

# The holistic transformative street-street gang intervention impact and its association with homicide rates in Cali, Colombia.

*El efecto holístico transformador de la intervención de las pandillas y su asociación con la tasa de homicidios en Cali, Colombia*

*O efeito transformador holístico da intervenção das gangues e sua associação com a taxa de homicídios em Cali, Colômbia*

Fecha de recepción: 2019/09/02 | Fecha de evaluación: 2020/03/18 | Fecha de aprobación: 2020/04/16

## **Maria Isabel Gutierrez-Martinez**

MD, MSc, PhD,  
Senior Researcher CISALVA Institute  
Professor at the School of Public Health,  
Division of Health, Universidad del Valle  
Cali, Colombia  
maria.gutierrez@correounivalle.edu.co  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4198-4638>

## **Rubén Dario Valencia**

Psy, Intendente Jefe  
Promoter of Prevention and Education, Metropolitan Police Cali,  
Colombian National Police  
Cali, Colombia  
ruben.valencia3340@correo.policia.gov.co

## **Julian Santaella-Tenorio**

PhD,  
Researcher CISALVA Institute, Division of Health,  
Universidad del Valle  
Cali, Colombia  
julian.santaella@correounivalle.edu.co  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3060-5994>

**To reference this article / Para citar este artículo / Para citar este artigo:** Gutierrez-Martinez, M. I., Valencia, R. D., & Santaella-Tenorio, J. (2020). The holistic transformative street-street gang intervention impact and its association with homicide rates in Cali, Colombia. *Revista Criminalidad*, 62(3): 39-48.

## Abstract

Cali is one of the cities in Colombia and Latin America with the highest rate of homicides, with around one third of homicides being attributed to street gang-related violence. In 2016, the Mayor's office from Santiago the Cali - Colombia, the Police Department and the Cisalva institute from Universidad del Valle worked together to develop an holistic intervention, "TIP -Youth without frontiers", to reduce street gang-related violence in Cali's communes. The intervention comprised six components focusing on developing personal/emotional skills, improving access to health and other public services, reducing substance use, connecting youth with employment and educational opportunities, promoting participation in sports and recreational activities, and improving the restitution of

citizen rights to street gang members. This study aimed to describe the characteristics and implementation of this transformative street gang program and to describe changes in street gang-related homicides that could be associated with the implementation of this program. The program started contacting street gangs in January 2016, recruiting the first street gang members in August 2016. As of December 2018, 2.107 youth (from 84 Police identified street gangs) have participated in the program. A reduction in street gang-related homicides was observed in Cali's communes from 2015 to 2018. In intervened communes these homicides decreased on average by 80%, suggesting that the program could have contributed to the reduction of street gang-related violent behavior in these areas.

## Keywords

Homicides, youth, social prophylaxis, crime prevention (source: Tesaurus de Política Criminal Latinoamericana [Thesaurus of Latin American Criminal Policy] - ILANUD). Street gang-related homicides, Street gang transformation, Street gang intervention, Street gangs (source: author).

## Resumen

Cali es una de las ciudades de Colombia y de Latinoamérica con la tasa de homicidios más alta, con alrededor de un tercio de los homicidios atribuidos a la violencia entre pandillas. En 2016, la Alcaldía de Santiago de Cali - Colombia, la Policía Nacional y el Instituto Cisalva de la Universidad del Valle trabajaron juntos para desarrollar una intervención holística, "TIP - Jóvenes sin fronteras", con el fin de reducir la violencia relacionada con las pandillas en las comunas de Cali. La intervención abarcó seis componentes centrados en desarrollar habilidades personales/emocionales, mejorar el acceso a los servicios de salud y otros servicios públicos, reducir el consumo de sustancias, conectar a los jóvenes con oportunidades laborales y educativas, fomentar la participación en actividades deportivas y recreativas, y restituir los derechos cívicos a integrantes de las pandillas.

El objetivo de este estudio era describir las características y la implementación de este programa de transformación de pandillas, y describir los cambios en la tasa de homicidios relacionados con pandillas que podrían estar asociados con la implementación de este programa. El programa comenzó contactando a las pandillas en enero del 2016, reclutando a los primeros miembros de estas en agosto del 2016. A diciembre del 2018, 2.107 jóvenes (de 84 pandillas identificadas por la policía) han participado en el programa. Se observó una reducción de los homicidios relacionados con pandillas en las comunas de Cali entre 2015 y 2018. En las comunas intervenidas, estos homicidios disminuyeron en promedio un 80%, lo que sugiere que el programa podría haber contribuido a la reducción del comportamiento violento relacionado con las pandillas en estas áreas.

