

# UNDERSTANDING DRUG USE IN COMMUNITIES:

A report on the findings from  
Haynesville and its environs

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## **Abstract**

The qualitative study involved focus group interviews with 28 young people between the ages of 13 and 29 years who reside in Haynesville and the surrounding communities of Durrants Village and Holders Hill. The initial reaction of these young people who have experimented with drugs, mainly marijuana and alcohol, was that drug use did not play a significant role in their daily lives. However, what was significant for young females, particularly those between the ages of 18 and 29 years, was the opportunity to provide child care and support for their children and a desire for young fathers to learn employable skills. On the other hand, of concern to young males was the fact that Police often stereotype them due to perceived marijuana use. Of overall importance to these young people was the perceived stigma and discrimination by society of residents from the Haynesville community, which they acknowledged limited their employment opportunities.

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## 1. Executive Summary

**BACKGROUND:** The current study was qualitative in nature and explored drug use and other relevant issues in communities. Such research was deemed necessary given the growing concern about drug use among young persons in Barbados and the importance of understanding this phenomenon.

**METHODOLOGY:** The data was collected through the use of focus group discussions. An adapted 8-item interview protocol served to guide the said discussions which were conducted among persons between the ages of 13 and 29 residing in Haynesville and the surrounding areas of Durrants Village and Holders Hill. Twenty-eight persons participated in the study; and these individuals were divided into 4 groups based on their age (13-17; 18-29) and gender. As such, there was a male and female group for each age category. The focus group sessions were audio-recorded and transcripts were generated. These transcripts were then systematically analyzed in an effort to identify emerging themes which were common to all groups.

**FINDINGS:** The focus group discussions brought to the fore not only issues pertaining to drug use, but also other issues currently impacting on the lives of the participants. As such, five themes emerged from the discussions: “Drug Use”; “Block Culture”; “Survival Issues”; “Stigma and Discrimination”; “Motivation to Succeed”. “Drug Use” was sub-divided into “Perceptions of Drug Use” and “Reasons for Drug Use”; while “Survival Issues” was further divided into: “Unemployment”, “Absence of Fathers”, “Transactional Sex”, “Housing” and “Sexual Abuse”.

The perceptions of “Drug Use” were consistent across all groups, with alcohol being considered to be more dangerous than marijuana given its tendency to make persons aggressive. Marijuana, on the other hand, was associated with calming, relaxing behaviour, positive thinking and cognitive improvements. Despite this, alcohol was more readily used by the participants, particularly the males in the 13 to 17 age group who tended to be heavier drinkers, and this was linked to its affordability. With regards to cocaine, the participants showed disdain for this drug, particularly crack cocaine. Overall, participants did not appear to consider substance use and

abuse to be problematic nor did they make the link to any negative consequences, medical, psychological and/or social, which may result.

The “Block” emerged as a cornerstone in the lives of persons residing in the area, particularly young men who view it as a place to seek refuge from their problems at home as well as a place to be accepted by, and gain respect from, their peers. As such, these young persons do not see the “Block” as the negative place which society makes it out to be. However, it should be noted that the “Block” was also identified as a place where marijuana is smoked within the community; and the young females considered the “Block” a place where young males are encouraged to use the drug. While the young men regarded the “Block” positively, they believe that men should not spend all of their time there but rather, should seek employment in an effort to support their families.

“Stigma and Discrimination” were very real issues for the participants. They indicated that there is a stigma associated with living in the Haynesville area and they are often discriminated against for this fact. This discrimination is especially evident when they seek employment and it negatively affects their ability to obtain work. Similarly, participants indicated that persons residing in Haynesville, particularly young males, receive unfair treatment from the police who, they believe, target these individuals for various reasons.

A number of “Survival Issues” were identified by the participants as having an impact on their lives. These included: unemployment, being single parents (mothers), difficulties obtaining child support and accessing welfare (multiple denials), limited availability/accessibility of affordable housing, the occurrence of transactional sex among women in an effort to make ends meet, and the occurrence of sexual abuse (particularly as it relates to mothers being aware that their daughters are being molested but not attempting to stop it due to the perpetrator being a bread winner/financial contributor in the household).

Despite the issues faced by the participants, most of them displayed “Motivation to Succeed”. This was evidenced in their identifying the various educational and professional goals they had for themselves. For instance, many of the youngsters spoke of their desire to become: accountants, lawyers, hairdressers, chefs, entrepreneurs, professional dancers and athletes.

Others indicated that they were desirous of obtaining certificates from the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION:** The study provided the opportunity to explore the life experiences of young persons residing in Haynesville and its environs. The participants freely discussed issues pertaining to drug use and other social problems affecting their communities, allowing for a number of recommendations to be made. These recommendations, if followed through, have the potential to generate change and improve the lives of these young persons. The recommendations focus on: the delivery of drug education, education alternatives for school leavers without certificates, the use of specially tailored health information campaigns, improving the relationship between the police and youth, and interventions that target families with multiple challenges as well as at-risk youth and those living in distressed areas.

## **2. Introduction**

The use of legal and illegal drugs by secondary school students and adults, particularly marijuana and alcohol, has been noted in recent studies conducted by the National Council on Substance Abuse (Secondary School Survey, 2006; National Household Survey, 2006). Such studies have shown marijuana and alcohol to be the most commonly used legal and illicit substances among adolescents and young adults (persons under 25 years). They have also highlighted the fact that rates of first time drug use among secondary school students dramatically increase from rates of first time drug use among primary school students (National Primary School Survey, 2010). Furthermore, during adolescence, 74% have reportedly used alcohol and 17% have tried marijuana (Secondary School Survey 2006). It should be noted that similar findings have been uncovered in the United States, where rates of drug use have also been found to increase during adolescence ( Englund et al. 2010). Seventy two percent (72%) of these adolescents reportedly used alcohol, 42% tried marijuana, and 24% used other illicit drugs. Such findings are corroborated by Arnett (2006) who is of the view that alcohol and other drug use tends to escalate during adolescence and is highest in young adult years.

