Causes, Effects, and Treatments: Impact of Gang Culture and Violence on Elementary, Middle, and High School Aged Children

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Sociology of Gangs

• History
• Reach
• Cultural Influence
Vandalism
Of Orphans And Crime

Oliver!
Pick A Pocket

In this life, one thing counts
In the bank, large amounts
I'm afraid these don't grow on trees,
You've got to pick-a-pocket or two

Why should we break our backs
Stupidly paying tax?
Better get some untaxed income
Better to pick-a-pocket or two.

When I see someone rich,
Both my thumbs start to itch
Only to find some peace of mind
We have to pick-a-pocket or two.
Urban Gangs In America

- Gangs of New York
- Gangs of the 1920s and 1930s
Explosion of Gang Culture Nationwide

• Music: Gangsta Rap

• Movies: Boyz In The Hood, Menace II Society, Colors, American Gangster, American Me

• Fashion: Gangsta Dress, Tattoos, Piercing, Hair
A Tale Of Two (Or More) Cultures

• Normal Culture:
  • Is where most of us live, work, and recreate.

• Gang Culture:
  • Exists parallel to normal culture and has its own codes, conventions, mores, rules, and order.
A Tale Of Two (Or More) Cultures

Gang Culture Exists In One Or More Venues Of All Students’ Lives

• Home
• Church
• School
• Neighborhood
• Internet/Media
“Classification”

- Criminal
- Conflict
- Retreatist
- Cult
Gang Recruiting

- Protection
- Belonging
- Respect
Gang Culture In A Community

Gang Culture Affects Children’s Outlooks:* I Live In A Place Of

- Crime
- Graffiti
- Trash
- Ugliness
- Danger
- Drugs
- Gangs

*Semark, Interviews with Harbor Area elementary school kids, 2002
Los Angeles Facts

- In LA, 850,000 children live in violent crime areas.
- In LA, 290,000 live in high gang crime areas.
- Of children living in high crime areas, 90 percent are exposed to violence as a victim or witness.
- Of children living in high crime areas, 27 percent show symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Gang Culture And Community Violence

Harsh Realities Affect Children*

✓ Nervousness
✓ Sleep Problems
✓ Intrusive Thoughts
✓ Anxiety
✓ Grief

✓ Stress
✓ Loneliness
✓ Depression
✓ Antisocial Behavior

*Miller, Wasserman, Neuberger, et al., Witnessed community violence and antisocial behavior…,
Clinical Child Psychology, 1999
Youth Who Live in Violent Areas

They Make “Pathological Adaptations”*

- Hopelessness
- Fatalistic Thoughts
- Desensitization to Violence
- Truncated Moral Development
- Severe Psychic Numbing

*Garbarina, Dudrow, Kostelny, and Pardo, *Children in danger: Coping with the consequences of Community violence*, 1992
Youth In Violent and Gang Infested Areas

They Participate In High Risk Behaviors*

• Alcohol And Drug Abuse
• Promiscuous Sex
• Association With Dangerous People
  • Tagging Crews
  • Gangbangers
  • Hardened Criminals

*Bell and Jenkins, *Community violence and children on Chicago’s Southside*, Psychiatry, 1993
Effects of Violence

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Being exposed to violence within the home for an extended period or exposure to a one-time event can cause PTSD in a child.*

- PTSD after exposure to a variety of traumatic events (family violence, child abuse, disasters, and community violence) is often accompanied by depression.**

*Bell and Jenkins, *Community violence and children on Chicago’s Southside, Psychiatry, 1993*

Effects of Violence

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Urban children experience the greatest exposure to violence.*

- An urban study of adolescent boys (Chicago) showed that 68 percent had seen someone beaten up and 22.5 percent had seen someone shot or killed.**

- Youth exposed to community violence exhibit more aggressive behavior or depression.***

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*Earls FJ. Child exposure to violence and PTSD across urban settings. NIMH Grant No. 5R01-MH56241-05. In progress

**Bell and Jenkins, Community violence and children on Chicago’s Southside, Psychiatry, 1993

Childhood Predictors

- Availability of Marijuana/Early Marijuana Use
- Learning Disabled
- Early Violence
- Low Academic Achievement
- Neighborhood Youth in Trouble
Childhood Predictors*

- Single Parent Plus Nonparent Adults
- Externalizing Behaviors
- Single Parent
- Parental Attitudes Favoring Violence

Major Risk Factors

• Lack of jobs for youth
• Poverty compounded by social isolation
• Domestic violence
• Negative peer networks
• Lack of parental supervision
• Early academic failure and lack of school attachment*

What Happens To Parents?

Parents’ Reactions To Gang Culture:

• Parental Coping Largely Determines Child’s Response*

• Parental Break Down, Panic, Or Denial Makes Parents Emotionally Unavailable**

• Parents Fear Social Expectations/Responsibility For child’s Actions***


***Harris, The nurture assumption: Why children turn out the way they do. Simon and Schuster, 1998
Some Actions For School Personnel

Schools Can Address The Issue By

- Identifying And Referring At Risk Youth*
- Creating Safer Environments Through Safety Plans**
- Helping Students Connect To Teachers And Peers**
- Using Prevention and Intervention Strategies That Include Outside Agencies***
- Treating the Entire Population***

* and ***Pynoos and Nader, *Psychological first aid and treatment approach to children exposed to community violence*  
*Journal of Traumatic Stress, 1988*


Crisis?

- Is this a civil or societal problem?
- Is this a legal and law enforcement problem?
- Is this an educational problem?
- Is this an economic problem?
- Is this a family and social work problem?
- Is this a psychological or psychiatric problem?
Public Health Epidemic

- What comprises an epidemic?
- What do we do in a public health emergency?
- What do leaders in the field do?
Public Health Model
Public Health Model

Define and Monitor the Problem:

Closely follow data trends to continuously define, redefine, and fine tune one’s grasp of the aberration of gangs, gang culture, and gang violence. This is a constantly evolving pathology that requires ongoing study.
Public Health Model

**Identify risk and protective factors:**

Review evidence-based outcomes and best practices of risk factors that contribute to gang joining and in the protective factors that can prevent gang joining. Based on the research of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the US Surgeon General, academic and institutional research, and field evaluations, target risk factors and inject protective factors for efficacious programs and services.
Public Health Model

Develop and Test Prevention Strategies:

Deploy a number of tactics in a primary prevention strategy, “To prevent young people from joining gangs.” As described by OJJDP, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the National Gang Crime Research Center, and the National Conference of Mayors, a number of best practices have been validated through vigorous evaluation. Embrace new, proven methods for improving program efficacy.
Assure Widespread Adoption:
Provide widespread “inoculation” from gang culture and violence to all vulnerable populations. Share expertise, experience, and resources locally, nationally, and internationally to curb the spread of gangs, gang culture, and gang violence.
Remedy

- Educate
- Inoculate
- Follow Up
- Treat
- Isolate
The Tactics Of Gang Prevention Education

Awareness And Training

- Parents: Orientation And Ten Week Parenting Program
- School Personnel: Inservice, Evaluation, And Referral
- Students: Pre- And Post-Survey, GAP In School Gang Prevention Program, Culmination, And Referral
- Community: Awareness, Clean Up, And Active Resistance
Gang Prevention Education

- Principles of Learning
  1. Clear Expectations
  2. Accountable Talk
  3. Academic Rigor

- USDOJ Best Practices
- 100% Classroom Coverage
- School Safety Plan
Gang Prevention Education

- California Standards (I–V) for reading and writing
  1. Significant Core of Knowledge
  2. High Thinking Demand
  3. Active Use of Knowledge
- Culmination event
- Middle School follow up
Best Practices

Predictors of Program Quality

- Extensiveness and Quality of Training
- Level of Supervision
- Principal Support for Program
- Degree of Structure ("Scriptedness") of Activities
- Local Responsibility for Initiating Program
- Multiple Sources of Information
- Part of the Regular School Program Day*

*Gottfredson Associates, Inc., Gang Problems and Gang Programs in a National Sample of Schools, 2002 (USDOJ, OJJDP)
Some Actions For School Personnel

Schools Can Address The Issue By

• Identifying And Referring At Risk Youth*
• Creating Safer Environments Through Safety Plans**
• Helping Students Connect To Teachers And Peers**
• Using Prevention and Intervention Strategies That Include Outside Agencies***
• Implementing a Public Health Treatment Model

* and ***Pynoos and Nader, *Psychological first aid and treatment approach to children exposed to community violence*  
Journal of Traumatic Stress, 1988
Gang Prevention

There Is No Silver Bullet.

• Gang prevention is an ongoing process.

• Gang prevention is a generational commitment.

• Gang prevention is the only approach that attempts to pre-empt the negative behaviors associated with gang culture.

• Gang prevention is both a moral and economic strategy.
Challenge

• “Raise up a child in the way he should go; when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

• “A young tree is easily bent; an old tree can only be broken.”

• “When a child begins to go astray, you must deal with her now, or you will deal with her later.”
The Gangfree Life®

• My Gangfree Life®
• Our Gangfree Family®
• Our Gangfree Schools®
• The Gangfree Workplace®