs. Also, because of the lack of recreational centers, many Belizean youths became idle and started hanging out on street corners and began to put their education, as a secondary cause because they knew their parents would be sending whatever they needed. With nowhere to go and nothing to do, mix with negative peer pressure, a formula for havoc was clear.

Adams (1994) states that two factors contributed greatly to the high crime rate in Belize 1990-1994: the availability of *drugs* and the presence of *gangs*. This was evident

because Colombian cocaine bound for the US has been transshipped through Belize. Often the drug runners would pay for services with cut-price cocaine, fueling a local addiction problem. At the same time many young educated Belizeans were immigrating to the United States in search of better paying jobs and there was mass immigration into Belize, often illegal, of refugees from poverty-stricken countries in Central America, especially Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. There was also the negative influence of American television programs where guns and killing were a prominent part of the shows. These shows were picked up on local satellite dishes and pirated to Belizean homes.

Esquivel's (1997) outlook is that Belize provided the following conditions:

- poverty
- lack of strong family structures
- abuse and neglect of children
- lack of a sense of 'belonging' (to family/community/school/job/team)
- availability of drugs, for the formation of gangs.

The influence of television and the introduction of crack cocaine trafficking onto the local scene together with Belizean youths being deported back to Belize from the United States after brushes with the law provided a sense of belonging that young people needed for forming and becoming members of gangs.

During the 1980's, several Crip gangs (and Bloods) developed in Belize. These gangsters migrated heavily to the United States during the late 1980's, especially throughout the West Coast and East Coast States like New York, New Jersey, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. In 1989, several large Belizean families

arrived in New York in the neighborhood of Harlem. The youth from these families, and some adults, were members of the Crips Gang in Belize. They created the Harlem Mafia Crips and helped establish several other Crip gangs such as the Rolling 30's Crips, 92 Hoover Crips and Rolling 60's Crips by 1995. During the late 1990's, Crip gangs were well established in New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, Georgia, Connecticut, Florida, Pennsylvania and other East Coast regions.

This overlaid an imported gang structure and language on the existing territorial groups of 'base boys' associated with a particular home base. This criminalization of gangs raised the levels of violence as gang members' acquired guns to protect themselves and their territories. Dyson (1996) also revealed that cultural and racial tensions in rival gang activity focused on ethnic, racial and neighborhood turf.

According to Miller (1995) an equation that will not be seen in any math class, but one that is worth thinking about is as follows:

Drugs = money
Gangs = family
Guns = power
Drugs + gangs + guns = disaster.

During the late eighties/early nineties gang-related killings were swiftly becoming the number one concern of law-enforcement officials across the country. It was not just a city problem, but smaller towns and rural areas were sharing in the concern. The spread of city gangs into other areas according to Miller was like 'franchising.' *"It's just like the fast-food industry with the main reason being drug money."* Criminal gangs, or structured gangs, are more likely to be involved in drugs and gun violence than

unstructured gangs are. Criminal gangs share the following characteristics:

- Formal membership, with a required initiation and rules for members.
- A recognized leader or certain members whom others follow.
- Common clothing, group colors, symbols, or tattoos, and a special language.
- A group name.
- Members from the same neighborhood, street, or school.
- Turf or territory where the group is known and where its activities usually take place.

The demise of different communities in Belize into a modern disorganized slum (ghetto) produced confused youths with defective personality systems. Plus they are exposed to confusing adult role models and value systems. The ambiguity and conflict of the disorganized slum produces a socialized individual. For this type of sociopathic youth the violent gang functions as an adequate adjustment pattern in the sea of social confusion he confronts in the disorganized slum.

It has been proven by an independent study carried out by UNICEF (1997) and local law enforcement departments (Belize Police Force) that for Belize, the violence shown on cable television programs, which came to Belize through the pirating of satellite transmission in 1983, was adopted in Belizean society. This was found in such movies as, “**Boys in the Hood**” and “**Colors**” which were copied by young Belizean males and some females who formed themselves into gangs, namely the “*CRIPS*” and “*BLOODS*.” According to Muhammad (1997), with the successful interception and destruction of marijuana (weed) plantations, gangs resorted to the trafficking of cocaine. The business of drug trafficking is very lucrative and to prevent themselves from being ‘*jacked*,’ drug dealers and gang members began carrying guns. Youths began to devise

several turfs in various neighborhoods. In turn, the gang culture in Belize rose and formed different *sets*, which were linked to the *Crips* and *Bloods*. (See Appendix C.) One major event that took place in Belize City that showed that the gang members had influence in their societies and that other youths were looking up to them as role models was when Derek Brown a leader of the Crips gang was murdered.