One noteworthy finding from the 2006 Secondary School Survey was that 34% of the participating adolescents were current consumers of alcoholic beverages (that is, they had consumed alcohol within the 30 days preceding the survey). Somewhat concerning is the fact that just over one-quarter (25.6%) of these students revealed that they had gotten drunk in the month preceding the survey. In Barbados, adolescents and young adults represent the majority of patients admitted to public and privately-funded drug treatment facilities. Marijuana was observed to be the drug driving the demand for treatment, particularly among males. This corresponds with the finding that trafficking and possession of marijuana were the dominant drug offenses while marijuana was the drug most commonly seized during 2011 (BARDIN, 2012).

### **Explanations for Drugs use Among Adolescents**

There is a growing concern in our society about the increase in adolescent drug and alcohol abuse and dependence (NCSA, 2006). However, most young people who experiment with drugs or use them recreationally do not develop serious drug problems (BARDIN, 2011). Rather, a

small but significant minority become intensive drug users and develop serious drug-related health problems (BARDIN, 2012).

One of the factors driving drug use is its cultural acceptance. Cultural and attitudinal correlates of drug use include beliefs and evaluations regarding drug use, as well as general values and behaviours that contribute to drug use (Little et al., 2013). Such cultural beliefs have resulted in the endorsement of negative social and psychological consequences of drug use that are influenced by broader societal values (Little et al., 2013).

Kandel (2003) offers a theoretical explanation of drug use by indicating that patterns of use are developmental and progressive. Kandel's Gateway Theory presents marijuana as the key gateway substance operating between youth cigarette and alcohol use, and later use of more serious drugs. The sequence of stages presenting drug pathways are as follows: no use of a drug, use of alcohol or cigarettes, use of marijuana, and the use of other drugs (Lessem et al, 2006). However, research on the developmental pathway of drug use trajectories remains inconclusive. First, the identification of these stages does not infer the existence of causal stages between different drugs or the inevitable progression along a continuum; and second, the proposition that marijuana use causes progression toward other illicit drug use is difficult to establish in naturalistic studies due to the inability to randomize subjects to experimental conditions (p.499).

A number of research studies have been employed to examine whether marijuana use causes the use of other illicit drugs in epidemiologic samples. One strategy controls for theoretically important covariates and confounders. Thus, Yamaguchi and Kandel (1984b) found that marijuana use continued to be associated with other illicit drug use even after controlling for covariates. Similarly, Fergusson and Horwood (2000), examined whether marijuana-use predicted use of other illicit drugs while controlling for family, social, educational, and behavioral background, and found that marijuana users who reported using on more than 50 occasions were 59.2 times as likely to use other illicit substances compared to non-users.

Finally, Fergusson and Boden (2008), found that heavy users/abusers have lower levels of competent functioning such as educational attainment, and higher levels of maladaptive functioning including aggression and unemployment compared with those who use lower

amounts of substances. On the other hand, Gotham, Sher and Wood (2003), found no or few effects of adolescent substance use on adult functioning. However, despite the fact that experimentation with substances may be a relatively normative activity during late adolescence, concerns have been raised about the consequences of adolescent substance use for future development outcomes (Hawkins & Abbott, 2008).

### **Significance of Study**

The prevalence rates of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use are matters of concern to policymakers since they are important factors affecting the health and welfare of the population. With this in mind, addressing drug use behaviours among adolescents is essential for prevention efforts, since it involves being aware of the magnitude of psychoactive drug consumption and its characteristics as well as acquiring more in depth knowledge of the underlying causes of risk and consumption. However, of importance to the study of drug use is the higher priority communities place on daily survival issues such as unemployment and the support for children (Hunter, 2002) rather than concerns with drug use. Such survival issues have been linked to transactional sexual relationships, where gifts of service are an important factor in sexual relationships and in the stigma and discrimination associated with social status.

### **The Current Study**

As a result of a limited budget, and the challenge of reaching all communities across Barbados, the NCSA's Research Department decided to strategically group communities into sectors, namely north, central, east and south. Communities in these sectors were purposively selected based on reports received from key informants, namely community leaders and other social and criminal justice agency professionals. From these reports, the NCSA identified communities in Haynesville, St. James; New Orleans, St. Michael; Crab Hill, St. Lucy and Six Roads, St. Phillip. Adolescents and young adults from these communities will be selected, over time, to participate in qualitative research studies that seek to explore and understand social phenomena related to drug use.

The current study is therefore an initial exploration of the phenomenon of adolescent and young adult drug use in the area of Haynesville and the surrounding communities of Durants Village and Holders Hill. Focus group interviews were conducted with 28 young people between the

ages of 13 and 29 years who reside these areas. This is an appropriate sample size given the method used in this exploratory study (Creswell, 2009). Participants were identified using Purposive sampling (a non-probability sampling technique which focuses on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest) in order to assure reaching information-rich cases (Patton, 1990). The focus groups were conducted in the former Haynesville Community Police Post located in Haynesville, St. James. Rich descriptions were obtained from the focus group discussions; these were intended to inform future interventions that could lead to more positive outcomes between children and families.

The interview protocol was adapted from one developed by Patton (1990) and consisted of 8 questions focusing on the daily experiences of adolescents and young adults regarding drug use and issues of importance to their life circumstances (e.g., block culture, survival issues and employment). Finally, the respondents were asked about their motivations to succeed and the long-term outcomes they envisioned for themselves. The interview protocol is available from the author.

### **3. Procedures**

Initial contact with potential study participants was facilitated by the Youth Commissioner of the area acting through the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. Subsequent arrangements were then made with the NCSA research team for scheduled focused group discussions. Informed consent information (the purpose of the study, risks and benefits nature of participation, the right to withdraw from participation without penalty, confidentiality, etc.) was described in detail to parents where applicable as well as to the participants. Upon obtaining consent, interviews with the participants were scheduled.

Focus group interviews were conducted at times convenient to the participants. Four focus groups were conducted at the Haynesville Community Centre and each lasted approximately one to one and half hours. A researcher with formal training in qualitative data collection and training for the specific protocol of this project, conducted the interviews. In addition, two students from the University of the West Indies, who were interning at the NCSA served as transcribers. In this respect, the students recorded and transcribed taped interviews and took field notes to capture nonverbal impressions for data analysis. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. Participants were provided with light refreshments as a compensation for their time and participation.

