

RESTORE BELIZE

Mary Vasquez

Experts' Meeting on Strengthening
the Public Health Approach to
Youth Violence in the Americas

RESTORE



BELIZE

BPD attributes 82.4% of the murders committed in Belize City between 2014 - 2017 to gang-related violence.

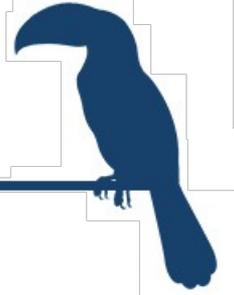
Belize is both a Central American and Caribbean nation - situated in two of the most violent sub-regions globally.

In 2017, Belize's murder rate was 37.2 (142 total murders) making it the 7th highest murder rate in the world, the 3rd highest in Central America and the 3rd highest in the Caribbean.

Google Earth

US Dept of State Geographer
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Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO

Lessons Learned



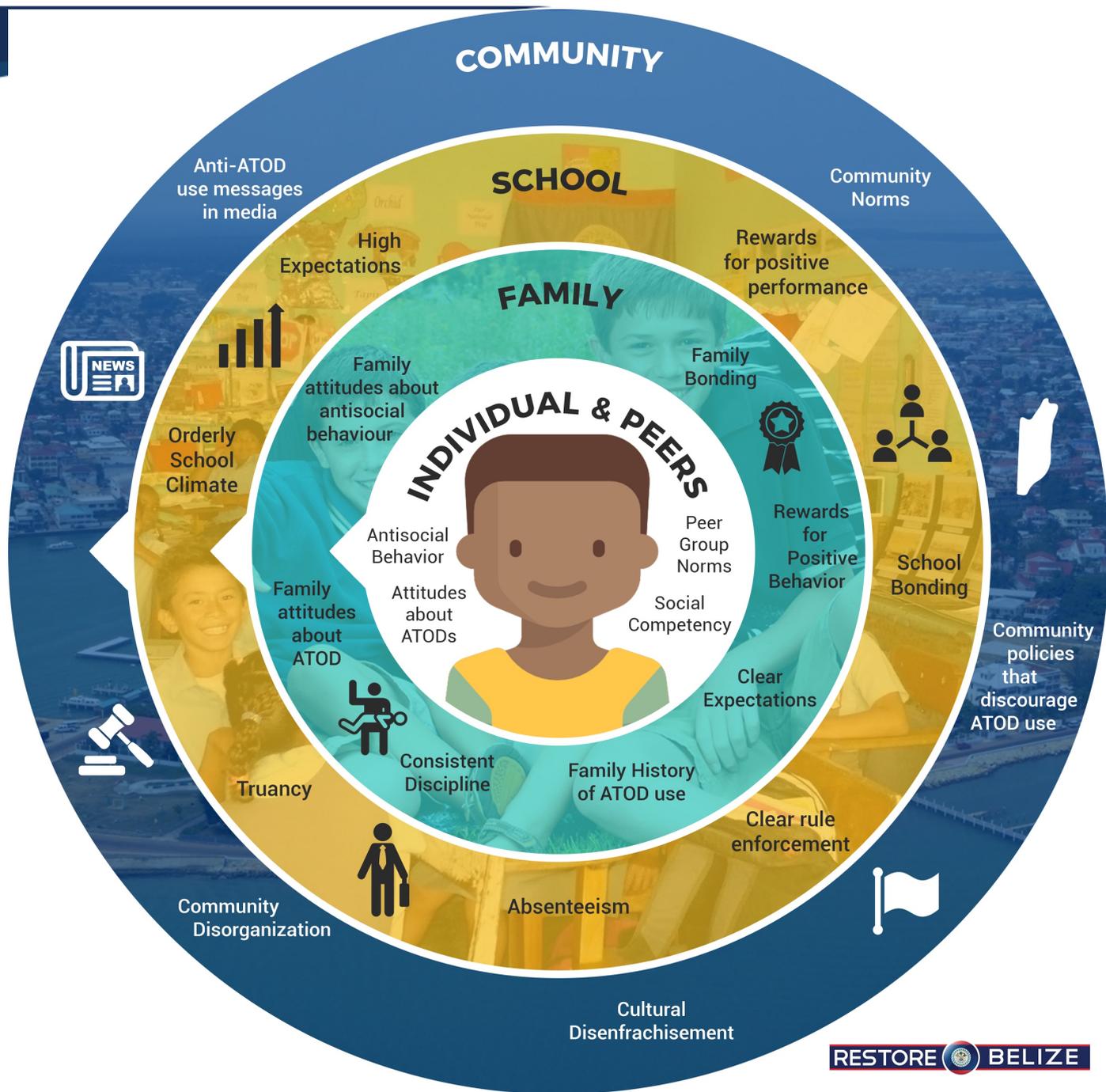
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Complex Trauma

