

Moving Youth Away from the Market for Crime in Honduras

i2i Dime

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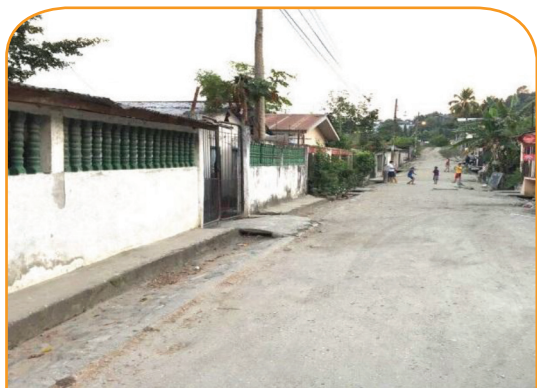
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MOVING YOUTH AWAY FROM THE MARKET FOR CRIME IN HONDURAS



The homicide rate in Honduras was 90.4 per 100,000 persons in 2012. This makes Honduras the most violent country in the world.

Moving Youth Away from the Market for Crime will study the protective role of a labor market intervention designed to steer at-risk youth towards legal, individually and socially productive opportunities.



THE SAFER MUNICIPALITIES PROJECT IMPACT EVALUATION

Context

With a 2012 homicide rate of 90.4 per 100,000 inhabitants, Honduras currently holds the title of most violent country in the world. Violence is concentrated in urban areas, with 65% of homicides occurring in 5% of municipalities. 94% of homicide victims are male, with men aged 15 to 34 years old accounting for 63% of the total.

Drug trafficking is the main factor associated with increasing levels of violence, and its negative impacts are exacerbated by socioeconomic factors including poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunity. In Honduras, half of secondary school-age youth do not attend school, and only 35% graduate in the expected year. For those that do graduate, job prospects are limited. Low-quality labor market opportunities are not sufficient to protect youth from taking part in criminal activity and being involved in increasingly serious and violent crime.

The *'Moving Youth Away from the Market for Crime'* impact evaluation will study the protective role of a labor market intervention aiming to steer youth towards legal, individually and socially productive opportunities. The study will be carried out in the three urban municipalities, covered by the World Bank-assisted Safer Municipalities Project and with a homicide rate above the national average. Two experimental studies will be carried out of a program targeting two groups of at-risk youth: (i) those currently in secondary school grades 7-9 and (ii) those that are no longer in school nor strongly attached to the formal labor market.

Interventions

The Safer Municipalities Project Impact Evaluation is built around two labor market interventions, run in collaboration with the private sector.

The **Summer Jobs Initiative** targets youth currently in secondary school grades 7-9. This group exhibits a high incidence of school dropout after 9th grade, causally linked to criminality and violence later in life. Participants will be provided with a 2-3 months internship during the long school break from November to January, alongside group-based cognitive behavioral therapy. In order to disincentivize drop-out from school, participants will be compensated through grants that cover school costs for the subsequent school year.

The Temporary Jobs Initiative targets youth aged 16 and above that are currently not studying nor strongly attached to the labor market. This group will receive a longer-term Temporary Jobs Initiative offering internships of about 6 months, preceded by 3–6 months of vocational training and group-based cognitive behavioral therapy. To discourage youth from dropping out of school in order to access this program, participation will be limited to persons that have not been enrolled in school for at least the past one year.

An add-on **Individual Mentoring Scheme** will be provided to a randomly selected subset of participants in both initiatives. Individual mentoring may continue past the end of either Jobs Initiative.

Outcomes and Impact Mechanisms

The impact evaluation study is designed to deliver evidence on various mechanisms through which the Jobs Initiatives may achieve impact relating to criminality and antisocial behavior, soft skills, mental health, education, and labor market outcomes. These are:

1. Increased access to legal labor market opportunities, which can serve as a protective factor against antisocial behavior through an income effect that renders the “need” for crime less prominent, and a human capital effect whereby training and employment provide skills and experience valued in the labor market, thereby raising expected future (legal) labor market wages.
2. Development of professional skills and attenuating cognitive biases that might trigger violent behavior through life-skills training and cognitive behavioral therapy.
3. Strengthening and improving gains from both human and social capital development through mentoring

as a reinforcement and reminder mechanism.

Impact Evaluation Design

The Summer Jobs Initiative and Temporary Jobs Initiative will be evaluated in parallel using a common randomized controlled trial (RCT) study design.

In both cases, the RCT design relies on oversubscription of eligible individuals. This allows for the random assignment of such persons to either the first treatment group T1 (Jobs Initiative with no individual mentoring) or the control group C. A subset of individuals assigned to the primary treatment group will be further assigned to the add-on individual mentoring scheme, and this group will comprise the second treatment group T2 (Jobs Initiative with individual mentoring).

This design will allow us to isolate the causal impact of each Jobs Initiative on the outcomes of interest and to quantify the additional benefits, if any, of the add-on individual mentoring scheme.

Policy Relevance

The impact evaluation study described examines the protective role of a labor market intervention in encouraging youth to engage in legal, individually and socially productive opportunities.

Evidence on supply-side programs aiming to enhance the technical/vocational skills of individual job candidates through education and on-the-job training in high-violence contexts is disappointing, suggesting little benefit beyond limited/rare short-term positive impacts. However, literature examining interventions targeting soft skills and personality traits suggest these have the potential to augment and sustain short-term impacts observed in more traditional

50% of secondary school-age youth do not attend school, and only 35% graduate in the expected year. Poor labor market prospects drive youth into the market for crime

The Safer Municipalities Project targets three high-violence municipalities which together account for 11% of homicides in the country

Men aged 15–34 years account for 63% of total victims

job-training interventions, but there is very little evidence of combined soft-and-hard skills approaches from low-and middle-income countries. The impact evaluation studies in Honduras are designed to help fill this gap.

This study has been developed and will be implemented in close collaboration with the Safer Municipalities Project team. Data, evidence, and knowledge generated throughout will be used to inform design modifications and eventual scale-up of the interventions described here to other high-crime municipalities in Honduras (contingent on positive results). Additionally, this experience will be relevant for other countries in the region—in particular neighboring El Salvador and Guatemala which also suffer from very high rates of violence and crime—and beyond.

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