## Palabras clave:

Homicidios, juventud, profilaxis social, prevención del delito (fuente: Tesoro de Política Criminal Latinoamericana - ILANUD). Homicidios relacionados con pandillas, transformación de pandillas, intervención de pandillas, pandillas (fuente: autor).

## Resumo

Cali é uma das cidades da Colômbia e da América Latina com a maior taxa de homicídios, com cerca de um terço dos homicídios atribuídos à violência de gangues. Em 2016, a Prefeitura de Santiago de Cali - Colômbia, a Polícia Nacional e o Instituto Cisalva da Universidad del Valle trabalharam juntos para desenvolver uma intervenção holística, "TIP - Jovens sem fronteiras", a fim de reduzir a violência das gangues nas comunas de Cali. A intervenção abrangeu seis componentes focados no desenvolvimento de habilidades pessoais/emocionais, melhoria do acesso aos serviços de saúde e outros serviços públicos, redução do uso de substâncias, conexão dos jovens com oportunidades de emprego e educação, incentivo à participação em atividades esportivas e recreativas, e a restauração dos direitos cívicos para os membros das gangues. O objetivo deste estudo foi

descrever as características e a implementação do programa de transformação de gangues e descrever as mudanças na taxa de homicídios por gangues que poderiam estar associadas à implementação deste programa. O programa começou contatando as gangues em janeiro de 2016 e foram recrutados os primeiros membros das gangues em agosto de 2016. Em dezembro de 2018, participaram do programa 2.107 jovens (de 84 gangues identificadas pela polícia). Uma redução dos homicídios relacionados a gangues nas comunas de Cali foi observada entre 2015 e 2018. Nas comunas intervencionadas, esses homicídios diminuíram em média 80%, sugerindo que o programa possa ter contribuído para a redução do comportamento violento relacionado a gangues nessas áreas.

## Palavras-chave

Homicídios, juventude, profilaxia social, prevenção do crime (fonte: Tesoro de Política Criminal Latino-americana - ILANUD). Homicídios relacionados a gangues, transformação de gangues, intervenção de gangues, gangues (fonte: autor).

## Introduction

Homicides in Cali and Colombia has been attributed to multiple factors, including the presence of organized crime, drug trafficking, interpersonal violence and the presence of street gangs (Fandiño-Losada et

al., 2017). Particularly, street gangs are known to participate in micro-traffic of drugs and robberies in Cali's neighborhoods (CCV, 2015; Fandiño-Losada et al., 2017), and 34% of all homicides in 2015 in Cali are attributed to street gang violence (OSC, 2016) Cali a city with 2.228.000 inhabitants (DANE 2018)

is one of the cities in Colombia and Latin America with the highest rate of homicides, with a rate of 48 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2018. Although the rate of homicides has been much lower in recent years compared to what it was in the nineties, Cali continues to be in the list of the most violent cities in the world (CCSPJP, 2017). According to the Metropolitan police (personal communication), by 2016 there were 106 known street gangs in Santiago de Cali.

Street gangs are an important challenge for cities worldwide, not only because of delinquency rates but also due to the social cost that having adolescents and young adults participating in these groups. Nevertheless, for many adolescents in context of disadvantage, the street gang is a source of support and protection, especially given the lack of family networks and support. The Eurostreet gang program defines a street gang as “any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity” (Klein and Maxson, 2006). This definition encompasses the young profile of street gang members, while it describes the durable aspect of these groups, founded in the strong cohesion among its members. This cohesion and sense of belonging provides multiple elements to street gang members (e.g., empowerment and support), and these characteristics of street gangs can potentially be promoted in alternative directions, other than illegal activity, to enhance personal growth and well being (Klein and Maxson, 2006).

The risk factor approach to street gang involvement, suggests that there are different risk factors for youth that can be grouped in 5 domains: individual, family, school, peer group, and community (Howell and Egley, 2005). Those who join a street gang usually have multiple risk factors from each of these domains (Howell and Egley, 2005). Structural factors at the neighborhood and family level can influence the risk of street gang membership through attenuation of social bonds (Thornberry *et al.*, 2003). In turn, the weakening of social bonds can elevate the risk of antisocial attitudes and beliefs, with criminal behavior being triggered by feelings of injustice, racial and poverty narratives. Street gangs can offer protection, excitement and increased social bond and other perceived social benefits to disenfranchised youth with weak social bonds. The risk factor approach indicates that intervention programs are needed to reduce risk factors and rehabilitate individuals involved in delinquent activities and to separate street gang-involved youth from these gangs (Thornberry *et al.*, 2003). However, alternatively, interventions could also work with the street gang as a whole to move it

in more pro-social directions, away from illegal activity, and using the interconnection and social bonds of street gangs to promote and strengthen its members' capacities.