2

**Gang crime is a
“wicked problem”**

Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecological Framework



Harsh Human Ecology



Adult with HIV

A red awareness ribbon icon, symbolizing HIV/AIDS.

Low Literacy

An illustration of a young girl with dark hair, wearing a purple shirt, sitting on the floor and reading a book.

Parents unable to Read/Write

An illustration of an open book with a pen resting on it, symbolizing literacy.

Poor Performance

An icon of a blue circle containing a white 'F-' grade, representing poor academic performance.

Poor Nutrition

An illustration of a young boy with a sad expression, holding his stomach. A speech bubble next to him says "RUMBLE", indicating hunger.

Child with Rash

An illustration of a child's torso showing a dark skin rash on the arms and chest.

Constantly Ill

An illustration of a person in a dark suit coughing into their elbow, symbolizing illness.

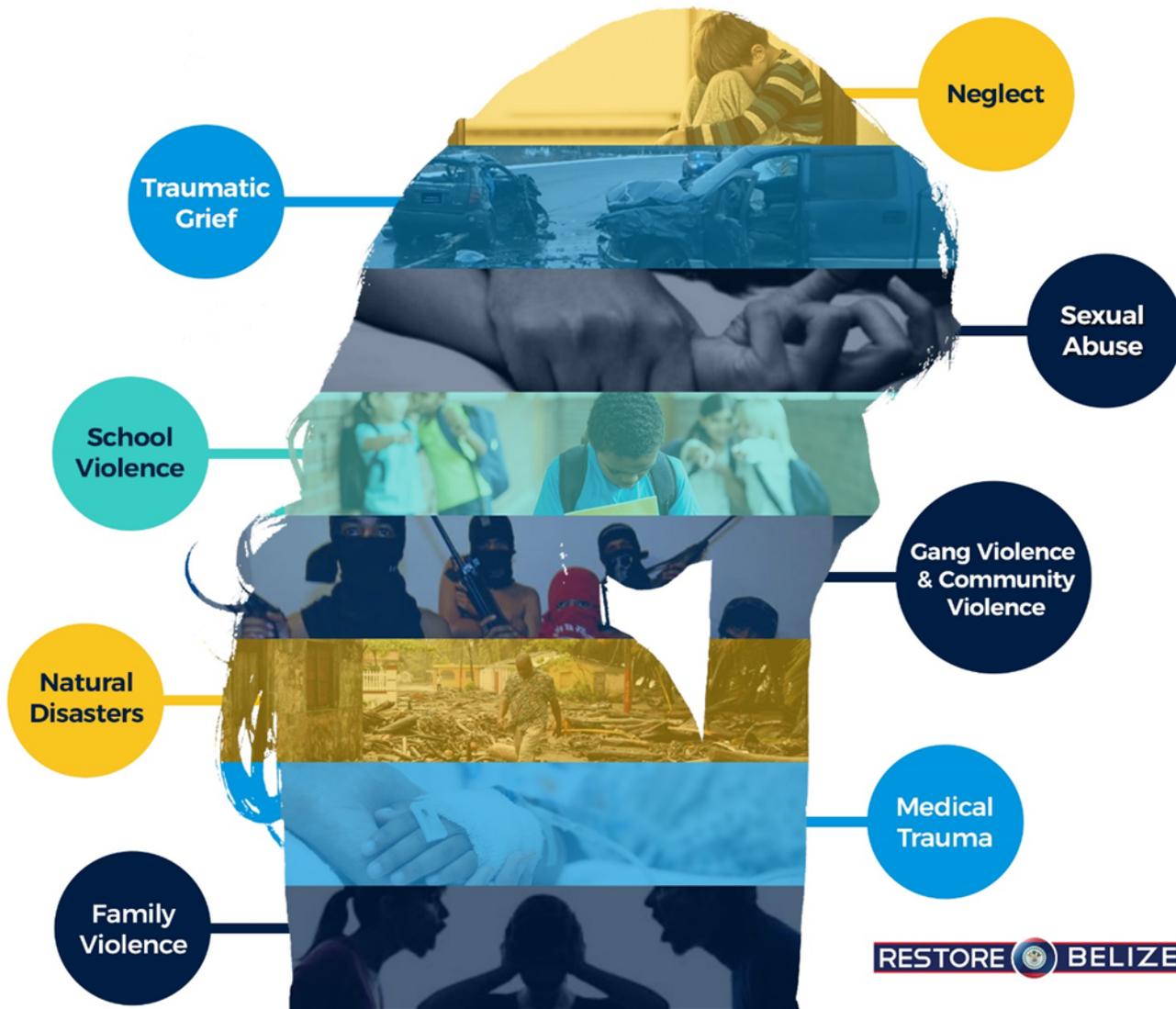