#### **Data analysis**

Transcripts of the audio tapes were generated. Additional material regarding the tone of voice and comments from the interviewer's field notes were added to these transcripts where appropriate. The data analysis team consisted of two researchers employed by the NCSA, including the author of this report. Both researchers possess post-graduate degrees. Each researcher independently reviewed the data. After this initial review, the researchers met and through consensus, identified themes they saw as emerging from the data. In the process of continued interaction with the data, additional themes, and thus codes, were identified, consensually reviewed at the department meetings and iteratively applied to the data through "between" and "within" case contrast and comparison. The team engaged in this process until no new categories and codes emerged and thematic saturation was reached (Creswell, 2009). The

research team attempted to capture the emotion experienced by adolescents as they spoke about their perceptions of drug use and other social problems. Commentary on the content of these emotions in association with some quotations were reported in the study findings.

### **Trustworthiness**

Bracketing, the deliberate putting aside of one's beliefs about the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013), and peer review techniques were used in order to mitigate the researchers' biases and enhance the trustworthiness of the study. This was seen as necessary as the author grew up in the Haynesville area and was familiar with some of the social issues experienced by adolescents in this study. The bracketing was done through analytical and reflexive review of the researchers' emotions, perceptions, and reactions to the data (Creswell, 2013). This "bracketed" material was then discussed at department meetings and a peer review of the coding was undertaken. The research team systematically reviewed their interpretations as a group and their conclusions drawn from the data, engaging in systematic discussions to achieve consensus.

## **4. Findings**

Accessing adolescents who use drugs was problematic. Thus the findings of the study provide information somewhat different than originally expected. In a sense, these adolescents divulged information that had been important to them at the moment but this information was not necessarily focused on the specific drug-related issues (for example their experiences of stigma and discrimination and difficulties receiving child support) rather than the issues the author had identified for the study. Five themes emerged from the data analysis process; (a) Drug Use, (b) Block Culture, (c) Survival Issues (d) Stigma and discrimination (e) Motivation to succeed.

### **The Participants**

All of the participants resided in Haynesville and the surrounding areas of Durrants Village and Holders' Hill. Participants between the ages 13 and 17 years old were attending secondary school while only one male between the ages of 18 and 29 was attending sixth form at a secondary school. One of the participants between the ages of 13 and 17 years was suspended from school several times. Two of the participants between the ages of 18 and 29 years were employed. One on a full time basis, while the other, on a part-time basis with his father's construction business. Both of these employed young men were also seeking to improve their work skills through the Barbados Vocational Training Board (BVTB). The other members of the group were also interested in improving their work and academic skills by seeking to attend the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic (SJPP) or obtaining certificates from the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). One member had ambitions to join the Barbados Defence Force (BDF) while another aspired to be an international Reggae and Dancehall artist. However, it should be noted that one member reported completing secondary school with five certificates.

All of the females in this study were unemployed, two of them between the ages of 18 and 29 years were single parents, one of whom lived at home with her parents.

## Girls 13-17 years

### Theme 1: Drug Use

The use of marijuana was not evident among all adolescents in this group. One of them indicated that she smoked marijuana to think and get a high “yea, yuh does want a lil spliff and go and smoke it and go and think and get high.” Another cautioned against the practice of smoking marijuana since she was of the opinion that smoking one “spliff” may lead to smoking many “spliffs”. However, some of these adolescents voided smoking marijuana and cigarettes due to unpleasant experiences. In relation to marijuana use, the following was said “I take one pull and I say hold that man...I ain’t want that no more” while for cigarettes another adolescent said “Not me boa, I gine tell the truth. I went to smoke a cigarette when I was like six years old and I choke fuh mussy a half a hour.”

Peer pressure and problems at home were some of the reasons offered by these adolescents for smoking marijuana.

“He say when he start smoking..he start smoking cause he friend tell he to smoke and then after a while now, he get into this smoking thing. When he got problems at home and thing..instead of freaking out and thing he does just go and smoke”

However, another indicated she was less likely to be influenced by others to smoke marijuana.

“Them can’t encourage me cause I got my own mind”

For these adolescents drinking alcoholic beverages was associated with dealing with problems “there got a man that he does got problems with the woman and every night he come in he quarrelling, when he done and buy a silver and sit down.” However, one of them believed that she would drink alcohol to deal with problems. “If I had the opportunity to I would.” It was also suggested that individuals drink alcohol because they could afford to buy alcoholic beverages while others drink because it is the popular thing to do: “there just some who feel that it cool and I gotta drink too”.

It was further noted by the group that the drinking of alcohol and smoking of marijuana took place on school premises and on the block. One member noted “Them does smoke at school.

Them does bring rum at school in a lil bottle” while another said “somebody does run cross the pasture and come back cross with a bottle of silver. Pasture there ...jump over the fence and go.” Another member mentioned that individuals were encouraged to use marijuana on the block and at the ‘dub’ or fete. “I could bet you that tonight when I go out there on that block I gine hear. Hold that there man...I don’t smoke ...hold that there... man nah, hold that there bee. I see it happen the other night when I went to a dub....two people.”

However, while some of these females admitted to the occasional use of marijuana and alcohol, they were of the view that males rather than females have serious problems with drug use and abuse.

## **Theme 2: Block Culture**

For these adolescents, smoking and drinking alcohol comes with a particular mindset of living a life on the block rather than seeking employment and self-improvement.

“Them rather be on the block smoking or drinking but them ain’t gine get rid of the mindset, let we say ...let me get off the block ...let me get a job ...time to get my life sort out and thing. Them does got just one thing ... I gine stand on the block cause that is wha I wanna do ... smoke weed cause I wanna smoke weed...I gine drink cause I could drink...”

Furthermore it was perceived by these females that young males could find employment if they really wanted by asking the Minister representing the Haynesville district: “ If they really want, them could go and talk to the Minister of this. If them really serious, them could go and do these things but them aint ‘bout nain... them just about weed... them just bout drinks, partying, gambling.” However, some of these females observed that although some males on the block have certificates there had no interest in finding work: “Them got nuff of them that pon de block that got CXC’s and ain’t got nuh job. I does be like so if you got CXCs why you ain’t want no job?”