Deterrence interventions aim to change the behavior of individuals through the strategic application of enforcement and social service resources to facilitate desirable behaviors (Braga *et al.*, 2018). They usually involve forming an enforcement group conformed by different agencies including the local police, probation, parole, state and federal prosecutors, and federal law enforcement agencies. Focused deterrence interventions can also include alternative approaches aiming at improving the life of street gang members through job training, employment, substance abuse treatment, housing assistance, and a variety of other services and opportunities (e.g., the Cure Violence model in the United States) (Braga *et al.*, 2018). These alternative approaches, do not involve the use of force or the threat of punishment, but focus on teaching individuals new forms of conflict resolution while “denormalizing” the harmful behavior, through 1) interrupting transmission of violence; 2) identifying and changing the thinking of potential transmitters; and 3) changing group norms regarding violence (Butts *et al.*, 2015). In this model, previous street gang members who have changed their lives may work as violence interrupters, i.e. they persuade youth that there are other ways to negotiate the conflict without engaging in more violence. By sharing their experiences, interrupters challenge the norms and narratives used as excuses to commit violent acts, and promoting improved ways of living. This approach also uses outreach workers who connect high-risk individuals to resources in the community, including employment, housing, recreational activities, and education (Butts *et al.*, 2015).

Following the experience from other cities in the world, in 2016 the Mayor's office from Santiago de Cali, Colombia, the chief's office of the Police department, and the Cisalva institute worked together on a project, “TIP –Youth without frontiers”, with the goal to reduce street gang-related violence in Cali's communes. Different street gangs were contacted and invited to participate in the project. The “TIP –Youth without frontiers” intervention attempts to change youth violent behavior in youth in a way similar to public health approaches designed to reduce the impact of harmful behavior, such as smoking or binge drinking. Similar to the strategy used in the cure violence model (Butts *et al.*, 2015), the intervention identifies individuals at risk (i.e., street gang members) who are invited to participate as a group in activities

that offer different elements to grow and to develop personal skills. Given that interventions that attempt to address risk factors from multiple domains are the ones most likely to be successful (Higginson *et al.*, 2015; Klein and Maxson, 2006; O'Brien *et al.*, 2013), this intervention focuses on six components that attempt to work on youth's emotional skills (e.g., self-control and well-being), connect youth employment and educational opportunities and access to health and other public services, while providing spaces for recreation. The program also focuses on enhancing family and social participation and sense of belonging, which can eventually produce changes in youth's beliefs, attitudes and behavior. The program activities also help participants to get well connected with their neighbors, to build new networks and to find their way back in society. This intervention also promotes social inclusion and the restitution of citizen rights to street gang members. In addition, the intervention can set the ground for public policies providing services to youth at disadvantage.

In this paper, we describe the methodology of this intervention, which aimed to reduce violent behavior among street gang members, and its implementation between 2016-18. Because of the intervention's focus on reducing violence in neighborhoods where street gangs are influential, we also examined whether or not this intervention was associated with a reduction in homicides in these communes between 2015-18.

### Description of the "TIP –Youth without frontiers" intervention

"TIP –Youth without frontiers" was supported by the Security and Justice Secretary from the Mayor's office from Santiago de Cali, with funds that were provided through the Municipal development plan from Santiago de Cali 2016-2019, Cali progresses with you ("Cali Progresando Contigo"). The Cisalva Institute, from Universidad del Valle, is the institution executing this project in collaboration with the National Police (Preventive Police Unit, TIP – Gang integral treatment program). The Cisalva Institute and the National Police discuss activities and make all final operational decisions by reaching consensus on these activities. The municipal police department reported there to be a total of 106 street gangs and 1.580 street gang members in Cali in 2014. A total of 84 street gangs have participated of the "TIP –Youth without frontiers" intervention (2,107 youth entering the program). To date, there are 64 active groups participating in the program.

#### *Street gang definition:*

The street gang definition used in this intervention was any group of three or more members, who are between 12 and 28 years old, which has formed spontaneously by affinities of interests, spatial closeness, consanguinity and friendship, and that seeks social recognition denied in childhood (family and/or school). This definition was used as the assessment criteria as to whether an individual was entered into the program. The group settles in a focused area of their community, which they defend as their personal space, usually involving violent confrontations with similar groups. However, a street gang is not a criminal band; they may have committed some felonies, e.g., robberies or even homicides as a result of confrontations with other street gangs, but they have not been paid or sponsored to commit these acts.

#### *The six components of the intervention:*

The TIP program is based on the integral services model approach, which comprises six components that are interrelated, and a transversal component focusing on prioritized communes (by 2018 eight communes had been prioritized). The six components are: 1) characterization, monitoring, follow up and evaluation, 2) psychosocial, drug use intervention and self-care, 3) leadership, job-seeking and performing skills, employment and entrepreneurship training; 4) education to finish secondary school, and to improve access to technical and university training; 5) engagement in sports and recreational activities that improve social cohesion; 6) restitution of citizen rights to youth at disadvantage. Besides these components, the program also focuses on skills to build family cohesion and facilitate social-reparation-activities to neighbors who had been affected by deleterious street gang activities in the past.

