

THE INFLUENCE OF GANGS ON JUVENILES: IMPLICATIONS FOR
EDUCATION AND COUNSELING

Approved by Tom Lo Guidice on April 23, 2012

**THE INFLUENCE OF GANGS ON JUVENILES:
IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION AND COUNSELING**

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Racine County Sherriff

Safe Haven

Professor Tom Lo Guidice

My Family and Friends

My Lord and Savior

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to report on an investigation of juveniles and the different gangs and their associates. This report will be helpful to parents and social workers of teens. It will provide a basic knowledge of the different gangs. It will inform and educate those that work closely with teens on the different warning signs that they should watch for. This study will also give recommendations for the parents and social workers to help re-direct their teens if they are headed into the wrong direction. This will talk about the different social effects on gangs and the role they play to juveniles. This study will take a closer look into the gangs that are established in the Racine, Wisconsin area and the impact it has had within my community. Also included is an evaluation of the various programs that are utilized in Racine to help our young people get out of and stay out of gangs.

Statement of the Problem

Why is it that young people want to join gangs? How may gang affiliation be discouraged?

Definition of Terms

Juvenile Delinquency: Youth that are out of control and break the law. Conduct by a juvenile characterized by antisocial behavior that is beyond parental control and, therefore, subject to legal action. Specifically, a violation of the law committed by a juvenile and not punishable by death or life imprisonment (Merriam-Webster, 2011).

Gangs: A group of persons working together to do unlawful or antisocial ends. A group of persons having informal and usually close social relations (Merriam-Webster, 2011).

Delimitations of Research

The references used for the review of literature were collected over a period of 40 days using the resources of the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin Platteville specifically to determine what makes young adults trend towards the gang activity and lifestyle.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Understanding the literature involves several subtopics including different types of gangs, local gangs, and what causes juveniles to get drawn into gangs. The information will discuss the different types of community and social areas and how they affect gangs. Neighborhood, family, peers, and other influences in a juvenile's life can explain what lures a young person to become involved in gang activities. Having a better understanding of these elements can make working with these behaviors more effective.

Different Types of Gangs

Gangs have been around for many years, but not until the early 1980's were many of communities effective by gang violence. Most gangs do not have a good reputation for being pleasant people in their communities. Most gangs promote criminal activity instead of combating against it. Usually they are organized based on race. The members may be all African American, Hispanic, Caucasian or even Asian. An example of a white gang could be a group called the "White Supremacists". Gangs could be organized based on a particular purpose, belief, religion or interest. Ethnicity and race does play a major role in our juveniles joining gangs. Researchers have found that 50% of black youth were involved with murder cases and that violence among youth is higher in both the Hispanic and African American community (www.TPRoline.org).

Local Gangs

There are a number of gangs in the upper Midwest region and many of them can be found here in Racine, Wisconsin. The Sheriff's Department of Racine County has a web site that references these gangs within my community that are active and have become trouble in the area. The gang within Racine County can be primarily divided under different types of Groups or may be referred to as different nations. These groups or nations are considered enemies. They are called "people" and "folks" The members of these gangs are predominately, African American and Hispanic. Racine County also has a "White Supremacist" or "White Power Group"

The gangs in Racine fall into a number of subcategories.

People Gangs that would fall under the covering of "People" would include: Almighty Conservative Vice Lords, Boulevard Latin King. The Gangs associated with the Almighty conservative Vice Lords consist of Vice Lords (VL), Traveling Vice Lords (TVL). Insane Vice Lords (IVL). Most of these gangs are from the north side of Racine.

According to the Washington Examiner, gangs are not only in streets, but a recent article has reported that gangs are now moving into our United States military. Some of these gangs seem to think that if they enter the military they can get out of the gang life. Gang members are getting their hands on many of the military gun and somehow getting them back to the streets.

Folks.Groups that would fall under "Folks" include: Black Gangster Disciple Nation, Imperial Gangsters, Spanish Gangsters, Imperial Spanish Gangsters, Brothers of

the Struggle, Spanish Cobras, Shorty with Authority, F.W.A. (Females with an Attitude). The gangs associated with the Black Gangster Disciple Nation consist of Black Gangster Disciples (BGD), Black Gangsters (BG) or Gangster Disciples (GD). The gangs that associate themselves with the “Folks” nation are located on the south side of Racine. They are under what we call the Star of David, a six-point star, in order to represent their affiliation. (Racine County Sheriff’s Department, 2009)