Hyde (1992) states,

"The fearless and ferocious behavior of the Crips gang in the aftermath of the Brown assassination, coming as it did after weeks of stabbing, chopping and shootings in Belize City, convinced members of the general public that the Belize Police Force had lost control of Jack City. The irony, as one observer remarked, was that Majestic Alley, the home of the Crips, was right behind Belize City's Central Police Station. The defiant and macho funeral procession behind Brown's body convinced more members of the public that the homicidal/suicidal mania within the gang intimidated the cops more than anyone could have believed. The Crips were ready to kill. They obviously were prepared to die. They were organized and unified. More than that, they were hero figures to many Belizean youth's who were not gang members.

Such behavior by gangs had been manifest at funerals before, but Derek "Itza" Brown was more than a gang member. He was a legend. His reputation for audacity, bravado, coolness under fire, and leadership had made him an icon among the Crips. In the wake of his death, it appeared that some people considered him somewhat of a Robin Hood: he 'jacked' the drug dealers to finance his gang and he ruled Majestic Alley like Robin ruled Sherwood Forest."

According to Nunez (1997), the peace treaty, or gang "Truce" came about because of intervention by certain individuals. This included the minister of National Security Hon. Dean Barrow (1993-1998), Inspector Edward Broaster, Mr. Roy Bowen, Mr. Carlos Perdomo, Mr. Nuri Muhammad and other top brass of the police force at that time along with members of religious and other organizations. The truce was signed in 1995 by the leaders and members of the different gangs from throughout the city and had in attendance over 600 gang members. With this newly found solution, gang related crimes in the city as well as countrywide suddenly had a dramatic decrease. This gave way to the formation of the Conscious Youth

Development Programme (C.Y.D.P.) whose main aims was to provide jobs and education for the now displaced gang members. However, gang life style was so much a part of the city culture that people could not leave it totally: gangs remained in Belize City as well as countrywide.

Nunez goes on to say,

“It does not matter where you go today, King’s Park, Belama, Farber’s Road Ext., St. Martin’s, West Landivar, Cayo, Toledo, Corozal, Stann Creek, Orange Walk, you will find gangs.”

Osman (1992) states that ‘gangbanging’ is not just a social problem but more one that affects all aspects of the development of a country. The gang problem, she believes, will not cease to exist until some middle ground is attained between government and the gangs. The situation, according to Nunez, is that Belize’s gang problem no longer stems from poverty but merely a fashionable thing, because even youths coming from well-to-do households form themselves into gangs. Mere rebellion from parents and acceptance by peers along with the lack of recreational centers, sporting facilities and jobs, has compounded the problem.

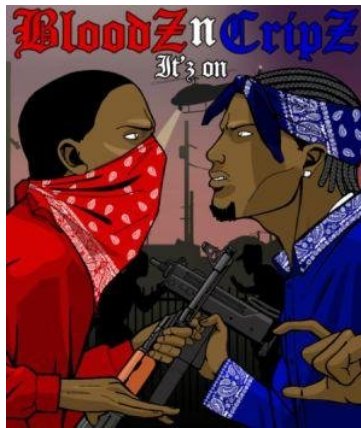
Hyde gave his summation of the situation stating it as, *“One of bitter harvest of years of corruption at the highest and lowest levels in our society with the involvement and collusion of Belize’s respectable leaders in the drug trade, consistent and abiding racism in Belize City’s business and commercial sectors and the irresponsibility of many absentee parents, and the deportation back to Belize of various Belizeans who had been introduced to more sophisticated and deadly means of street warfare in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles.”*

He went on to point out,

“The gang situation in Belize will get worse before it gets better but it doesn’t have to be that way.”