The six components are described briefly: 1) The first component "characterization, monitoring, follow up and evaluation" is the official first approach to the group. The groups are exposed to the program goals and characteristics. After at least three pre-encounters with the program staff, street gang members are invited to become part of the program by signing an agreement to no commit anymore felonies and to engage in a process to leave behind their violent behavior. After participants sign the agreement, they are invited to a full-day gathering at a green open space, where they meet other participants and program staff. During this day participants go through three main activities: First, they participate in icebreaker activities. Second, life-plan sheets are provided to each participant in which they can describe their life

short- and medium-term goals for a better future, and the potential barriers they believe can prevent them from reaching their goals and from accessing the city's public services. Third, each participant is surveyed with an instrument that includes questions on socio-demographic, education, employment, alcohol/drug use, their group of friends and family characteristics. The information provided in the survey will serve as the baseline to analyze the impact of the intervention. This component also involves activities to follow up and monitor participants, and to evaluate the intervention. During the monitoring and evaluation parts of the component, operating units (described below) conduct monthly follow-ups of each participant's life-plan, along with follow-ups of participants' performance in the educational training programs. This allows the program staff to measure changes, identify special needs of participants and to provide the appropriate response to these needs. The evaluation section of the component examines whether the program it's serving its purpose.

2) The "psychosocial, drug use intervention and self-care" component involves the development and implementation of a psychosocial intervention aiming at transforming personal goals, improving well-being, strengthening family cohesion and local networks, and facilitating access to medical treatments including those related to substance use, abuse/dependence. 3) The "Leadership, employment, job- seeking and performance skills, and entrepreneurship training" component focuses on human development through the acquisition of occupational skills, the planning of strategies to improve access to job opportunities and to increase the likelihood of being employed, and the gaining of entrepreneurial skills to become self-employed through the creation of their own businesses. 4) The "Education to finish secondary school, and to improve access to technical and university training" component comprises a strategic plan to allow youth to return to secondary school programs and to prepare to enter technical or university programs. This component provides information to identify career options and strategies to prepare for national exams to enter higher-education programs. 5) The "Engagement in sports and recreational activities improving social cohesion" component provides better use of free time through physical and cultural activities aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing the risk of becoming exposed to violence and to substance use. Finally, 6) the sixth component "The restitution of citizen rights to youth street gang members" involves developing activities to promote social citizenship participation and to improve youth's conflict resolution skills.

#### *Operating units:*

Starting in 2016, operating units (OU) (to date nine units have been formed, one per commune) were created to visit and support youth in their usual daily activities. The staff from these units advises and supports youth so they can reach their desired life goals. These OU are comprised by:

1) Community liaisons are individuals living in the neighborhoods who are well known and respected by the community and street gang members in the area. There is one liaison per street gang in the program. Community liaisons are leaders who continuously enhance the participation of youth in all activities of the program. Given that community liaisons know the street gang slang, their interaction styles, and have gain the trust of the gang member, they can better connect with these gangs and promote their participation in the program.

2) Peace promoters from the National Police are police members trained in the development of social strategies to reduce violence in communities, with a special focus on helping youth involved in street gang-related activities. Peace promoters are in charge of implementing activities for each of the six components of the program. They also look after participants, providing support and advice, so participants have a better chance to reach their life goals.

One important variation of the "TIP –Youth without frontiers" compared with other similar models is the participation of peace promoters from the National Police in the implementation of core activities. While risking the participation of some street gang members in the program who may worry about their presence in the area, the participation of these peace promoters is a key aspect that offers a different perspective about law enforcement to youth. As participants interact with the peace promoters, they start building better relationships that can eventually permeate the whole community. Peace promoters also help improving safety in neighborhoods, not only in a preventive manner during the implementation of program activities, but also displaying enforcement operations when homicides occur to prevent future retaliations from those seeking revenge. The articulation of Police peace promoters with the educators for life, the commune coordinators and the community liaisons, help build a stronger core-operating unit that is capable of connecting with youth at risk to offer them alternative opportunities to reach their goals in a safer environment.

3) "Educators for life" are psychologists and social workers working in the implementation of activities for each of the six components of program. Similar



to the peace promoters from the National Police, they look after a number of participants to help them focus and continue to work towards achieving their life goals. There is one educator for life and one peace promoter per two/three street gangs in the program.

