Prospectus

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**INTRODUCTION**

In Trinidad and Tobago, despite the small population of approximately 1.4 million people in the country, there is a significant crime problem that is mostly committed by young people and, more specifically, by young men. The government has developed a ministry that focuses wholly on youth development. Despite these many programs available to young people, the crime rate continues to climb. Previous governments have had a youth division as part of a ministry such as; Youth and Gender Affairs or The Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, but the current government thought it was worthwhile to establish a ministry focused solely on youth issues, so there is currently the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service (MYDNS).

The purpose of this action research project is to address the problem of the lack of sustainable youth development programs in Trinidad and Tobago that effectively address the youth issues in the country and thus address the ever-increasing crime problem. This action research will seek to determine the most effective components in youth development programming that will aid in their longevity and also aid in the changed behaviour of young people in conflict with the law, reduce recidivism, keep young people engaged and attracted to positive aspects of society while empowering them to be productive members of society.

# Statement of the Problem

**Problem Overview**

The problem is significant because although the MYDNS produces many programmes every financial year, there has yet to be a substantial reduction in criminality performed by those in the youth population. Depending on the programme, it is highly subscribed to; however, during the programme, they experience dropouts for various reasons and are not attractive to those who would genuinely benefit from the multiple initiatives that the MYDNS put forward. Despite what those within the field would describe as easy access, a sector of society always claims that the government does not provide adequate opportunities to young people or that they are unfairly subscribed. For fiscal year 2023/2024, the government, by way of the MYDNS, has proposed to do 21 projects for the year, which is more than the previous fiscal year. It has been observed that, the most successful programmes are ongoing rather than a one-off programme with a lot of pomp and ceremony; programmes, where young people can build relationships with mentors or peer mentors, yield the most change or beneficial outcomes.

This action research project seeks to add to the effectiveness of programs that are available to youths, by targeting the demographic of young persons who may have been in the juvenile justice system and, unfortunately, have little access or interest in the programs currently being offered. The project would seek to empower and support youth who have been in conflict with the law. It also aims to filter a percentage of juveniles into appropriate government programs as a means of combating recidivism.

# Background of the Problem

## Historical Context

Offer historical and current context with relevant citations from the literature.

# Analysis through Sociological Theory

In Trinidad and Tobago (TT), particular communities and demographics are perceived as the country’s significant perpetrators of crime and deviant activities. An offshoot of symbolic interactionism, labelling theory is the most aligned theory that addresses the issue of crime in communities that may be considered “hot spots”. Formulated in the 1960s by American Sociologist Howard Becker, labelling theory argues that individuals only become deviant when a label is applied to them; they then adopt the label by displaying behaviours, actions, and attitudes associated with it [(Popa & Iurchevici, 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?HUbbcv). Labelling theory emphasises that what may be regarded as deviant is determined not so much by the behaviours themselves or the people who commit them but by the reactions of others to these behaviours. Labelling theory is derived from the symbolic interactionism theory in sociology, which asserts that facts are based on and directed by symbolism. [(Aleksandar & Rustemi, 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?F7km2W). Labelling theory holds that people become deviant because others force that identity on them. Unfortunately, this process occurs due to the stigma attached to the label.

Knowledge of the theory allows us to conceptualise how the past behaviours of deviant labelled individuals can be reinterpreted when considering the label that may have been placed on them during their lifetime. As a result, what is considered deviant changes over time and can vary significantly across cultures [(*Introduction to Sociology*, 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?ViUCwj). In Trinidad and Tobago, it is common for young Afro-Trinidadian males to be considered criminals based on the area in which they live. This phenomenon is known as territorial stigmatisation, where the othering of people is normalised, and the negative construction, representation, and governing of specific geographical communities and places is perpetuated [(Meade, 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?K96mBj). Unfortunately, territorial stigmatisation is reinforced via state policy, social service delivery, policing, and political programmes, and through a myriad of everyday cultural practices or sayings, places are dismissed as ‘slums’ and ‘problem neighbourhoods’ in both popular or traditional media discourses [(Meade, 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?cASULf).

# Faith-Based Analysis

In his book Broken Signpost, NT Wright names justice as one of the markers human beings display as a universal longing. Within the frame of youth development, this longing can be observed when considering the aspects of crime that occur within our male youth population and adequately addressing the grievances they cause. Many countries have established justice systems, and while these systems should be restorative, they may present further problems to the societies in which they occur [(Wright, 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?bRFZ4I). According to Wright, although we know that justice matters, it is sometimes difficult or impossible to achieve. Biblical justice is characterised by radical generosity, universal equality, life-changing advocacy, and asymmetrical responsibility [(Keller, 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?21n7ii). God’s justice is retributive and reparative; he punishes evildoing and restores the victims of injustice. In scripture, God’s restorative justice is much more prominent than his retributive justice, which establishes justice for those wronged and mistreated and meets punishment for those who have perpetrated those wrongs[(Keller, 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?k6RoPl).

Howard Zephr, the founding father of Restorative Justice, developed the concept based on his study of the theology of “shalom”. His concept of restorative justice was an opportunity to bring people to a state of shalom, the ideal condition God originally intended. Restorative justice does not let the offenders be off the hook; it requires them to be accountable for their actions. In the process, they will learn the implications of their offences to the victims and how to make things right. Justice is not served by punishing the offenders but by restoring shalom. Injustice is the absence of shalom [(Effendy, 2020)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?DSqMum). “Restorative Justice is a process whereby parties with a stake in a specific offence collectively resolve how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future (Tony Marshall, 1999, p. 5) [(Kirkwood, 2022)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?tDh9X7).” Restorative justice involves persons who committed a crime and those who have been affected by the offence. It can also include those indirectly affected by the offence, such as family members of the person who committed it or those harmed by it [(Kirkwood, 2022)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?rsIGIp).

# Designing the Intervention

The restorative intervention to be implemented for this particular action research will involve the Youth Training Centre (YTC), a rehabilitation centre for young people. Although it is not a prison, the facility falls under the ambit of the Prison Service and is guided by the Young Offenders Act of Trinidad and Tobago. The YTC is designed to properly administer and manage sentences imposed by the Court on young offenders; provide secure custody and physical care which fosters mature development and minimises the damaging effects of incarceration; provide constructive and satisfying activities, including vocational training, general education and quiet, active and creative activities [(*New Board at Youth Training Centre | Local News | Trinidadexpress.Com*, 2014)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?x9xcOf).

The intervention will include two components: a skill-based vocational barbering training session determined based on consultation with the YTC staff, and a personal development coaching session to encourage employability, civic-mindedness and a better sense of self to lessen recidivism. Following the National Youth Policy (2020-2025) Pilar 1; Prioritizing Youth Economic Participation and Empowerment, this intervention strategy emphasises the promotion of youth skills for inclusive economic growth. A focus is placed on modern and “future-focused career guidance and planning, targeted career and employability skills development, education-related work experiences and opportunities for career growth.” Pillar Two of the national youth policy promotes harnessing youth social and intellectual capital. It further emphasises lifelong learning and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes that are more responsive to emerging labour markets, youth interests, and the nation’s sustainable developmental needs. The skills portion of the intervention will be done by a collaborating training agency that does TVET programmes within the Trinidad and Tobago prison system. This researcher will conduct personal development sessions where she seeks to use an appropriate curriculum that will holistically benefit the participants.