Poor Sanitation

An illustration of overflowing trash, including plastic bottles, food waste, and bags, symbolizing poor sanitation.

Chronic Illness

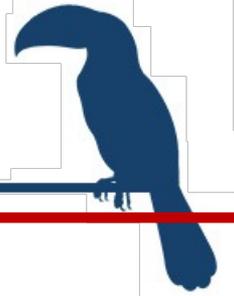
An illustration of a person in a dark suit with a heart rate monitor symbol on their chest, holding a pill bottle, representing chronic illness.

Complex Trauma



THE METAMORPHOSIS PROGRAMME

– BUILDING RESILIENCY IN BOYS AT HIGH RISK OF GANG RECRUITMENT



OBJECTIVES

- Foster resiliency by promoting protective factors to mitigate risk in their daily lives.
- Provide parents with knowledge and skills they need to become effective parents.
- Build capacity in schools to reinforce protective factors

DESIGN

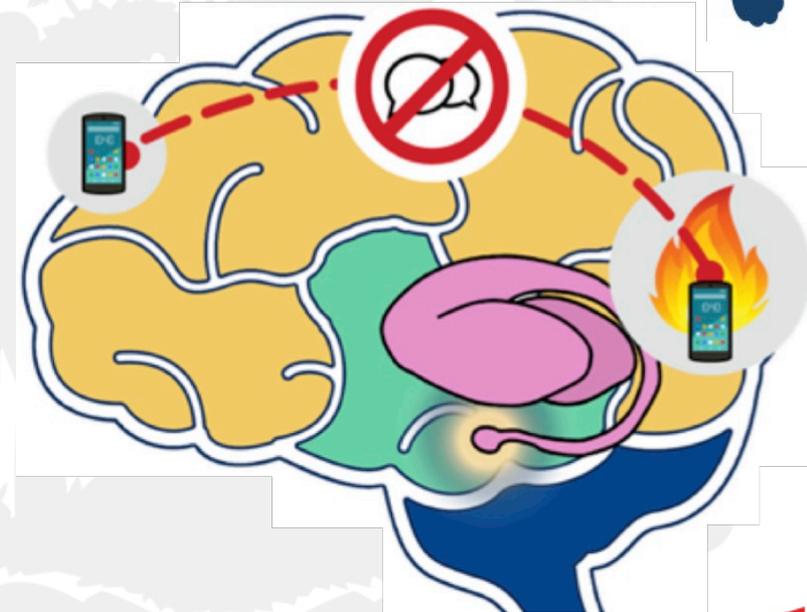
Multiple protective factors

- Individual counselling
- Psychiatric & medical referrals
- Remedial academic classes
- Mentorship
- Extracurricular activities
- Social work support for families
- School Liaison
- Social support network

How Trauma Affects the Brain



- Smaller brain size and structures
- Fewer neural connections
- Heightened baseline level of arousal
- Difficulties with learning, memory, and emotional regulation
- Difficulty trusting others and forming healthy relationships
- Increased behavioural issues
- Increased risk for mental health issues
- Lower self-esteem
- Focus on survival vs. future orientation



Lifelong Impact of Complex Trauma



Literature

- 100's of studies have found that the more exposure a child has to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), the higher the child's risk for poor educational, social, health, and economic outcomes in childhood and adulthood
- "Positive experiences and supportive relationships provide the buffering that allows children to withstand, or recover, from adverse experiences."

Sege, R., et al. (2017) **Balancing Adverse Childhood Experiences with HOPE (Health Outcomes of Positive Experience): New Insights into the Role of Positive Experience on Child and Family Development, Casey Family Programs.**

Trauma Informed Care



Commitment to Trauma Awareness and Practice

Understanding the Impact of Violence



Implemented through policies, procedures and practices



Create a safe environment:

- Physical safety
- Trustworthiness
- Clear and consistent boundaries
- Transparency
- Predictability

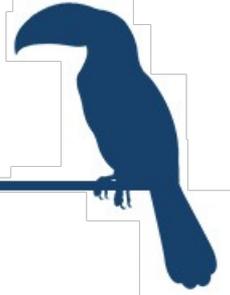
Build relationships and connectedness:

- Respect
- Compassion
- Acceptance and non-judgment
- Mutuality
- Collaboration
- Peaceful coexistence

Empower citizens:

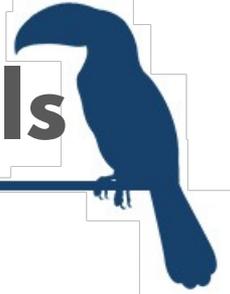
- Build Self-esteem
- Choice
- Strengths perspective
- Skill building

Quality Child Friendly Schools



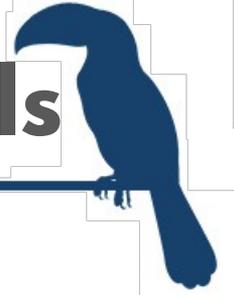
- School Governance and Identity
- Effective Leadership
- Teacher Competence and Commitment
- Delivery of the Curriculum
- School - Community Relationships
- Quality Assurance
- Safe, Healthy and Supportive Learning Community
 - Nutrition, Counselling, Trauma Informed Practice, Risk Identification and Intervention, Conflict Mediation

Trauma Informed Practice in Schools



- Understanding Impact of Armed Violence on Children
- Impact of Trauma on Child & Adolescent Development
- Impact of Trauma on Learning & School Performance
Impact of Family Violence on Children &
- Understanding Grief & Loss
- Classroom & School-Based Interventions
- Early Identification of Students at Risks

Trauma-informed Practice in Schools



- Summer training (40-hour) in TIPS
- Purposeful dialogues & strategic planning with school leadership for Quality Child Friendly Schools
- Counselling for children and teachers
- On-going technical support and training throughout the school year
 - Classroom observation and feedback to teachers and school administrators
 - 4 hours of training courses per month
 - On-going hands-on coaching
- School feeding programme (ideally)

Challenges



- **All services to violent, traumatized communities need to be trauma-sensitive, including police.**
- **Caregivers are also traumatized and so need healing from trauma**
- **Cultural beliefs do not support children's rights – traditionally punitive, religious constraints, belief that violence, etc.**
- **Stigma relating to mental health care**
- **Extreme scarcity of mental health professionals – qualified counselors, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses**



Children at St. John's Anglican practicing mindfulness

Policy and Practical Implications



- Transgenerational transmission of violent behavior and trauma -> violence epidemic is deep and wide
- No single type of violence can successfully be addressed in isolation – structural, family, sexual, institutional
- Gang-violence is a complex problem which requires new types of governance, a coordinated multisectoral approach, different approach to problem solving
- Need to re-focus governmental investments into violence prevention rather than suppression
- Need to integrate policies and programmes in security, education, health and social support

THANK YOU