4) Commune coordinators are professionals with a social sciences degree, or similar, with experience in community/social work, project development and administration. There is one commune coordinator per commune. Coordinators are in charge of planning, developing and monitoring activities from the six components that will be implemented by the peace promoters and the educators for life in the commune that they coordinate. Each commune coordinator is also in charge of developing activities for one specific component of the program. They share these activities with other commune coordinators, who in turn plan, deliver and monitor these activities in their own commune. Therefore, commune coordinators have a dual responsibility, coordinating all activities in their commune, and also developing activities for a specific component of the program. In addition, commune coordinators are also in charge of keeping records of all activities, information about active/inactive participants (those who continue or to stop being part of the program) and of other important field events that may affect the youth's participation in the program.

Finally, the National Police Peace Promoters coordinator and the Cisalva Institute Project Director follow up and coordinate all activities regarding technical and security issues of the program, based on the information provided by commune coordinators.

The OU direct interaction with youth is based on a behavioral-change model in which OU participants used the methodological principles of the intervention to design and implement different activities. The initial process involves the acknowledgement of the youth group and its participants, and the establishment of communication channels through which trust is built. Once participants have gone through the characterization process, the UOs start providing psychosocial services and activities of the "psychosocial, drug use intervention and self-care" component. As described above, the purpose of this component is to transform personal goals, improve well-being, and strengthening family cohesion, to enhance social active participation and strengthen social capital. These activities, which happen at the street gang territory, are delivered by the educators for life and the peace promoters who have previously planned the activities with commune coordinators. The community liaisons follow up each participant on

the daily duty and continuously supports participants to enhance their participation in all program activities.

In addition, to improve access to the health system, the OU identify the individual's type of affiliation to the health system, whether is contributive (monthly payments proportional to income earned) or subsidized (no payments to the system given low or no income). If families or participants are not affiliated to the system, the OU provides information to participants so they can start the affiliation process according to their income and possibilities. The OU also provides elements to identify domestic abuse and the public services available to abused victims, and provides information about the risks associated with substance use and information on public services providing alternatives to substance use problems. The OU also works with participants to identify all other basic needs and initiates a process to identify private and public services that the city could serve to participants.

### Implementation of the "TIP –Youth without frontiers" intervention

In 2016, 661 youth belonging to 34 street gangs (from 8 communes) joined the "TIP –Youth without frontiers" program. In addition, 773 youth joined the program in 2017 and 673 also joined in 2018. Of the 2107 youth characterized (baseline surveyed) up to 2018, 67.3% were males, 26.2% were between ages 12 to 16, 64.1% were between ages 18 to 25 and 9.7% were between ages 26 to 28. Also, 67.2% were single and 20.3% were living with a partner, 32.8% reported having at least one child. Also, 78.5% were living in stratum I (with the lowest economic status), 68.4% belonged to the subsidized health insurance system and 9.1% were not affiliated to the health system. A small number of these participants had a high-school degree (26%), and 11.4% reported working in formal jobs. The most common illegal drug was marijuana (55.7%); 25.6% of participants were currently using two or more illegal drugs. Also, 10.8% had been incarcerated/detained in a reclusion center, 33.1% were victims of physical or psychological violence in the past six months, and 54% have felt they were at risk of dying while doing activities with their gang.

#### *Services provided to participants:*

The program was able to connect all participating youth with medical, dental, sexual and reproductive health services. Individuals who were not in the health system were assisted in the application process to become part of it. Also, all individuals participated

in activities of the psychosocial care model that addressed prioritized family, drug use, management of grief, and gender aspects.

Also, the program facilitated the return of participants to educational programs including secondary school, courses to prepare for the national admission test for higher education, and technical/university programs. To December 2018, 171 had taken courses to prepare for the national admission test, and 294 had taken this. Also, 97 participants have been enrolled in technical employment related programs, and 101 have completed a technical course in motorcycle repair trainings. From the ones with a secondary school degree, four were admitted in university programs. Participants who did not have a high-school degree attended secondary schools.

In addition, 600 participants have received in-job training, 480 with the security and justice secretariat and 120 with the peace and citizen culture secretariat. A total of 268 participants have become environment promoters of Cali's environmental protection administrative department (DAGMA) and 93 have become peace and culture promoters from the Cali's peace and citizen culture secretariat. Also, 63 report working independently (self-employed) and 55 were working as employees in private companies. About 70% maintained their jobs through all the intervention up to December 2018.

To date 56 physical spaces have been intervened by youth (restorative actions in the community) that included painting of murals, cleaning streets and sowing plants in different parks. Also, multiple recreational and sport activities have been developed, such as soccer tournaments, visits to city parks and visits to movie theaters. Also, a demonstration of their artwork was performed in a city museum for three weeks. In addition, a group of participants worked on a theatre, which they performed at one of the most important city theaters in the city (sold out audience). Moreover, six invisible barriers (frontiers) have been eliminated in four of the eight communes (communes 13, 14, 15 and 16).