The mindset of males who cohabit the block was also perceived by these females to be linked to parenting, drug use and crime.

“Them they gine go and breed this body till them get children but still when them get the children... them want the children but still cant got nain to give them. A child should change somebody mindset to say alright I got a responsibility. Let me get off the block... let me go and get a job to support my family and this and that. But no them wannna stand on the block.. see who cold smoke the most weed ..them wanna gamble... see who could get the most girls... who wanna go and rob people when them could go and mek them own money now.”

### **Theme 3: Motivation to Succeed**

These adolescents were succinct about their goals and aspiration. Some aspired to be accountants, lawyers, chefs, hairdressers and entrepreneurs while others aspired to be professional dancers and sports women. They are also of the view that programmes were needed to target the males who they perceived as lacking motivation to improve themselves. They were further of the view that young men needed to realise their full potential and not be hindered by where they came from.

### **Theme 4: Survival Issues**

#### **Subtheme: Transactional Sex**

These female adolescents were of a view that young women traded sex for money, clothing or food. This view was further supported by a popular dance hall song. In this song the phrase “meat gotta pull” was used to describe situations of having sex for money, clothing or food.

### **Girls 18-29**

#### **Theme 1: Drug Use**

All of the young women in this group smoked marijuana at some point in their lives. One mentioned her appetite for marijuana: “ I could smoke a joint now and smoke for the whole day.”

There was the perception among these females that marijuana is less harmful than cocaine. One observed: “Cocaine is wha does mek you tief and rob and steel... marijuana doesn’t. Marijuana don’t do that stuff to you that make you do these tings. Another girl linked marijuana smoking with enhanced intellect: “I could smoke weed and study so much things. I does over think things...I does say you...I could mek a car... but the only thing when I smoke dope gine be mekking a mess.” However, all the females in this cohort agreed that alcohol caused more problems than marijuana. They also admitted that although they may have consumed alcohol they would not get drunk.

#### **Theme 4: Survival Issues**

##### **Sub theme 1: Unemployment**

Unemployment among these young women is a major concern, particularly as it relates to supporting their children. All of these females were unemployed and those who had children were single parents who did not receive financial support from the fathers of their children, some of whom were imprisoned. In addition, some of these young women were denied welfare aid from the Welfare Department. One such participant spoke to the issue of the fathers of their children being incarcerated and being denied welfare: “No time at all I got no kinda help... de welfare denying me, denying me and denying me so I give up going and just try to mek it pon my own.”

Furthermore, concerns were expressed as to the limited funds available from the Welfare Department: “And this stuff I hearing pon de news bout fifty dollars to help support children pon a week... that is not no money... fifty dollars is no help for no chile cause from the time you go in de supermarket dat dead like a door nail and is only breakfast tings and dat ain’t got nuttin to do wid rice, chicken or food. For example, de children school tings ...dat can’t, fifty dollars can’t help”.

## **Sub theme 2: Absence of Fathers**

The females of this cohort voiced some concerns as to the inability of the fathers to provide for their children. There were further of the opinion that since the fathers of their children were incarcerated, this prevented them from providing for their children. They also believed that although they may agree with decisions to incarcerate these males, incarceration prevented fathers from supporting their children “ so when dem go and put dem in jail now right....not dat I see any problem wid dat.....punishing dem or whaevea dem gotta do but .....I got my chile to support.... These young women also suggested that incarceration affected the upbringing of male children.

“Cause children does need fadders, especially a boy. 'Cause tings dat I cannot tell my son about his puberty and stuff he would go through as a boy....I can't....when he come to me I can't got de tings to tell he...I gotta tell he go to one ah he uncles. I could deal with my daughter...yuh understand wha I telling you. Fadders need to be there... dem need to be there financially and physically cause as a youth when you grow up and you don't grow up without a father it does play wid your mind and nuff ah dese men grow up without fadders and dem won't look at dis as an example and suh well I'm gonna be a dad to my son. I's gonna be a different person.”

## **Sub Theme 3: Transactional Sex**

These young women alluded to the role of “doing what it takes” to make ends meet when unemployed. For one individual this included stealing and selling drugs, food and drinks. While for others this may involve offering sex in order to feed their children.

“When you guh home and you see you chile come and it say “mummy I hungry” and you look in the fridge and you ain't see nuttin... you look in the cabinet and you ain't see nain... dat does hurt you to the uttermost. You could fair you days hungry but you chile does can't fair dem days hungry; and at the end of the day, you does get involved in relationships right, and you gine see somebody. It ain't mek no sense gine wid no man and he gine want sex....some part of the relationship....unless he is a 'faggit' he gine

want sex from yuh and you would want to find yusef even wanting sex from he. It ain't mek no sense you gine wid somebody dat can't help yuh."

Although some of these young women agreed that they would engage in prostitution if they found themselves in circumstances where it was difficult to find employment and support their children; one of them was of the opinion that there are other options such as seeking support from family members and close friends. However, for some of these young women giving sex in exchange for money is fair.

"... you can't stand him but you sticking round he cause ...it ain't dat he love you yuh know. It is a fair exchange... he getting sex pon a regular and you gine want a woman to hold down dat you could come and get it from and you got bills pay, you got you groceries and you got things done."

Moreover, it was observed that married men seeking happiness and comfort deliberately seek sexual relations with these females.

"Some of dem is comfort too. 'Cause nuff men got wives dat don't gee dem de comfort so dem does go and get a lil friend or whaeva ...Ort...say she in need and I got my wife home. She (wife) don't make me happy but when I come and breeze wid she (other woman) it does make me happy. How it gine look to get ...I gine help she and as she said a fair exchange....it don't always go like dat... like down Nelson's Street or down in.... it does come in too many different ways.

#### **Sub Theme 4: Sexual Abuse**

Linked closely to transactional sex are instances where females were sexually abused by stepfathers with the knowledge by their mothers who depended on step fathers for financial support.

"I told my mother I get interfere wid... she neva believe me because she did getting de money... she ain't believe me. My brudda is who believe me and my brudda is who near lick off piece ah he head. Cause my brudda older dan me, you understand. So it had to

take me to run away... I was twelve years old and I run away... de last time it happen I was fifteen and I run way and went to de Child Care Board. I ain't run and went by nuh man house or nuffin... run and went to de Child Care Board and dem seek help fuh me fere wid when I was small... so you see men round my daughter, I does be real skeptical.”

### **Sub Theme 5: Housing**

Housing was also another major concern for one young woman: “There is no place for them to spread their wings and live”. This young woman further explained that opportunities that were granted to her generations should still be offered to them. This was in reference to housing units where one stated that the concept of the housing unit was so that you could have some place comfortable and affordable to rent while trying to get on your feet.”

### **Theme 5: Stigma and Discrimination**

Those young women who reside in Haynesville reported that they have experienced discrimination because of the perceived stigma associated with Haynesville. For one of these young women, such discrimination affected their ability to find work.

“Well dem got Haynesville class up so bad that when you gotta thing a application form for you child or anything or even a job application, sometimes a lot of people does be afraid to put down Haynesville. And when dem put down Haynesville, even if them well qualified, dem ain't gun get de job that easy all because of the same thing or the shooting that wuna talking bout.”

Some of these young women were of the opinion that it was easier to portray the bad rather than the good about Haynesville. They further observed that the good things about Haynesville, such as the Haynesville Drummers, footballers, dancers, DJ's and the vocally talented are not highlighted. Furthermore, the portrayal of the negative aspects of Haynesville is also associated with the perception that sporting officials are biased in decisions against the Haynesville

footballers: “Even for the footballers, when dem got a match, the referee does wan thief pon dem.” However, it was believed that residents from Haynesville may have also contributed to the negativity being portrayed: “Like you would help out a person from the same Haynesville wid a job and dem would go and make bad for the other people.”

## **Boys 13-17 years**

### **Theme 1: Drug Use**

The male adolescents of this cohort were of the opinion that since the drinking of alcohol is socially acceptable, consumption of this substance will not cause significant problems for themselves or their community. However, some of these adolescents admitted that persons who drink alcohol should exercise caution: “it depends on how you use it” and “ you gotta know your limit.” In this respect, most of these boys admitted limiting alcohol intake to one or two beers, while one of them boasted that he drank much more: “Go out a night and drink four Bacardi, four Patrons, two cases ah Mackesons, four Stags.” Furthermore, these young adults compared the drinking of alcohol with smoking marijuana. Thus, despite the fact that they had all consumed alcohol at least once, one of them indicated smoking marijuana on many occasions: “ I would say bout fifteen to twenty times... yeah.”

Some of these adolescents were of the opinion that peer pressure can influence them to drink alcohol. Furthermore, they felt that once alcohol is free they will drink as much of it as they can. However, they were also of the opinion that they could reduce the experience of hangovers by eating a lot of food prior to drinking alcohol: “I does only drink when it free.... when you eat nuff food and thing it don’t kick on so. You gotta eat nuf.”

Although all of these boys agreed that alcohol can cause problems, they also believed that alcohol only causes problems if consumed to the extreme. In this context, extreme was defined as “You ain’t know wha part yuh is and yuh vomiting.”

In regards to marijuana, most members of this cohort felt that marijuana helped them to relax and to think positively, enhance abilities to learn trades and refrain from aggressive behaviour.

“So when you smoke weed and you angry, you more relax ...you does come back down and relax and tek off you mind from on them things and like... just think. ....when you smoke weed now and get high or whateva. If you got negativity pon you mind that is always be the bad effect. If you got sain positive in you mind, like that is be a great effect just like that man just now say...he learn trades from smoking weed...he smoke weed, get high ..went pon a meditation, on a positive vibe and learn tiling and things and the third...if now he pon a negative height... probably he would be in jail by now but it is like wha on you mind after you get high...”

Most of these young men smoke marijuana and do not perceive smoking marijuana as a problem. However, they were also of the opinion that you should know your limit and should not smoke marijuana every day. Furthermore, it was agreed by these young males that consuming both alcohol and marijuana simultaneously can be problematic.

“It does calm yuh down....relax yuh nerves. But the problem is now that why these young fellas does get on so, yuh understand is that....like ...weed contains a substance called THC yuh understand. So when you smoking and you teking the THC and you drinking alcohol behind it that is boost up the dosage of the THC along with the alcohol, so you meking it stronger. And nuff of these men ‘bout hey minds cant tek that kinda pressure, so that is why them does end up doing so.”

A further distinction was given between simply smoking and abusing marijuana.

“Them got a difference between smoking weed and them got a difference between abusing weed. When you smoking weed the right way....to do something positive....if you vex, it would calm you down or something. Abusing weed now is when you sitting down pon the block and you gine and shout the weed man.....you ain’t got no reason for smoking no weed or nain but you just wanna look classy pon the block like everybody else....”

These adolescent boys spoke of their experiences with marijuana. One of them reported feeling weird after first inhaling marijuana but adjusted quickly into feeling normal. Another explained why marijuana creates a weird feeling.

“Yuh see why he did so is cause them got different strains of cannabis which does carry different strains of THC, yuh understand. Everybody brain does can’t tek it... yuh ...them got weed that does be stronger. Them got weed that when you smoke it you ears get heavy, that’s for weed like when you shoulders hurting you...shoulder pains or sain. Them got certain strains now that when you smoke it you gotta go straight and lie down and relax for the rest of the day.”

## **Theme 2: Block Culture**

These males identified family problems as one of the reasons why they would leave home and assemble on ‘the block’. ‘The block’ in their opinion is not a negative place as made out by society but rather an escape from the varying realities and problems that men experience as individuals and as a group. One of these young men suggested that young people who assemble on the block were just lazy. However, they generally believed that being on the block should never occupy most of the time of any individual since such persons should be seeking employment and making a contribution to their families.

The young men in this cohort also agreed that although some young people who assemble on the “block” were illiterate, they were also of the opinion that some of these young men were talented: “Them got men pon the block, they all over. Some of them can’t even spell their own name to start with...but if you just tek the time to sit down .....you would tek the time to realize that everybody got slight different talents.” Another member of this group observed:

“Them got some that does smoke and thing but these men could play so hard. Them got men that does do trowel plastering and thing and them so talented. Men that does paint and thing... them got men that does carve out things outta wood and thing ole man.”

However, it was generally perceived by these young males that young people go on the block to smoke marijuana in order to “breeze” and clear their mind and relax.

### **Theme 3: Motivation to Succeed**

Peer pressure was repeated among them. Essentially, they have to learn to be individuals and not become followers. This is supported by one participant’s statements: “I think they could just be themselves and stop minding people.” Some said that their peers could encourage them to smoke marijuana and drink alcohol.

### **Males 18-29 years**

#### **Theme 1: Drug Use**

For these young men, alcohol consumption resulted in erratic behaviors which made the drinking of alcohol problematic. Furthermore, they were of the view that drinking alcohol can create problems. For one individual alcohol itself was not a problem rather the abuse of alcohol. Others linked alcohol to death a “ I see too much people dead “ and getting drunk to losing control “getting drunk and ain’t know wha yuh doing. Doing things to other people dem ain’t know wha dem doing.” However, all of these young men have consumed alcohol, one reported that he used alcohol regularly and if he goes partying, he would normally consume one or two drinks while two others further indicated that they had stopped drinking alcohol.

The young men of this cohort were strongly of the opinion that nothing was wrong with smoking marijuana. They were also of the view that the drug was used primarily for relaxation and is not as harmful as alcohol. However, two members of this cohort did not currently smoke marijuana, although one of them had previously smoked but had since stopped. Alternately, three others admitted smoking marijuana on a daily basis.

“When you smoke a joint, you does get high, you does lay down and you does drop sleep. Get up the other day, you does feel good. When you drink alcohol you does do tings you don’t know...guh home and vomit bad. Got a total different effect. And it depend on yuh

mind. If you vex and you smoke, it gine relax you. If you drink alcohol now, you gine wanna kill somebody.”

Moreover, most of the members of this group were of the view that smoking marijuana allows you to get away from problems and to better relate with friends. For another, smoking marijuana improves his ability to write music:

“Not really, cause when I writing music and smoke a joint to a rhythm, I guarantee you that within two minutes my song done, my mind does open up. Fuh right now it does just be a bit hard to pick up what yuh want. It ain’t gine get me lazy, it gine just mek me focus pon what I doing.”

However, there was some agreement among all of these young men on the selling of marijuana which they compared with the selling of alcohol.

“I don’t see anything wrong wid selling marijuana. You see anything wrong wid selling alcohol? I tell you wuh, you drink two litres ah Patron and I drink a ounce ah hydro (synthetic marijuana) yuh understan. I gine lay down hey and sleep and I bet you gine got a bus face....tell me how you gine get it?”

However, what was noticeable was the acceptance of marijuana smoking in the broader community. One member claimed that his family does not have a problem with him smoking marijuana as long as he does not smoke it in the house or go home smelling as though he was smoking.

### **Theme 5: Stigma and Discrimination**

Most of the young men in this group agreed that they were discriminated against because they resided in Haynesville.

- “ ..when I first start secondary school dat is wha I get tell...you from Haynesville? You ain’t do nain..you ain’t mek it pass third form.”

- “When I went KFC to work and de woman hear I from Haynesville, she say I gotta be another hooligan.”
- “Cause when I did working down Harbour Road, my supervisor ask me if I from Haynesville, I ain’t gine last long....dat dem gine look and see how long I gine put up. Which means that they had the intent to ensure dat I get in trouble.”

On the other hand, not all of these young men who were discriminated against perceived it as a problem. For one of them, being stigmatized gave him respect. “Cause when I was gine school I din use to get no heat from de fellas. I use to get a lot of respect and plus I did from Haynesville. Men use to be like gee he de space. So dat could be a good or bad thing.” Furthermore another member of this group suggested that since he had the ability to rob me (the author of this report) of my watch and did not, then Haynesville is not as bad as being portrayed by others who live outside the community.

### **Sub Theme 1: Relationship with Police**

For these young men, their relationship with the police was troublesome. One of them was of the opinion that although he agreed with the rights of police officers to enforce the law, he was also of the view that police action could prevent them from selling marijuana. Furthermore, for this individual, while the actions of the police may be perceived as a threat, in other communities the police may be perceived as friendly.

“...fuh you to be selling herb down pon de block to feed you family and a police trying to stop dat now, he trying to destroy you business. So you would see he as a threat, yuh understand. Some men now that living in dem big houses and ting would see de police as a friend, yuh understand.”

Other young men of this cohort also viewed relations with the police negatively. They were of the opinion that the police deliberately targeted them for unfavorable treatment.

“Dem does do a lot of profiling too. If police see you and it late and you look a certain way dem does stop you....if you look a certain way and you walking the road.....it don’t

be just wha yuh wearing sight.....dem would say he look rough, he look wicked...where yuh from. You look like you get lock up and ting already.”

Another added that reports of abuse of citizens by the police to obtain information are documented by international law enforcement agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Furthermore, this member believes that such actions by the police are accepted by the community and could tarnish relationships between the police and the community. However, he is of the opinion that the relationship between the police and community is not as bad as portrayed by the wider public.

“The Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States has profiles on every law enforcement agency like worldwide. You could click pon Brabados and you could read it. Dem say dat police does force information from whaeva dem want from suspects by brutally abusing them and it is allowed and accepted in the community. So if New York people know dat, how come you don’t know dat? It is not dat de police is a problem; it is how dem does relate to people in dese communities. If it was bad as it was we would be shooting at dem every since.”

## **Theme 2: Block Culture**

The block culture is more than smoking marijuana as stated by one young man. In his opinion, it was a place which allows men to get away from their problems and have a sense of belonging and acceptance. On the other hand, another young man said that the block had evolved and he had seen a measure of lawlessness attached to some of the men on the block. One member of this cohort attempted to define the “block’ and the reasons why young people are drawn to it.

“...You does hear de term ‘block’ being used, dat is where a congregation of young people does be and a few ah dem does got possession ah marijuana to smoke it and relate to problems dat dem got at home, sports whaeva problem. And we would lef de blocks sweet and we would guh back dey de next day. De love ah dat dey would hinder you from wanting a job and dat is when it does become a problem. If you smoking marijuana everyday you don’t gotta tell youself dat you wanna be pon de block, you just could work

pon whaeva and come home and face de block cause it aint gine nuh way, yuh understand! You would hear a old man say de block aint gine nuh way so you could go work and do you lil ting or whaeva yuh understand and keeping a level head and doing tings to suit.”

He further noted that one of the primary reasons for being on the ‘block’ was the respect and acceptance from others individuals who gather on the ‘block’.

“The problems we does get does drive we to de block and because we does get respect and acceptance hey we would want to be dere every day and dat would stop we from looking fuh work cause we got wha we ain’t getting from home, pon de block, yuh understand.”

Another young man sought to explain the relationship between the ‘block’, marijuana smoking and unemployment by suggesting that an individual could smoke marijuana and go to work without difficulty. However, he surmised that there is nothing wrong with being on the block and smoking marijuana once congregating on the block does not hinder your employment.

### **Theme 3: Motivation to Succeed**

Only two young men of this group were employed. Of those employed, one was full-time and the other part-time. Both of these employed young men were also seeking to improve their work skills through the Barbados Vocational Training Board (BVTB). Others were seeking to attend the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic (SJPP) or obtain certificates from the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). One young man had ambitions to join the Barbados Defence Force (BDF) while another aspired to be an international reggae and dancehall artist. However, it should be noted that one member of this cohort completed secondary school with five certificates.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of the study covered five themes, namely: Drug use, Block Culture, Survival Issues, Stigma and Discrimination, and Motivation to Succeed. Drug use was further divided into subthemes of: Perceptions of Drug Use and Reasons for Drug Use. The category of Survival Issues was also divided into the subthemes of Unemployment, Absence of Fathers, Transactional Sex, Housing, and Sexual Abuse. Four focus groups participated in the discussions. Two of the groups (1 male and 1 female) contained persons from the 13 to 17 age category while the remaining 2 groups (1 male, 1 female) comprised of individuals in the 18 to 29 age category.

The perception of drug use was consistent among all ages. Alcohol was perceived to be a drug which causes aggressive behavior and fighting while marijuana was perceived to be associated with calming, relaxing behavior which encourages positive thinking and improved cognitive learning. However, alcohol was used more readily across all age groups and its use was linked to its affordability, particularly among young males in the 13-17 age group who also tended to be heavier drinkers of alcohol. “Go out a night and drink four Bacardi, four Patrons, two cases ah Mackesons, four Stags...”, this statement was made by one of the members of the focus group. It is upon this backdrop that the following statement is made. The males of this group do not see alcohol and drug abuse as a serious issue. It is deemed to be socially acceptable and nothing is wrong with it as it relates to them or their community. Although some of these 13-17 year olds were cautious about the harmfulness of alcohol, statements such as “it depends on how you use it” and “you gotta know your limit” cement the notion that they do not view alcoholism as a serious issue.

However, adolescent females in the 13-17 age group are of the view that the males within the community have serious problems with drug use and abuse. Although some of the adolescent females in this age cohort did admit to experimenting with both marijuana and alcohol, they were not regular users of either substance.

Most participants perceived alcohol use as more harmful than marijuana use; and they also showed a disdain for cocaine use, particularly crack cocaine. The perception of the harmfulness of alcohol and marijuana is a reflection of their personal experiences of using these substances as

well as observing the behaviours of others who use these substances. For example, 13 -17 year old males who use marijuana were able to identify and report on the effects of the different strains of marijuana, ranging from relaxing to sleeping all day. However, despite the existence of some knowledge regarding the harmfulness of drug use among across all age cohorts, what appears to be absent is a greater understanding of the harmfulness of substance abuse in particular and the link between substance abuse and the related human, social and economic costs.

According to Single et al. (2003), there is strong evidence, for example, that the consumption of alcohol is related to a variety of health consequences. The probability and severity of adverse health effects of alcohol are strongly related to level of intake, often in a non-linear fashion and sometimes in a manner which is also dependent (as with road accidents). The dose-response relationship is most evident with respect to cirrhosis of the liver, but adverse effects of the high intake of alcohol have also been found for many other disorders including delirium tremens, impaired brain function, cancer of the oesophagus and digestive tract, chronic calcifying pancreatitis and congenital defects in the foetus among pregnant women. High and moderate alcohol use is also associated with increased risk of trauma, such as that caused by impaired driving accidents.

The 'Block' was described as a place where young men go to get away from their problems at home and a place where they can be accepted and gain the respect of peers. Family problems were among the reasons why they would leave home and find themselves on the 'block'. The 'block' in their opinion is not a negative place as made out by society, but rather an escape from the varying realities and problems that men experience as individuals and as a group. However, young men also use the 'block' to smoke marijuana and it was perceived by females (13-17 years) as a place where young men are encouraged to use this drug. Most adolescent males in the 13-17 age group, believed that being on the 'block' should never occupy most of the time of any individual. In fact, they stated that the men ought to go and look for gainful employment and make a contribution to their families.

The 'Block' however remains the cornerstone of life for these young people. Its drawing card is the perceived belongingness which these young people seek and results in part from their ability,

or inability, to cope with the problems they experienced in the home. Such problems are further compounded by the perception these young people have of being discriminated against due to their residing in Haynesville, which results in unsuccessful attempts to find jobs and housing as well as unnecessary profiling by the police. However, the fact that the 'Block' is also linked to marijuana use may further add to the malaise and general lethargic approach to improving life circumstances.

Understanding the nature of 'Block life' is therefore critical to the exploration of the issues affecting young people across these age cohorts. In this respect, the 'Block' should not be viewed as a separate social entity from other social institutions but rather as a type of a social network with its peculiar culture and value systems. Thus, in order to respond effectively to the problems of young people as well as the varied psychological and social reasons perpetuating 'block life', it becomes necessary to treat the 'block' as a social system with its own philosophical ethos and value system.

Unemployment, welfare issues, housing and transactional sex, were major concerns particularly among the 18 to 29 year old females, and came to the fore during the discussions. All of these young women were unemployed and those who had children were all single parents who found difficulty in obtaining financial support from the fathers of their children. The inability of fathers to provide for their children was further aggravated by some of these fathers being imprisoned and leaving prison without any viable job related skills. Furthermore, one mother reported she was consistently denied aid from the Welfare department and not provided with reasons for her denial.

The affordability of housing was another major concern which, together with unemployment, further aggravated their problems of financial support. Another concern of these young women was the perceived stigma and discrimination they received as a result of living in Haynesville. For them, stigma and discrimination affected their ability to secure employment and housing.

The challenges with financial support for these young women resulted in them finding ways to support themselves and children. The possible options included selling food, drinks, drugs and exchanging sex for money (transactional sex). However, it should be noted that while such transactional sex may secure the necessary financial support, women who have little negotiating

power with their partners may find it difficult to insist on the use of condoms and therefore experience a higher risk of becoming pregnant and contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS (Gregson et al., 2002; Longfield et al., 2002). Young men involved in transactional sex may also expose themselves to the risk of STIs.

To protect young men and young women from this heightened risk of HIV/AIDS, it is important that policymakers and program managers gain a better understanding of transactional sex among youth. Policymakers and program managers need answers to questions such as: Are youth at higher risk of engaging in transactional sex than other groups?; What factors influence youth to engage in transactional sex?; and, What subgroups of youth are particularly vulnerable to engaging in transactional sex?

The stigma and discrimination faced by these young people due to their being residents of Haynesville was particularly worrisome. For young men between the ages of 18 and 29 years, such stigma and discrimination resulted in hiring practices that were biased against them as well as unfair treatment by the police. Furthermore, it was also perceived by these 18-29 year old males that the police purposefully targeted young men from Haynesville because of the way they dress or the perception that they were previously incarcerated.

The motivation to improve one's life circumstances was apparent among all of these young people. However, adolescent females between 13 and 17 years were more decisive in their career development, citing aspirations to become lawyers, doctors, business women, professional dancers and sportswomen. However, young adolescent males were less decisive in career development but nevertheless focused on developing job-related and entertainment skills such as dance hall artists. Similarly, older males were also focused on improving job related skills including academic development while the uncertainties of providing for the future of their children may have inhibited older females from engaging in career development opportunities. Overall, the various social issues experienced by these young people may inhibit their progress towards intended careers. In this context, the challenges faced by females 18-29 years with regards to their being single parents experiencing difficulties in finding employment, accessing welfare and securing suitable housing is of some concern. Similarly, young males across all age

cohorts are warm to the idea of skill and artistic development; however, they are conditioned to believe that drug use will have no effect on their career aspirations.

For actionable programmes, it is therefore necessary to continue to build on existing structures within the community which encourage the wide participation of young people in development activities. It may also be necessary to further this association with other social agencies and other Non –governmental organizations which are also pursuing such development activities in communities. However, it is necessary that such development activities be captured among the general population in these communities with particular emphasis being placed on those who assemble on the block.

## **6. Conclusion & Recommendations**

The foregoing study was an attempt to explore the life experiences of young people in the Haynesville area and surrounding districts of Durants Village and Holder's Hill. Through focus group discussions, these young people were able to speak freely about issues of drug use and other social problems afflicting them in their communities. Some of the major concerns of these young people relate to the lack of job-related skills, unemployment and the subsequent inability of fathers to provide for their children. A notable consequence of these concerns is the increased risk for sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. One major observation is the inability of these young people to link drug use to medical issues, including the psychological and health-related harms and social fallout.

Overall, the information provided in these discussions is useful as it informs responses to address the concerns raised by these young people as they attempt to improve their life circumstances. However, since the study is qualitative in design, the information gleaned is not representative of the general population and therefore cannot be generalized. Therefore, future research should take into consideration replicating such a study within various communities across Barbados so as to assist in the identification of social problems and the development of meaningful responses specific to those communities.

### **Recommendations**

1. Developing more in-depth approaches to information regarding the harmfulness of licit and illicit drug use.
2. Interventions targeting early school leavers and students with social and academic problems. Providing the opportunity to access education and training for adolescent males who have left school without achieving any qualifications.
3. Establishing links with employment service providers.
4. Family based preventions: Targeting families with multiple difficulties including unemployment, affordable and accessible day care for children and dealing with trauma related drug use such as sexual and domestic abuse.
5. Developing general health information campaigns, including HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns among adolescents, particularly unemployed females.

6. Selective interventions which target structural characteristics such as high crime rates, stigma and discrimination, poverty, poor housing and unemployment.
7. Greater thrust in community work to improve relationships between the Royal Barbados Police Force and young people.
  - Selective interventions targeting young people on ‘the block’ at risk for offending and drug use, through sports programmes that embrace the building of interpersonal skills and self-esteem.

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## 8. Appendix

### Sample Interview Protocol: Understanding Drug Use in Communities

**Time of interview:**

**Date:**

**Place:** Former Haynesville Police Outpost

**Interviewer:** Jonathan Yearwood

**Interviewees:** Participants Focus Group discussions ages 13 -17 years, 18-29 years, male and female.

**Project brief:** The project is a qualitative study of focus group interviews with 28 young people between the ages of 13 and 29 years who reside in the Haynesville and surrounding communities of Durrants village, and Holders Hill. The study was an attempt to through focus group discussions. The information provided by these discussions is useful as it informs responses to address the concerns raised by young people as they attempt to improve their life circumstances.

#### Questions

1. In your opinion what do you perceived as problems
2. Do you perceive drug use to be a problem
3. Why do you think young people use drugs people
4. What do you think are the major problems in your community?
5. What do you recommend to solve major problems, in any, in your community
6. What are your career aspirations
7. Do you believe that drug use can affect your career aspirations
8. What are the larger implications for you if you use drugs

Thank you for participating in this interview. I assure you that your identification will remain anonymous and the responses will be used to inform programmes and interventions addressing concerns of the youth however we hope that you can be available for future interviews.