## Purpose and Objectives

* To reduce recidivism, harness youth social and intellectual resources, and encourage lifelong learning through the introduction of Technical Vocational training in core skill areas.
* Increasing the marketability of inmates by training them in appropriate skills
* Changed the mindset of participants towards productive activities
* Reduce recidivism rates of the inmate population

## Sociological Theory

Becker believes that the first consequence of labelling a person is consolidating his deviant status, which automatically becomes dominant. Labelling theory is considered an essential approach in deviant research, suggesting that people become deviant because political authorities and others name their behaviour by assigning specific labels [(Aleksandar & Rustemi, 2021)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?mdQTQi). Based on these considerations, the intervention strategies will include personal development sessions focusing on the young person`s empowerment. The strategy will provide a juxtaposition to the labels that they would have previously received and should aid in improving their sense of self.

## Faith-Based Considerations

NT Wright describes justice as one of the universal longings humans have to see in the world; it is humanity`s need to see things put right where people experience consequences for their actions;

We all know justice matters, but we all f ind it difficult or sometimes downright impossible to achieve it. In other words, we find that justice serves as a signpost pointing toward what is foundational or essential to our lives. At the same time we find that it is a broken signpost in that, no matter how hard we strive to live up to the ideal, we fail, often in ways that create more injustice (Wright, 2020, p. 16).

Scripture not only encourages justice to be met and the restoration of individuals who may have deviated from the Lord'ss original plan for humanity. Jeremiah 22:3 says, “ This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.” [(*Bible Gateway Passage*, n.d.-b)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?cCnsDt). However, 2 Peter 3:9 reminds us that the Lord would prefer the restoration of those who have fallen short; “ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance”[(*Bible Gateway Passage*, n.d.-a)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?nCDjtq). Based on these principles, the intervention will seek to aid in that longing that humans have by aiding in the justice system as these young people are in a rehabilitative institution and encouraging a component of Christianity by incorporating sessions with a biblical emphasis.

## Target Group or Issue

YTC participants who are between the ages of 16 and 25 and are interested in learning a vocational skill that the institution does not consistently offer.

## Strategies and Activities

A two-pronged approach will be used: a practical vocational session will be conducted along with personal development sessions that will aid participants in developing their self-efficacy, employability, and civic-mindedness.

## Resources Needed

Vocational(Barbering tutor), barbering equipment, handouts, two speakers for personal development session

**Timeline**

Six weeks with two sessions per week.

## Anticipated Challenges

Suitable barbering tutor to volunteer service, funding to buy barbering equipment,

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## Measuring Success

* Competency Standards will be assessed based on Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQ) for the barbering course.
* A pre-and post-test will be administered during the personal development sessions.

# Ethical Considerations

## Adherence to Professional Ethics

As a Youth Development Practitioner, ethical boundaries must establish and comply with ethical boundaries when working with young people to ensure the professionalism of the field. Although mentor/ mentee relationships begin to develop, there are identified standards, principles, and ethical guidelines for effectively working with young people, especially when meaningful engagement is desired [(Lansford & Banati, 2018)](https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?87ij0g). In working with young people, especially those who are institutionalised, the privacy rules of the establishment must be adequately followed for the entire duration of the project to ensure exploitation of the youth population does not occur although they may not all be minors.

**Respect for Persons**

Ensure respect for the individuals and communities involved in your research, even though observational or indirect data collection will be employed.

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## Confidentiality and Privacy

Confidentiality agreements will be administered to participants although there will be no individual identifying traits used in the writeup of this action research project.

## Avoiding Harm

For this project, this researcher will work closely alongside the YTC staff to ensure that the project is relevant to the participants' needs so that best-practice interventions can be implemented.

## Cultural Sensitivity

Fortunately the researcher is familiar with this demographic of young people through their community work, the speakers chosen will also be those who are familiar with working with youth in conflict with the law.

## Addressing and Disclosing Bias

Biases will attempt to be avoided by working in close contact with the assigned DSL committee to ensure that any writing or analysis done are neutral and objective.

## Transparency and Accountability

Regular check-ins with the DSL committee will aid in the accountability of the researcher.

## Site Permissions

The prospectus template will be adapted to a proposal submitted to the Commissioner of prisons to gain access to the YTC participants.

# References

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