### Analyzing changes in street gang-related homicides in intervened communes

Homicide occurrence for each commune from 2015 to 2018 was obtained from Cali's inter-institutional security observatory, the official source of information on all homicides in the city (Guerrero, 2015; Gutierrez-Martinez *et al.*, 2007; OSC, 2016). The security observatory keeps track and analyzes all homicides identified by institutional sources in the city (e.g.,

National Police, Forensic medicine, Public Prosecution Office, Public Health services). In weekly meetings personnel from each of the four information sources discuss all homicides evidence and classify each case according to different motives including coexistence (e.g., personal disputes, domestic violence) violence related to robberies/theft, organized crime related activity (e.g., drug cartels), and street gang-related violence. For the purpose of examining the impact of the program on homicides that are responsive to changes in street gang activity, only street gang-related homicides are analyzed in this study. Changes in street gang-related homicides from 2015 (baseline) to 2017 and 2018 are presented as percent change increase/decrease.

### Change in street gang-related homicides

The intervention was evaluated in eight communes where the program was implemented. In 2015, commune 15 had the highest number of street gang-related homicides ( $n = 79$ ), followed by communes 20 and 14 ( $n = 74$  and  $73$ , respectively) and then by communes 13 and 21 ( $n = 63$  and  $60$ , respectively) (Table 1). From 2015 to 2016, there was a 50% reduction in street gang-related homicides across intervened communes (Table 1). The strongest reductions were observed in communes 18 (82% reduction) and 16 (73%), followed by communes 20 (54%), 15 and 21 (both with a 52% reduction). Communes 13 and 14 (40%), and commune 1 (30%) also had important reduction in homicides (Table 1).

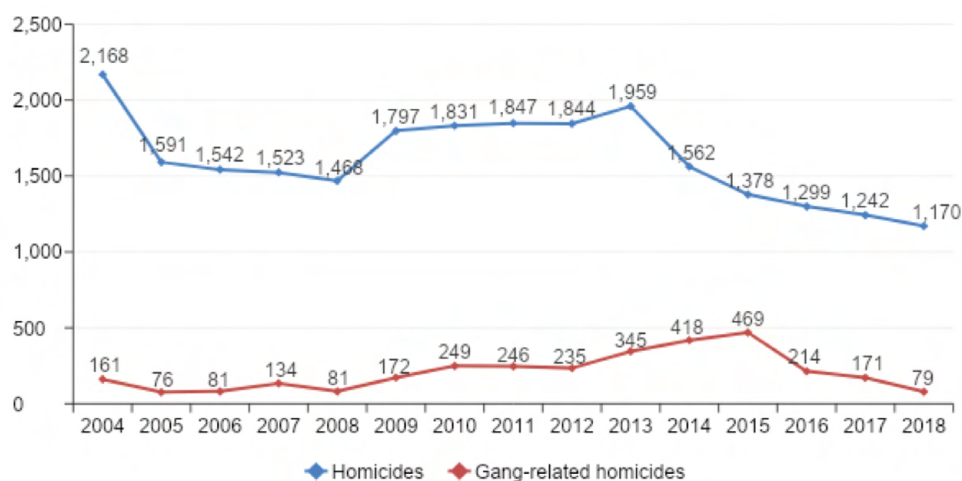
From 2015 to 2018 there were also important reductions (of 73% or greater) in street gang-related homicides across all communes (Table 1). When analyzing all communes together, there was an overall 80% reduction in street gang-related homicides. In commune 1 there were no homicides in 2017 and 2018 (Table 1). Figure 1 shows an increasing trend in the number of street gang-related homicides in Cali from 2009 to 2015 (year with the highest number of these homicides in the series); however, a change in trend was observed starting in 2016, with a marked reduction in the number of street gang-related homicides that continued until 2018.

Regarding the month of occurrence of these events, reductions from 2015 to 2018 occurred across all months varying from 46% in April to 100% in September (Table 2).