As in 2000, *gangbanging* and gang related crimes on a whole have decreased a great deal. Yet, many neighborhoods throughout Belize City as well as countrywide have some affiliation to a major gang, be it *Crips* or *Bloods*. Now, with a new visible presence of police on the streets, hardcore *bangers* tend to be less seen in the open. Also, the crimes have changed dramatically and are less gang related as have been reported by the police department and the media. They have taken on a vicious cycle of drug-related murders, kidnapping and the rape and murder of innocent young girls. **(See Appendix D)**

. Many gang members who were the pioneers in this imported lifestyle have grown up and are now more interested in supporting their families or are trying to stay out of trouble and jail. It seems many have seen the error of their ways and are now trying their best to keep the new generation from not following the trend they started. Whether or not, it will work, only time will tell. Many would openly admit that they are still gang linked but that does not mean they will allow ignorance to override their judgment anymore. Like Dr. Dre said in one of his songs, ***“Been there, done that.”*** Many would now agree that it is the time for upliftment and more positive changes both in our country and communities.



Chapter: 2.

Research Methods, Survey, and Data Analysis:

The main thrust of this paper is the responses to the questionnaires that were distributed, which proved that there was positive participation of the exercise conducted by the patrons and students. The findings, which are presented, in this section are the actual data collected from questionnaires. The questionnaire was set up so as to gauge an idea of how many students are living in gang territories and also to find out some of the reasons they believe contributed to the formations of gangs in Belize.

Out of the 80 questionnaires distributed 77 were returned which equates to a response rate of 96%. This would seem to indicate a high level of interest in the subject. However, as stated earlier this is only based on a small sample size of the total school population in Belize City.

Interesting findings were:

~ The females who participated in the exercise were:

50 = 65% Ranging from (13-20 years old)

~ The males who participated in the exercise were:

27 = 35% Ranging from (15-23 years old)

This was interesting because the females who participated in the exercise almost doubled the males who were somewhat reluctant in taking and filling out the questionnaire. This I felt was important to note as it's a fact in Belize that the males are the ones who are more affiliated with the gangs.

***Those living in gang territory:**

For the females: **25 = 50%** of the total female sample of 50.

For the males: **15 = 56%** of the total male sample of 27.

The total number of students assessed in this exercise that lives in gang territory (neighborhoods): **40 = 52%** of the total sample of 77.

Gangs mentioned were:

- Bloods : **16 = 40% of 40**
- Crips : **13 = 32.5% of 40**
- Both (Crips/Bloods) : **8 = 20% of 40**
- KPP (new) : **2 = 5% of 40**
- Hoovers : **1 = 2.5% of 40**

From the small sample taken it indicates that a little more of the students live in *Bloods (red)* territory but many live in gang territories that are mixed (*both Crips and Bloods sets can be found there*).

The total number of students who admitted they were associated with a gang was:

6 = 8% (both male and female statistics)

Student's assessment of the gang situation in there schools:

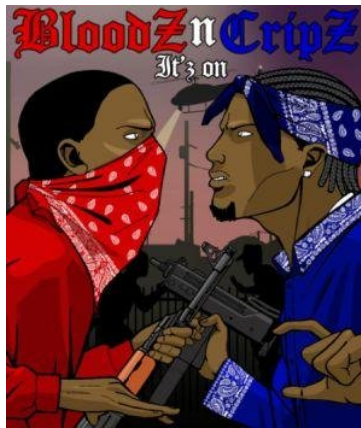
- i) **1 not a problem = 50 or 65%**
- ii) **2 minimal problem = 14 or 18%**
- iii) **3 there is a balance = 6 or 8%**
- iv) **4 situation is critical = 2 or 3%**
- v) **5 there is a major problem = 5 or 6%**

(See Appendix B.)

Other overwhelming responses were that 98% of the students stated that gangs did not provide the basic needs of a family (food, shelter, clothing, education, and love). But it was necessary to belong in a gang to survive on the streets of Belize. Also, 90% of the students believe that poverty and not so much racism was a major factor that contributed to the formations of gangs in Belize; others commented that television also played a major part in this imported lifestyle therefore affirming previous statements in the literature review. Ninety-seven percent of the students who took part in the exercise believe that Belizean families will never be able to establish strong family structures.

Interestingly enough as will be seen in Appendix B, the 9% who viewed the gang situation as critical to a major problem mostly came from schools situated on the south-side of Belize City where poverty is more concentrated.

Although the library is situated on the north-side most of the students live and go to school from the south-side of Belize City. Those students who where from the north-side and took part in the exercise where not so affected by gangs in their communities. They seem to be more economically stable than those on the south-side.



Chapter: 3.

Summary / Conclusion and Recommendations:

This research is on a social problem in our communities and country of Belize. Because of my socialization, I identify with the gang situation seeing as I grew up in a gang territory and was a member of a gang. My perspectives are therefore rooted in Belizean social conditions and wellbeing. Social conditions point to a lack of recreational centers and employment opportunities, which could provide some income for a young person whom has little or none at all. The outlook taken here is in collaboration with students' feelings and beliefs, which were discovered in this research. Belize is much too small to be faced with such a major problem, which it seems, has resurfaced with more acts of violence. What we as Belizeans have, far exceed what we are trying to imitate and identify with, which is a criminal culture. We are a nation of diverse ethnic groups that is very *unique*. I say this because if this gang lifestyle progresses we will be looking at a nation were we will be accountable for making ourselves extinct.

The research reemphasized some very important points and many of the students were happy to add their comments about the gang situation here in Belize. The major factors that have contributed to this problem are poverty, loss of family due to migration to the states (*skip generation - lost of a generation whereby mother or father did not raise their own child*), and television. But I did find positive results as hope to a better Belize in that many students did not associate themselves with gangs nor are their schools viewed as gang havens. Based on observation and my socialization what I came up with, as a means of combating this problem is that more help is needed from the government by providing more educational opportunities for young people and building more

recreational centers where young people can go to keep out of trouble. This is because 52% of the students who took part in the exercise lived in gang territories and eventually some of them sooner or later may be drawn into the gang lifestyle.

*** Some recommendations recommended to address this situation are: (*Bib., Questionnaire, Self*)**

- (1) More recreational facilities and parks are needed.
- (2) More educational centers whereas not only those going to school could get help but also ordinary youths that wanted to learn could get help as well.
- (3) More positive images of the authorities need to be evident: police, soldiers, magistrates, etc.
- (4) More educational opportunities need to be created for poorer class youths.
- (5) More self-help programs need to be created whereby skilled youths could find positive outlets for their talents.
- (6) More programs to help neighborhoods from being taken over by gangs.
- (7) More open discussions about sex, drugs, abuse, crime, teen pregnancy and other pertinent social issues that affect our society. This will help to generate feedback to pinpoint relevant solutions to these issues.
- (8) More economic opportunities need to be created so that more parents will want to stay in Belize and raise their own children.
- (9) More positive response by the police to gang related incidents whereby witnesses will be able to testify without the fear of being hurt.
- (10) Counseling centers for those seeking help: (confidentiality in speaking about any subject matter affecting them, etc.) in an attempt to get help.
- (11) More job opportunities for youths.

There are much more I could mention but based on the scope of the paper these are the ones that need to be addressed immediately.

The research however has just tipped the iceberg from the perspective of a small sample size of students in Belize. To fully understand the magnitude of this problem other studies on street crimes and juvenile delinquency needs to be conducted on the gang situation and members on the streets of Belize and their social environment, before an

accurate account can be made. In 2001 gang related incidents have again become a major issue that needs to be addressed by the government and society. The time I think is for another “Truce” before innocent lives are lost. But until then let’s hope the future will be geared to more equal opportunities for all so that the need for gangs will not inhere in our country Belize.

Glossary:

Banger - *an individual who belongs to a gang and actively participate in criminal activities.*

Baseboys - *a group of boys (men) associated with particular home bases that do not necessarily partake in criminal activities.*

Franchising - *the principle of authority granted to a group by a major gang to practice in there own neighborhoods or town the principles of the major gang; to be a subset of.*

Gangbanging - *the act of belonging in a gang and actively participating in criminal activities.*

Jacked - *to rob; to get robbed.*

Sets - *a group of gang members consorting together and having similar interests' etc.*

Truce - *a temporary agreement to cease hostilities; peace.*

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Interview:

I. Nunez AKA '**Ranks**' September, 1997 (Private) Belize City, Belize by Ian Cacho

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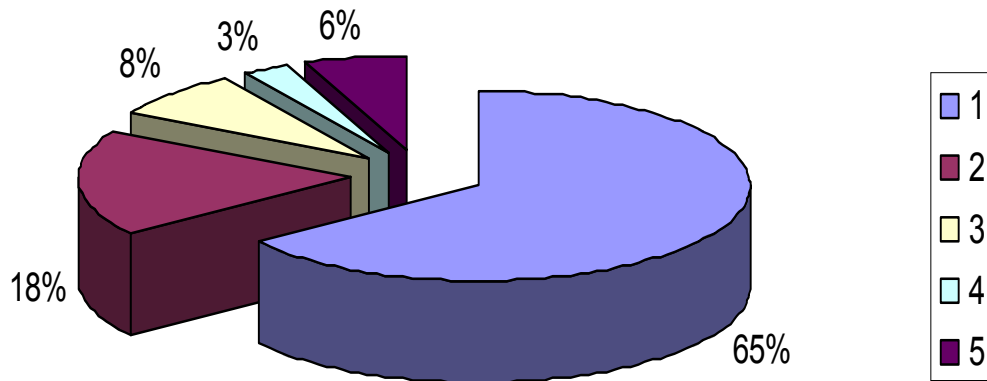
QUESTIONNAIRE

- *This questionnaire is a tool that will be used to get feedback from you the students about the gang situation in our schools and Belize City. Kindly fill it out so that the feedback can be analyzed for a Research Paper. Thank you.*

- 1.) **Gender:**
Male _____ *Female* _____
- 2.) **Age:** _____
- 3.) **School:** _____
- 4.) **Do you know of any gang member that attends your school?** _____
- 5.) **How would you rate the gang situation at your school on a scale of 1-5 (1 being no problem – 5 being a major problem).** _____
- 6.) **Is the neighborhood where you live gang territory?** _____
- 7.) **If yes to question 6, what set? [Crips (blue), Bloods (red), other]** _____
- 8.) **Are you associated with a gang?** _____
- 9.) **Do you feel that a gang provides the basic needs of a family?** _____
- 10.) **Do you feel that you need to be a gang member in order to survive on the streets of Belize?** _____
- 11.) **Do you believe that the major factors that have contributed to the formation of gangs in Belize are poverty and racism?** _____
- 12.) **Looking towards the new millennium do you see a peaceful Belize, free from drugs, gangs, and crime and the establishment of strong family structures?**

Comments:

APPENDIX B: Assessment of the gang situation in schools



KEY:

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|-------------|
| 1 = | not a problem | = 50 or 65% |
| 2 = | minimal problem | = 14 or 18% |
| 3 = | there is a balance | = 6 or 8% |
| 4 = | situation is critical | = 2 or 3% |
| 5 = | there is a major problem | = 5 or 6% |

Some gangs of Belize City

Abbreviation	Meaning
G.T.C.	Ghost Town Crips
P.I.V.	People in Violence
RIPPERS Crips	
B.S.P.	Black Scorpion Posse
P.A.C.	Pink's Alley Crips [Majestic Alley]
N.H.B.	Neighborhood Bloods
107 HOOVER	
K.D.F.B.	Kick Down Fence Bloods
B.S.C.	Back Street Crips
W.S.B.	West Street Bloods
D.P.G.C.	Dogg Pound Gangster Crips
B.T.B.	Back a Town Bloods
W.H.C.	Westside Harlem Crips
K.G.B.	Kenny's Gangster Bloods
K.R.C.	Krawl Road Crips
K.P.B.	King's Park Bloods
Z.S.C.	Zacaranda Street Crips
C.S.B.B.	Conch Shell Bay Bloods
P.T.P.	Plumb Tree Posse
R.R.B.	Rocky Road Bloods
K.C.P.	Kelly Crip Posse
K.G.C.	Kelly Gangster Crips
Rolling 20's	Bloods
Rolling 30's	Crips
BLOODS	Brother Hood
CRIPS	Coming Revolution in Progress

**Young girls who went missing and were found murdered in Belize
between late 1998 and early 2000**

Name	Age	Went missing	Found dead
Sheri lee Nicholas	13	Sept. 8 th , 1998	Oct. 8 th , 1998
Jay Blades	9	Oct. 1 st , 1998	June 5 th , 1999
Samantha Gordon	15	Nov. 6 th , 1998	Nov. 8 th , 1998
Becky Gilharry	11	Feb. 15 th , 1999	Feb. 16 th , 1999
Jackie Fern Malic	12	March 22 nd , 1999	March 24 th , 1999
Karen Cruz	10	April 13 th , 1999	April 14 th , 1999
Erica Wills	9	June 26 th , 1999	July 19 th , 1999
Naomi Hernandez	14	Feb. 15 th , 2000	Feb. 24 th , 2000