Why Juveniles Join Gangs

What makes young people want to join gangs? Maybe it is because they want to fit in or because it is something they grew up in. Some juveniles may join gangs for respect from others. Television is believed to have a lot to do with promoting gang life to make it look appealing. There are several different movies out there to do this; one of those movies is “Scar face.” The movie was about a gang that was heavy into drug dealing and they made a lot of money. Juveniles look at this and think it’s cool to live life in the fast lane. Many kids join gangs for different reasons. Some want to be protected, some want to fit in, and others to be cool. Some turn to gangs because they don’t have anyone else to be their friend. Juveniles may join gangs because of bad parenting or lack of parenting in the home. The need for parents to show positive role modeling to their children is essential. Some children do come from bad families especially these days the mothers or fathers are on drugs or behind bars. Many children are left to take care of siblings pushing them in responsible roles they are not equipped to handle effectively. They join gangs and begin selling drugs in order to buy food for their families.

There are also kids who join gangs who have been brought up in good homes with many positive role models to look up to. Many of the juveniles that join gangs today

carry an “I don’t care attitude” and have no respect for family, society or themselves. When juveniles become part of a gang they are expected to go against the norm of society. Some of those norms that are violated could include truancy, and refusing to listen to parents, teachers, or authority figures. They may regularly use drugs or alcohol. They may run away from home and then associate themselves with thieves or with violent, immoral people. They may constantly use bad language or demonstrate violent behavior. Juveniles associated with gangs will probably be found in places where illegal activity is going on, such as holding an illegal job like selling drugs.

Music plays a strong part of a gang member’s life. There are many popular rappers in our society that are involved with street gangs. Many have said that gangster rap has caused violence and causes disrespect towards many women, and is very gang focused. ([http://66wrtg1150.wikidot.com/the-influence-of music-videos](http://66wrtg1150.wikidot.com/the-influence-of-music-videos)).

Recent work by researchers has lead to identifying the specific risk of those prone to gang membership. Those at risk include youth that grow up in disorganized neighborhoods; come from very low income, distressed families; don’t do well academically and have low attachment to school; spend time with delinquent peers; and engage in “problem” behaviors such as marijuana. The Juvenile Justice Journal has identified individual risk factors, family risk factors, school risk factors, peer group risk factors, and community risk factors that are all impacting youth gang involvement (Wyrick & Howell, 2004). The accumulation of risk factors that can be used to predict youth gang involvement also include mental health and antisocial behaviors. The researcher found that behavior diagnoses like Conduct disorder, and oppositional defiant

along with ADHD in delinquent could play apart of why juveniles join gangs as well.
(www.TPRoline.org)

The researcher also found that violence can also play apart of why our young people join gangs. If a young person is put into a situation where violence is displayed around them it can cause them to suffer from some kind of mental health issue (whole children Intervention and prevention program among youth at risk of Delinquency).

There are several aspects of gangs that may be described in terms of the demographics of neighborhood, family, abuse and neglect, and peer relationships.

Neighborhoods. Youth who live in neighborhoods where acquaintances were “in trouble” is 3 times more likely to join gangs. Those living in neighborhoods where marijuana is easily available were 3.6 times more likely to join (Wyrick & Howell, 2004). The inner city area of the City of Racine has been particularly hard-hit economically. The 2000 Census provides the most recent reliable data on unemployment rates in the inner city. At that time, 1,300 job seekers, or 14% of the labor force, were unemployed, twice the unemployment rate of the City as a whole. In 2009, the unemployment rate in these neighborhoods may be as high as 19-20 percent.

Family. Juveniles in single-parent families were 2.4 times more likely to join a gang than those in two-parent households (Wyrick & Howell, 2004). Parental attitudes towards violence, poor family management, and low parental attachment also correlated with gang membership (Wyrick & Howell, 2004). More than 80% of the City of Racine impoverished children live in our inner city. Many of the children who live in poverty

also reside in homes headed by single person-often female. The poverty rate for female-head-of-household families living in the City is 36%, based on 2000 Census.

Gangs have impact on our families and our communities, according to the United States Department of Justice, many gang members get involved in many different types of criminal behavior. They usually find themselves in trouble with the law and eventually will be in the correctional system. The National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) reported in 2011 that gang members account for about 230,000 inmates in both the federal and state prisons across the nation. Many of these gang members will continue to display criminal behaviors while they are incarcerated. (USDOJ, 2011)

Abuse and Neglect. Racine County Human Services Department reported 578 referrals of physical abuse, 156 of familial sexual abuse, 301 non-familial sexual abuse, and 762 of neglect, for a total of 1797 referrals for abuse and/or neglect in 2008.

Peer Group. Youth associated with delinquent friends were twice as likely to join gangs. According to United Way of Racine County's 2008 Community Indicator's Report, only 37% of students surveyed felt that they could resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.

Developing Characteristics

Another interesting way to analyze the developmental needs and characteristics of young people is the work of the Search Institute. The Institute has reported on the general characteristics of adolescents and not specifically gangs.

The 2006 Search institute Asset Survey completed by 8,298 7th-12th grade RUSD students indicated that only 36% of youth have social competencies (resistance skills, cultural competence, interpersonal competence, decision –making and conflict resolution); only 47% have positive identity (personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose); 44% have positive values; and only 53% are committed to learning. Only 34% of that survey has support from caring adults in the family, school and community; and only 47% reported having boundaries and expectations from family, school and other adults.

Gang Involvement

The majorities of children in the inner city of Racine do not attend a neighborhood school, but are bused to suburban schools for racial and economic desegregation, disconnecting them from their neighborhoods and schools. Children on the same block often attend different schools; friendships are lost and children feel isolated. Many youth are raised in households with three generations of gang affiliation. Just as many people grow up with a “red” or “blue” political affiliation; these children develop an affinity to “red” for Vice Lord nation and “blue” for the Gangster Disciple Nation. Placing them together in distant schools creates volatile environments, fostering the spread of gang affiliation into the suburbs. The City of Racine Police Department reports there are three sets of Vice Lords, five sets of Black Gangster Disciples, and four Hispanic gangs, including Latin Kings active in its jurisdiction.

In 2009, the Wisconsin Federal U.S. Courts issued indictment for forty-one gang members in Racine, Wisconsin. These forty-one gang members were from two of the

main gangs in Racine. The Vice Lords and the Gangsters were involved in many murders which lead to those indictments. (Milwaukee Journal, 2009)

The Latin Kings are one of the largest Hispanic gangs in America and they account for criminal activity throughout the nation. In January, 2012 a federal judge convicted one of the key leaders of the Latin Kings for conspiracy and racketeering. The judge sentence 51 year old Augustin “Tino” Zambrano to 60 years in prison. (Chicago Tribune, 2012)

Drugs and Violence

Juveniles who use marijuana were three times more likely to join gangs (Wyrick & Howell, 2004). Youth who engaged in violent behavior at younger ages were 3.1 times more likely to join gangs (Wyrick & Howell, 2004). The 2006 Search Institute Asset Survey completed by 8,298 Racine Unified School District students in grades 7-12, found that students had, on an average, only 17 of the 40 desired developmental assets. Developmental assets are divided into two different types, external assets and internal assets. External assets consist of support networks and opportunities available to youth (Search Institute, 2006). Internal assets consist of the youths’ individual commitments, values and competencies (Search Institute, 2006). Exposure to risk factors, with a low number of assets (protective factors), greatly increases the chance that a youth will engage in problem behavior such as substance abuse (Wyrick & Howell, 2004).

Types of Criminal Activity

Many gang members find they get involved with a lot of criminal activity. Some get involved with selling drugs, are involved with homicides, or find they carry illegal weapons. Burglary is a popular criminal activity involving gang members. Many gang members find themselves stealing cars; shoplifting is another big thing gang members get caught up in. Assaults are also very well known amongst gang members. Gang members are known for their roles of intimidation. Most gangs are involved with some kind of violence. The researcher found in his investigation on the web site of United States Department of Justice, among juveniles seventeen or younger, blacks were five times as likely as whites to be the victim of a homicide.

Gang Communication

Gang members in Racine do their communication to one another in a number of different ways. Many gang members communicate by certain words such as “What’s up Lord,” “What’s up Folks,” or “What’s up hook?” Meaning a fighting word like the north side gangs are punks. The researcher also found in his investigation from Racine County Sheriff’s Department Gang Awareness Information website that there are other ways gang members communicate.

Many gangs communicate by using hand signs. This is referred to as “throwing signs” or “flashing signs.” Gangs do this by forming a letter or number with their hands. This is used as a way of identifying which gang they are from and represent. Gang members will also mimic sign language as a way of communication amongst other gang members and rival gangs. (Racine County Sheriff’s Department, 2009)

Another way of communication is by tattoos. Most of your gang members in Racine will have different kinds of tattoos on their bodies to let others know what gang they belong to. The tattoos might include the name, initials or symbols of the gang they represent. (Racine County Sheriff's Department, 2009)

Lastly, gangs communicate through graffiti. Graffiti is a way gangs communicate their territory to the other gangs. The graffiti is a way a gang marks the neighborhood they come from.

Warning Signs

There are a number of warning signs parents can observe in their children that might be an indication of gang involvement. Parents should be concerned if their child says that he or she is involved with a gang and if they begin wanting to wear only certain colors. Also if the child is wearing jewelry on only one side of their body this could be a sign. For example Black Gangster or otherwise known as Folks wear their earrings in the right ear, the right side shows what gang they belong to. People and Latin King wear theirs on the left side, shows their affiliation.

If a child is hanging around people who do not attend school or are always in trouble this could be a sign of gang involvement. If a child is using hand gestures all the time be careful if you child is Caucasian and if he is male and shaves his head and his peer shave their heads this could mean they are involved with the white supremacist gang skin heads. (Racine County Sheriff's Department, 2009)

Some cautionary language is needed here. Some youth display the "signs" as statements of fashion and others as "wannabes".

Youth Gang Prevention Strategies

There are several approaches to countering socially undesirable youth behavior. The SEARCH Institute, for example, provides several strategies throughout training programs to promote pro-social development for adolescents. There are also specific programs that are used by local law enforcement agents to promote youth gang prevention. The approach in Racine is, of course, important to the overall theme of this paper.

In September, 2006, law enforcement groups including the Racine Police Department, police departments from three suburbs and the Racine DA's office joined the FBI and US Attorney's Office to form the Greater Racine Gang Task Force/Safe Streets Task Force. The Task Force mission has been to identify, apprehend and prosecute organized crime groups and violent street gangs responsible for drug trafficking, money laundering and other crimes (Racine County Sheriff, 2009). The Task Force is a component of the Department of Justice funded collaboration of Racine Unified School District and SAFE Haven, a primarily youth serving Community Based Organization. SAFE Haven programs in this collaboration include 2-1-1 Racine which is a 24/7 contact for human services information & referral; the Gang/Crime Diversion Task Force; SAFE Passage Transitional living facility and SAFE Streets. Also in 2006, with funding from the State of Wisconsin, the Mayor's Youth Gang Crime Diversion Collaborative was formed. The collaborative included SAFE Haven Gang Crime Diversion Task Force (Primary Prevention and Intervention), Why Gangs, and Racine Safe Neighborhood Alliance Weed and Seed program. Each organization partners with

the criminal justice system, Racine Police Department, Racine Police Department, Racine Unified School District, local and regional faith-based organizations, social service organizations, mental agencies, and governmental to provide wrap-around services to youth offenders.

CHAPTER THREE

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Recommendations

Developing a plan to deal with the state's escalating gang problem is very challenging. There are many different reasons as to why gang crime occurs and many different possible solutions to help the problem. Figuring out one solution to solve the many reasons is not feasible. According to Webster's dictionary gangs are a group of criminals or adolescent hoodlums. After reading this definition why would anyone want to be in a gang? Why would anyone even want to be associated with a group of criminals? What makes a gang so appealing? Is it because the young people today just want to be in a gang, is it because they have psychological issues, is it because of a class struggle, or does it have to do with their social structure? There are a number of theories and theorists out there that suggest why crime occurs. Looking at each of the four main theories they all suggest viable reasons for criminal activity.

The Classical Theory, which originated around 1764 expressed by Cesare Beccaria, would support the idea that the young people today are in gangs because they want to be in a gang (Siegal, 2003). They have chosen to join a gang and participate in the criminal activity that goes along with being in a gang, by choice. They have decided that the advantages of being in the gang outweigh the disadvantages of any punishments that may come about (Siegal, 2003).

The Positivist Theory, which originated around 1810 founded by Cesare Lombroso, would support the idea that the young people today are in gangs and

participate in criminal activity because they can't help it (Siegal, 2003). Some people are born with certain biological and mental traits that make them crime prone (Siegal, 2003). In the Criminology text it is also stated that these traits are inherited and present at birth. If this theory is true then this means that the gang criminals today would all have some sort of psychological problem.

The Marxist/Conflict Theory, which was articulated around 1848 founded by Karl Marx, would suggest that criminal gang activity occurs because crime is a function of class struggle (Siegal, 2003). Society puts great emphasis on competition and wealth, which produces an economic and social environment, where crime is inevitable (Siegal, 2003).

Lastly, the Sociological Theory, which originated around 1897 founded by Emile Durkheim, would support the idea that criminal gang activity occurs because of a lack of legitimate opportunities (Siegal, 2003). A person's place in the social structure determines their behavior (Siegal, 2003). If you have a gang member(s) that live in disadvantaged conditions it may lead a person to crime. Majority of gangs today originates out of these types of communities. Other theories that have grown out of the Sociological Theory and include Strain Theory, Cultural Deviance Theory, Social Learning Theory, Social Control Theory, Social Reaction Theory and the Labeling Theory (Siegal, 2003).

Each of the theories listed above all provides sound reasons why crime occurs and could apply to the gang criminals today. The Sociological Theory could be the biggest piece of the pie and the main reason why gang crime occurs. The Sociological Theory may not attribute to all of the reasons why all gang members commit crimes but it could

be the basis for a majority of the gang crimes that are being committed. The location of someone's residence can make a difference. Living in a low-income, poverty-stricken neighborhood does not provide the same opportunities as a middle-class neighborhood. Even if it did provide the same opportunities it is not always easy to access these opportunities when you may have other barriers such as lack of finances, lack of transportation, and inadequate living conditions. Residents of poverty-stricken neighborhoods still have just as many goals as those that live in better neighborhoods but the means to obtain those goals may be harder and more difficult (Siegal, 2003).

There are different strategies and programs out there to help reduce gang violence such as prevention programs, intervention programs and suppression programs (Howell, 2000). Prevention programs try to deter youth from joining gangs and it might also seek to interrupt gang formation (Howell, 2000). They try to help fill the void that some of the young people today may be experiencing. Prevention programs try to provide a sense of belonging, identity, and self-worth that was previously sought before joining the gang in the first place (Howell, 2000). Filling the void before they resort to gang membership can help reduce the gang numbers. Most prevention programs consist of school-based programs, after school programs, local clubs and community organizations (Howell, 2000).

Intervention programs seek to reduce the criminal activities of gangs by coaxing youth away from gangs and reducing criminality among gang members (Howell, 2000). Intervention programs try to provide alternatives to gang life. They teach life skills, provide them with education and even employment.

Intervention programs may intervene and try to establish truces among rival gangs to help reduce the gang violence (Howell, 2000). Intervention programs also provide guidance and take on the role of a mentor. These programs try to help them transition from gang life to violence-free lives and to become productive citizens (Howell, 2000).

Intervention and suppression programs share the common goal of reducing criminal activities of gangs (Howell, 2000). Suppression programs use the full force of the law, generally through a combination of police, prosecution, and incarceration to deter the criminal activities of entire gangs, dissolve them, and remove individual gang members from them by means of prosecution and incarceration (Howell, 2000). Police suppression tactics would entail gang sweeps, hotspot targeting and intensified patrols to apply pressure on gangs (Howell, 2000). It could include saturation of an area with police and special surveillance (Howell, 2000). Prosecution tactics would include vertical prosecution which means the prosecutor would remain responsible for the case through the entire prosecution process (Howell, 2000). This would also allow for reduced caseloads, additional investigative support, and resources for assisting victims (Howell, 2000).

As a society, one way to help these young men and women turn to more positive things in their lives is to start more programs for gang members to learn different ways of handling conflict in their lives. Many gang members don't attend school because many of them would rather sell drugs or hang out on the street corners. If society paid them to attend school for at least fifteen hours per week that may be enough to encourage them to stay in school. In addition to academic studies they would team up with an opposite gang, in neutral territory, listening to various presentations on different teen issues.

A recommendation to help combat these issues would be to open up more group homes in the city for first time offenders. Instead of Racine County housing Racine county juveniles the surrounding counties would swap offenders, that way the gang members would be exposed to different surroundings then what they are used to.

Another recommendation could include passing a bill where people who come out from under gangs would be able to get jobs allowing them to going back into the community and work with at risk youth to avoid gang involvement. The funding for this program could come from the government. Parents would also be encouraged to place their children in the Racine Gang Crime Diversion Taskforce program here in Racine through Safe Haven.

Conclusions

In order to effectively reduce or resolve the problem of gang violence all of the programs previously mentioned would have to be implemented together to make a difference. To operate one program alone and by itself it would not be able to withstand the pressures that gangs put on the young people today. The object is to make a difference and impact that child or juvenile before they decide to stray and join a gang. Family involvement is another factor that would have to take a stand. Family members and those raising children have to instill into the children everything they need in order to combat against the forces that will come at them. The community needs to come together and prepare the way for the little ones and fall back onto the belief that it takes a village to raise a child.

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