**Table 1.**  
**Street gang-related homicides in intervened communes with the TIP program**

Street gang-related homicides (# participants included in the program)	2015	2016	2017	2018	% Change 2017-2016	% Change 2018-2016
<b>Commune 1 (92)</b>	10	7	0	0	-30%	-100%
<b>Commune 13 (179)</b>	63	38	26	16	-40%	-75%
<b>Commune 14 (382)</b>	73	44	28	10	-40%	-86%
<b>Commune 15 (418)</b>	79	38	51	21	-52%	-73%
<b>Commune 16 (231)</b>	26	7	7	7	-73%	-73%
<b>Commune 18 (197)</b>	11	2	4	2	-82%	-82%
<b>Commune 20 (298)</b>	74	34	36	13	-54%	-82%
<b>Commune 21 (310)</b>	60	29	26	12	-52%	-80%
<b>Total (2.107)</b>	396	199	178	81	-50%	-80%

Source: Cali's inter-institutional security observatory



**Figure 1. Homicides and street gang-related homicides in Cali, Colombia, 2004-2018**

Source: Cali's inter-institutional security observatory

**Table 2.**  
**Street gang-related homicides in intervened communes with the TIP program, by month and year**

Street gang-related homicides	2015	2016	2017	2018	Change 2015-2016	Change 2015-2018
<b>January</b>	27	28	10	10	4%	-63%
<b>February</b>	19	21	20	6	11%	-68%
<b>March</b>	34	18	11	15	-47%	-56%
<b>April</b>	35	25	16	19	-29%	-46%
<b>May</b>	38	13	11	6	-66%	-84%
<b>June</b>	41	21	7	3	-49%	-93%
<b>July</b>	34	10	15	3	-71%	-91%
<b>August</b>	40	14	17	6	-65%	-85%
<b>September</b>	23	12	12	0	-48%	-100%
<b>October</b>	27	16	14	7	-41%	-74%
<b>November</b>	26	15	20	5	-42%	-81%
<b>December</b>	52	6	25	1	-88%	-98%
<b>Total</b>	396	199	178	81	-50%	-80%

Source: Cali's inter-institutional security observatory



## Discussion

The present study describes the methodology of the “TIP –Youth without frontiers” approach to reduce violent behavior among youth street gang members in Cali, Colombia and its implementation between 2016-18. It also examines the association of the program with a reduction in street gang-related homicides during the first three years of the program. This intervention sought to improve the life of street gang members through access to multiple health and education services, providing job opportunities, and providing psychosocial support with conflict resolution skills. This strategy was aligned with other deterrence interventions (Braga *et al.*, 2018; Butts *et al.*, 2015) that aim at reducing the burden of youth violence, intervening on structural and proximal risk factors for street gang involvement.

Analysis showed a large reduction in observed street gang-related homicides in communes that received the intervention, a decrease by 73% or more from 2016 to 2018 was noted. It was also observed that homicides continued to go down throughout the study period, suggesting that the continuation of the program keeps contributing to the reduction of homicides in these areas. These reductions are much higher than the ones observed in other similar interventions developed in the United States ((Skogan *et al.*, 2009; Webster *et al.*, 2012) and other countries such in Brazil (Abramovay, M. 2003; Waiselfisz, J.J. & Maciel, M. 2003.).

These findings should be taken with caution, given that the descriptive approach used in this study cannot not rule out that external causes (e.g., the presence of local or national public policies) could explain the observed changes. Future studies using experimental/quasi-experimental approaches (Skogan *et al.*, 2009; Webster *et al.*, 2012), e.g., using control cities not exposed to similar interventions could provide additional evidence of the program effects on homicides. However, the fact that there were major reductions in street gang-related homicides in the intervened communes is an important finding indicating that youth lives are not being lost at the rate they were occurring in 2015. The fact that invisible barriers (frontiers) were eliminated in half of the communes provides additional evidence of a reduction in violent confrontations in these areas.

Previous studies (Skogan *et al.*, 2009; Webster *et al.*, 2012) show how similar approaches to reduce street gang-related violence have confronted multiple obstacles and opposition. For example, the cure

violence model developed in different cities in the United States have faced difficulties in creating new programs due to lack of organization and community leaders, limited community buy-in, and inconsistent program funding (Butts *et al.*, 2015). The “TIP –Youth without frontiers” have also faced difficulties mainly on inconsistent program funding. The program depends on resources from the Mayor’s office and uncertainty about whether or not the new incoming administration will continue funding the program, creates tension among the program staff and participants.

In conclusion, According with this intervention aims at transforming the lives of street gang members in communes at economic disadvantage in Cali using a public health approach has worked with a significant impact. The six components of the program holistic approach are needed to assure the results like to improve access to services, reduce substance use, develop personal skills, and improve access to education and employment opportunities, while improving the restitution of citizen rights to youth street gang members in their transformation and reintegration to become an active member of their society. Important reductions in street gang-related homicides were observed in the intervened communes, suggesting that the program have contributed to the reduction of violent behavior in these areas.

**Funding:** The TIP –Youth without frontiers project was funded by the administrative agreement # 4161.010.27.1.001. from the Security and Justice Secretary from the Mayor’s office from Santiago de Cali, with funds that were provided through the Municipal development plan from Santiago de Cali 2016-2019 - “Cali Progresando Contigo”.

**Acknowledgments:** The authors would like to thank all the project participants and their families; they are the future of the city. We also thank the project staff, the peace promoters from the Metropolitan Police of Cali, Colombian National Police; life educators, liaisons, commune coordinators, database manager and others who made this project a reality. We also would like to thank the chief of the Metropolitan Police of Cali, General Hugo Casas, for his support and contributions that helped consolidating the project; Police ex-Commander Hoover Penilla for proposing in 2014 to work on interventions to transform city street gangs, and Police ex-Commander Nelson Ramirez Suarez for his support to start the project in 2016. We also thank Coronel Abert Lopez, prevention director, all Police regional commanders, and chiefs of local Police stations in intervened areas in Cali. We thank Dr. Laura Lugo, ex-secretary to Government (Secretaria de Gobierno) of Cali, for proposing conducting this

project in 2016. Finally, we thank the Mayor of Cali Dr. Morris Armitage for believing in this project, his support and funding through the Security and Justice Secretary.

## References

- Abramovay, Miriam (coord.) (2003) *Abrindo Espaços: Avaliação do Programa em Bahia*. UNESCO, Universidade Católica de Brasília, UNIRIO, Brasília.
- Braga, A., Weisburd, D., Turchan, B., (2018). Focused Deterrence Strategies and Crime Control. *Criminology & Public Policy* 17(1), 205-250.
- Butts, J., Roman, C., Bostwick, L., Porter, J., (2015). Cure Violence: A Public Health Model to Reduce Gun Violence. *Annu. Rev. Public Health* 36, 39-53.
- Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y la Justicia Penal, (2017). *Listado de las 50 ciudades más violentas del mundo en 2017*. Mexico: Seguridad, Justicia y Paz; 2018. Available from: <http://www.seguridadjusticiappaz.org.mx/ranking-de-ciudades-2017> Accessed January 12, 2019.
- Cali Como Vamos, (2015). *Informe de calidad de vida en Cali, 2014*. Available at: [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/ba6905\\_93042cae8c56487993759197a2ae6945.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/ba6905_93042cae8c56487993759197a2ae6945.pdf) Accessed: March 05, 2019
- Fandiño-Losada, A., Guerrero-Velasco, R., Mena-Muñoz, J., Gutiérrez-Martínez, M., (2017). Efecto del control del crimen organizado sobre la violencia homicida en Cali (Colombia). *CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*. 116, 159-178.
- Guerrero, R., (2015). Big Data Are Reducing Homicides in Cities across the Americas. *Scientific American* 313(4), 46-50.
- Gutierrez-Martinez, M.I., Del Villin, R.E., Fandino, A., Oliver, R.L., (2007). The evaluation of a surveillance system for violent and non-intentional injury mortality in Colombian cities. *Int J Inj Contr Saf Promot* 14(2), 77-84.
- Higginson, A., Benier, K., Shenderovich, Y., Bedford, L., Mazerolle, L., Murray, J., (2015). Preventive Interventions to Reduce Youth Involvement in Gangs and Gang Crime in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 2015:18. DOI: 10.4073/csr.2015.18.
- Howell, J., Egley, J.A., (2005). Moving risk factors into developmental theories of gang membership. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 3(334-354).
- Klein, M., Maxson, C., (2006). *Street gang patterns and policies*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- O'Brien, K., Daffern, M., Chu, C., Thomas, S., (2013). Youth gang affiliation, violence, and criminal activities: A review of motivational, risk, and protective factors. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 18(4), 417-425.
- OSC, (2016). Observatorio de Seguridad. *Muertes por homicidio en Santiago de Cali 2015*. Alcaldía Municipio Santiago de Cali. Available at: [http://www.cali.gov.co/observatorios/publicaciones/115087/informes\\_anual\\_homicidios/](http://www.cali.gov.co/observatorios/publicaciones/115087/informes_anual_homicidios/) Accessed: March 05, 2019.
- Skogan, W., Hartnett, S., Bump, N., Dubois, J., (2009). *Evaluation of CeaseFire-Chicago*. Evanston, IL: Inst. Policy Res., Northwest. University.
- Thornberry, T., Krohn, M., Lizotte, A., Smith, C., Tobin, K., (2003). *Gangs and delinquency in developmental perspective*. Cambridge University Press, New York, NY.
- Waiselfisz, J.J. & Maciel, M. (2003) *Revertendo Violencias, Semeando Futuros: Avaliação de Impacto do Programa Abrindo Espaços no Rio de Janeiro e em Pernambuco*. UNESCO, Brasília
- Webster, D., Mendel Whitehill, J., Vernick, J., Parker, E., (2012). *Evaluation of Baltimore's Safe Streets Program: Effects on Attitudes, Participants' Experiences, and Gun Violence*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence.