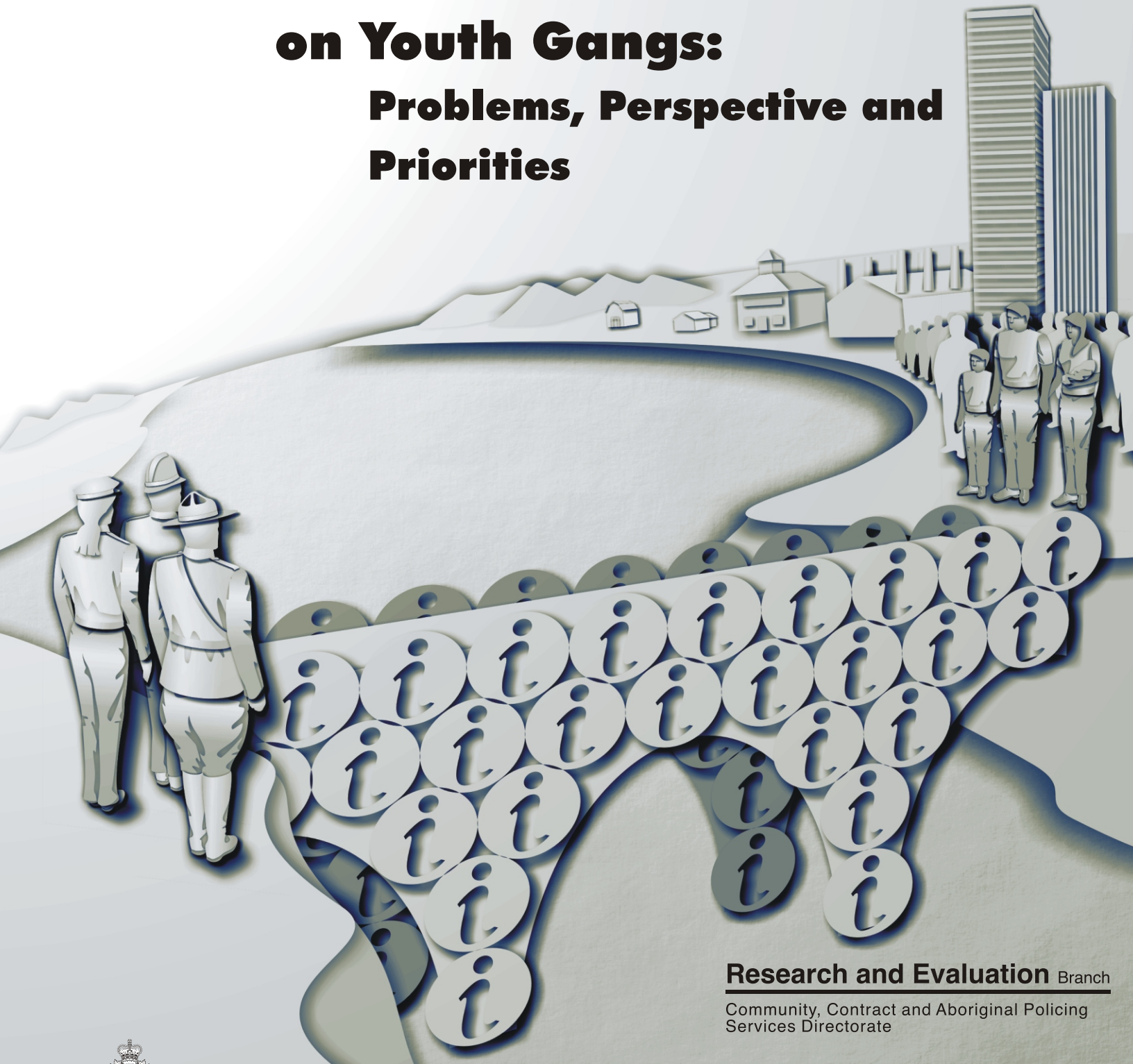
A Research Report

RCMP
ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

on Youth Gangs:

Problems, Perspective and Priorities



Research and Evaluation Branch

Community, Contract and Aboriginal Policing Services Directorate

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Canada

A Research Report on Youth Gangs: Problems, Perspective and Priorities

by

Jharna Chatterjee, Ph.D.

Research and Evaluation Branch
Community, Contract and Aboriginal Policing Services Directorate
Royal Canadian Mounted Police
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Executive Summary

The topic of youth gangs has emerged as a major issue of serious concern in many communities in Canada, especially for the law enforcement community. Available empirical evidence indicates that youth gangs exist in almost every continent, mostly in urban areas, but increasingly also in other areas. This paper reviews the research literature available in print and published on the Internet.

Due to the diversity of gang phenomena, no universally accepted definition of youth gang exists in the research literature. Often, the terms “street gangs” and “youth gangs” are used interchangeably. For the purpose of the present paper, the Klein and Maxson definition seems to be the most acceptable as it includes the most salient aspects of a youth gang as well as presents sufficient flexibility for addressing the diversity of the phenomenon in terms of law enforcement and community responses. The definition is as follows: "[A gang is] any denotable..... group [of adolescents and young adults] who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood, (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name), and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of [illegal] incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or enforcement agencies."

Scholars have identified a number of risk factors for the emergence and continuation of youth gangs. Research indicates that socio-economic (poverty and unemployment, actual or perceived disadvantage), family-related (dysfunctional, abusive or negligent family), school (poor academic performance and low attachment to schools) and community (disorganized, crime-prone and unsafe) factors that contribute to marginalization of youth, as well as negative individual/biological factors (anti-social attitudes, FASD) may contribute to the emergence and continued existence of youth gangs.

Data indicate that there are both push and pull factors that contribute to youths' decision to join a gang, and they overlap with the risk factors. These include: a dysfunctional family - characterized by abuse and neglect, socially disorganized communities, poor

academic performance, lack of opportunities for pro-social activities including legitimate employment, presence of gang members in family, peer group and/or neighbourhood leading to modeling, and youths' needs for acceptance, love, discipline, structure, money, safety, personal protection and drugs.

Available research evidence demonstrates that youth gang members' age range is wide, from 8 to 50+ in some cases, that the average age tends to be 14-16, that there are more male than female gang members, and many gang members happen to come from socially marginalized and disadvantaged ethnic minority groups. A recent tendency of youth gangs including older youths or young adults has also been noted.

Most well-established gangs tend to have codes of conduct. They sometimes include initiation rites and distinct style and colour of clothing; they use graffiti, tattoos and special terminology to identify themselves as well as to mark their turfs. The price of non-compliance could be physical punishment, even death.

Gang members commit a variety of offences ranging from minor to serious, such as: graffiti, burglary, theft, vandalism, motor vehicle theft, arson, assault, drive-by shooting, selling crack, powder cocaine, marijuana and other drugs, home invasion, arson, intimidation, rape, robbery, shooting, and homicide. They may also engage in frauds, pirating and selling movies and music, identity theft, witness identification and intimidation, and communicating with other members of their gangs through cell phones, the Internet, and computers.

Researchers believe that gang membership has both short-term and long-term consequences for the youths and the community. Examples include risks of arrest, of incarceration, of injury and/or a violent death, non-transition to normal adult life-style that includes legitimate employment. The impact on the community, justice system and health care system is also enormous, and sometimes not well recognized. Financial cost due to gang activities in all these domains is considerable; in addition, there are social costs in lost potential and fear of crime inhibiting normal activities of citizens.

No conclusive empirical evidence is available to suggest that youth gangs are interconnected within a community or among different communities. Some evidence exists, however, to indicate that there is considerable rivalry among gangs for control of territories or, of illegal drug business. Violence is a common tool used to establish such control. It seems that although not all youth gangs have associations with organized crime groups, some (especially street gangs) most probably do. It is also conceivable that in gangs characterized by fluid structures, some young adults will form liaisons with adult gangs. Another possibility that needs special attention is that gang members may be brain-washed and recruited by terror groups, especially within prison walls. It would be rather easy to attract youths with anti-social, anti-mainstream attitudes, and convince them that they need to fight against social injustice by whatever means.

Most researchers believe that for most youths who join gangs, gang membership is a transitory experience, lasting for one year or less. However, in some circumstances such as multigenerational or highly-structured gangs, youths, especially the hard-core or long-term members, may find it difficult to leave gangs. The desire to leave a gang may arise from natural maturation and wish to lead a stable, "normal" life, and/or fear for personal safety, of incarceration, experience of loss of key individuals to drug abuse, injury or death. A strong support network and provision of life-skills are crucial for the successful re-integration of these youths into the mainstream. But some youths may never give up the gang lifestyle and join prison gangs as young adults.

Combating gang problems is a serious challenge faced by the law enforcement community as well as the society in general. Research indicates that gang phenomena are extremely complex in their origin and functioning, in which socio-economic, psychological, family-related, personal factors, to name just a few, contribute to youths' creating, joining and remaining in gangs. It would be naïve to think that the problem can be solved without addressing these underlying issues. It seems that the law enforcement community has a logical role in providing leadership in efforts to counter youth gang development and gang-related activities, albeit in partnership with communities, societal

institutions such as schools, universities and churches, outreach workers, youth service agencies and youth and family counselors. The RCMP's community policing foundation and restorative justice principles are especially consistent with playing a leadership role in this area, provided there are sufficient resources available. Following some available examples, it might be possible to develop an effective gang-related incident tracking system that does not rely on individual offence data currently collected in the Uniform Crime Records system.

The basic premise for any prevention and intervention effort seems to be that programs must be targeted at providing at-risk and gang-involved youth with legitimate alternatives for fulfilling their basic needs such as love, discipline, structure, belonging, personal safety and protection. In other words, any gang-reduction or -prevention program must include support and counseling for youths and their families, especially for hard-to-reach families and communities, education and training for youth for earning an honest livelihood, skills for conflict resolution, and provision of recreational opportunities (for example, after-school programs) that offer youth a healthy lifestyle alternative as well as a sense of self-worth and self-respect. Anti-bullying programs may also help in reducing children's and adolescents' reliance on physical violence for protection and personal safety.

Empirical evidence has shown that community mobilization was one of the most effective strategies in addressing gang problems. This implies garnering support and full participation of neighbourhood residents - both young and adult, churches, and educational/social/outreach agencies in both urban and rural communities, in all socio-economic levels and both racially homogeneous and diverse neighbourhoods that are affected. Community mobilization and strengthening, and sharing resources at the grassroots level, need to be integrated with long-term prevention strategies in any gang-reduction program. Intervention for youth already involved in gang activities and targeted suppression of hard-core gang members known for their repeated serious crimes will also be required under some circumstances. However, a thorough and accurate assessment of each community's gang problem needs to be undertaken as a first step to plan, develop

and implement appropriate strategies. Research also points out the effectiveness of a multi-faceted, multi-partner, comprehensive, and balanced strategy to prevent, reduce and combat gang problems.

Introduction

The topic of youth gangs has emerged as a major issue of serious concern in many communities in Canada, both large and small. Their impact is felt by all, and especially by the police who are called upon to respond to their activities. Given the service foundation of community policing in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the issue is being pursued as a major component of its Youth Strategy. This is a multi-faceted problem and will require close collaboration between the police and other agencies and organizations in the community as they attempt to deal both with the reactive dimensions of youth crime and with the proactive side of youth victimization and crime prevention.

This report is based on a review of research literature published in print medium and on the Internet, primarily of the gang-related research material that originated in the United States, because of its relative prevalence as compared to the relative paucity of Canadian research. This literature review is designed to provide a better understanding of the youth gang phenomenon in general. As Delaney (2005) quotes:

> "Youth gang intervention is a very formidable enterprise. Because we lack a clear understanding of why and how youth gangs form, preventing their formation is problematic. Gang interventions rarely are based on theoretical assumptions. This lack of knowledge impedes our efforts to disrupt existing gangs and divert youth from them. Gangs dissolve and disappear for reasons that are poorly understood. In some cities, youths who join gangs leave them within about 1 year. Yet we do not understand why. Future youth gang research must address the formation of gangs, disruptive forces, and factors that account for diversion of youths from gangs." (Howell, 2004, p.318).

We hope that with more research, especially in the Canadian context, we will be able to improve the situation and address gang problems more effectively.

Definition of Youth Gang

There is no common definition of the term "youth gang" equally acceptable to all researchers, law enforcement community, schools, practitioners and the general public (Howell, Moore and Egley Jr., 2002; Shelden, Tracy and Brown, 2004; CTI, 2003). The National Youth Gang Surveys conducted since 1995 by the National Youth Gang Center, USA, used the loose definition "a group of youths or young adults in your jurisdiction that you or other responsible persons in your agency or community are willing to identify as a 'gang'." The 1998 National Youth Gang Survey (NYGC) also used the following elements derived from responses to previous survey questions:

(i) has a name

(ii) commits crimes together

(iii) has a leader or several leaders

(iv) hangs out together

(v) displays or wears common colors or insignia

(vi) claims a turf or territory.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) states,

> "A youth gang (as a segment of a street gang) should be defined as a group ranging in age from 12 to 24, of variable size and organization, engaged in violent behavior, and characterized by communal or symbolic and often economic considerations, such as drug trafficking, burglary, robbery, and auto theft." (quoted in Pappas, 2001).

A handbook called "Project Gang-Proof" published by Manitoba Justice (2001) describes a gang as "A group of two or more individuals consorting together for the purpose of unlawful activity." (p. 4). The handbook also indicates that street gangs are generally fluid in nature — they are formed and change, they may consist of a few members, or more than a few. They may have a clear leadership and structure, or may not. However, most youth gangs are believed to be loosely-knit groups with more than one leader who can be replaced quickly if necessary.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2002), in collaboration with Solicitor General and Justice Canada, responded to perceptions of increased youth violence including gang activities by initiating a research project titled “Youth Violence and Youth Gangs: Responding to Community Concerns”. The researchers commented on the difficulty of defining the term “youth gangs”, and suggested a continuum instead, based on the level of organization; the existence of a clear leadership structure; the use of distinctive clothing styles, graffiti etc.; the existence of elaborate initiation rituals; the existence of recognized turf or gang territory; the continuity or longevity of the group; the centrality of criminal activity; and the group's use of violence.

The continuum they proposed started with the friendship groups, - loosely organized with no leadership structure. Sometimes there was a spontaneous involvement in violence and little involvement in crime for profit. The middle of the continuum was marked by criminal youth gangs, highly organized, with definite leadership structure, systematic involvement in violence and those for whom crime for profit was a major activity. Accordingly, they recommended the use of the term youth group/ gang and locating any group on the continuum to determine if it could be considered a gang.

Mellor, MacRae, Pauls and Hornick (PESP - 2005) reviewed programs and services for combating gang problems in Canada. These researchers, similar to the FCM framework, sought to develop a conceptual framework for categorizing youth gangs and proposed a five-part multidimensional framework as follows:

i) Type A refers to an interest-based group of friends, with no criminal activities;
ii) Type B are primarily social groups/gangs of youths with other interests in life, who derive their power and status from the size of their group. They may engage in spontaneous criminal activities, taking advantage of situational opportunities;
iii) Type C gangs may emerge from larger groups/gangs for a specific purpose such as stealing cars, vigilante-type violence or spontaneous mob activity, and may cease to exist as a gang once the purpose has been carried out.

iv) Type D or Youth Street Gangs are highly visible hardcore groups that develop primarily for profit-driven criminal activity. These criminal gangs adopt a distinct identity and dress codes with a defined turf of their own;
v) Type E gangs are highly-structured adult criminal groups or networks formed for the purpose of economic or financial gain. These groups engage in serious and premeditated criminal activities and use youth to assist them for specific gang activities and interests.

A Canadian Police Survey was conducted in 2002 with the objective of assessing the extent and characteristics of youth gangs in Canadian communities as reported by members of police organizations across the country. The survey defined the term “youth gang” as

> [A] group of youths or young adults in the respondent’s jurisdiction, under the age of 21, that the respondent or other responsible persons in their agency or community were willing to identify or classify as a gang. (p.1, report dated 2003).

Respondents were instructed to *exclude* motorcycle gangs, hate or ideology groups, prison gangs, and other exclusively adult gangs.

Klein, 1995, listed the differences between street gangs, including youth gangs and drug gangs in the following table:

Street Gangs	**Drug Gangs**
Versatile ("cafeteria-style") crime	Crime focused on drug business
Larger structures	Smaller structures
Less cohesive	More cohesive
Looser leadership	More centralized leadership
Ill-defined roles	Market-defined roles
Code of loyalty	Requirement of loyalty
Residential territories	Sales market territories
Members may sell drugs	Members do sell drugs
Intergang rivalries	Competition controlled
Younger on average, but wider age range	Older on average, but narrower age range

Source: p.132.

Shelden Tracy and Brown (2004) presented definitions (p.19) of similar terms such as 'street gangs' as defined by Curry and Spergel (1988) as:

> [A] group or collectivity of persons engaged in illegitimate or criminal activities, mainly threatening and violent.

Curry and Spergel have also defined the term “traditional youth gangs” as:

> [T]he youth sector of a street gang. Such a group is concerned primarily with issues of status, prestige, and turf protection. The youth gang may have a name and a location, be relatively well organized, and persist over time. [They] often have a leadership structure (implicit or explicit), codes of conduct, colors, special dress, signs, symbols, and the like. [They] may vary across time in characteristics of age, gender, community, race/ethnicity, or generation, as well as in scope and nature of delinquent or criminal activities. (quoted by Shelden et al, 2004).

Another definition offered by Klein and Maxson (cited in Shelden, Tracy and Brown, 2004) of the term is:

> [A gang is] any denotable... group [of adolescents and young adults] who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood, (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name), and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of [illegal] incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or enforcement agencies. (p.18).

Due to the diversity of gang phenomena, no universally accepted definition of the term 'youth gang' exists in the research literature. Often, the terms 'street gangs' and 'youth gangs' are used interchangeably. For the purpose of the present paper, the Klein and Maxson definition seems to be the most acceptable as it includes the most salient aspects (e.g., youth, relative stability of the group, involvement in illegal incidents and negative response of residents) of a gang as well as presents sufficient flexibility for addressing the diversity of the phenomenon in terms of law enforcement and community responses. For practical reasons, the term 'youth gang' and 'street gang' may also be treated interchangeably in this report.

Demographic Characteristics of gang members: Who are the gang members? Are age, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, immigrant status and race related to youth gang membership? How?

Age

By definition, members of youth gangs are young — with some exceptions. However, the research literature (e.g., Howell, Moore and Egley, 2002) suggests that in the United States, a higher percentage of the members of contemporary youth gangs seem to be older (18-24) in comparison to those of earlier gangs. Based on Chicago police data, Spergel (1995) found the age of gang members to range from 8 to 51 years, and maintained that gang membership extended into young adulthood and in some cases, beyond. He observed,

> ... [T]he extreme gang violence problem is due primarily to youths between 15 and 24 ears of age, particularly to those in the late adolescence years. (p. 42).

A longitudinal study following a large group of male and female adolescents in Rochester found that about 30 per cent of them had joined gangs at a point between the ages of 14 and 18. However, most of them indicated being in a gang for one year or less. (Thornberry et al., 2004). The 2002 Canadian Police Survey indicated that nationally, 39 per cent of youth gang members are between 16 and 18 years old, and 48 per cent are under the age of 18.

Shelden, Tracy and Brown (2004) portrayed an age-graded profile of gang members. For example, according to these authors, in New York in the 1960s they were: (a) Tots - 11-13, (b) Juniors - 13 -15, (c) Tims (15-17) and (d) Seniors (17 and older). A decade later, the age groupings in the same city had changed to Baby Spades (9-12), Young Spades (12-15) and Black Spades (16 -30). In Philadelphia, in more recent years, the age groups of gangs were reported to be Bottom Level Midgets (12-14), Middle Level Young Boys (14-17) and Upper Level Old Heads (18-23). Quite often, the ages corresponded to the type of membership in gangs, described by Shelden et al. (2004) as regulars/hard core,

peripherals/associates, temporary, marginally attached situational, at-risk - pre-gang youths, wannabes — or recruits in their pre-teen years, veterans — usually in their 20s and 30s, and auxiliaries who had limited responsibility — often female members. An OJJDP fact sheet (February 2002) titled "The National Youth Gang Survey Trends From 1996 to 2000" reported that in 1996, 50 per cent of youth gang members were less than 18 years of age; but in 1999, 37 per cent of gang members were less than 18 and 63 per cent were 18 and older — which suggested that in areas where gang phenomena were not recent, at least the hard core members were older.

Gender

Female gang membership was believed to be of three types: membership in an independent gang, regular membership in a male gang as co-eds and membership as auxiliaries in male gangs. The third type seemed to be the most common (Shelden et al., 2004). The authors maintained that girls joined gangs for the same reasons as their male counterparts, namely, belonging, protection, self-esteem and a surrogate family. They also shared the same background factors, such as poverty, dysfunctional and/or abusive families and minority status. Miller (2000b), whose research showed that neighbourhood exposure to gangs, family problems and gang-involved family members were the risk factors contributing to gang membership for young women, supported these findings. The 2002 Canadian Police Survey reported that youth gang members were mostly male, but there was a significant number of female members as well. Esbensen (2000) stated that according to a 1998 survey, female gang members constituted more than one third of all gang members in the USA.

A study of 47 Latina young women gang members in San Francisco Bay area (Hunt, Mackenzie and Joe-Laidler, 2000) documented that these women had complex relationships with their various family members: usually close with their mothers and sisters but distant from their fathers and brothers. Many of their family members were alcoholic or used drugs. Some of the respondents reported being physically or sexually abused by their fathers' friends or stepfathers, and running away or being thrown out from

home. The most important finding in this study was the overlap of family and gang relationships. The authors indicated,

> Initially we had assumed that the girls' families and their gang were two distinct and separate associations, but we found that these two seemingly disconnected groups were intimately linked. Far from choosing a sharply different alternative to the family, the homegirls in effect were joining an extension of their families. Homegirls did not relinquish one for the other; they were not thrust into gang membership because of family dysfunction, nor were they necessarily looking for a youth gang to join as a rebellion against their families. ... gang already was part of their daily lives. Gangs were present in their schools, next door, in the park, on the bus, and, most important, in their families. Many of the homegirls did not formally join a gang; they were already hanging out with their siblings, extended family members, and other gang members. (p. 20, Hunt, Mackenzie and Joe-Laidler, 2000).

A cross-sectional study examined the impact of sex composition in youth gangs on the organizational structure of gangs and gang-members' activities (Peterson, Miller and Esbensen, 2001). The results based on self-reports of male gang members indicated that approximately 45 per cent belonged to gangs with a male majority, 38 per cent were in a sex-balanced gang, 16 per cent were said to be all-male gangs and 1 per cent were reported to be with a female majority. The female gang members' responses were somewhat different: 64 per cent described themselves as belonging to sex-balanced gangs, 30 per cent to male-dominated ones, and 13 per cent to female-dominated gangs. Most of the gang members, male and female, were 13 to 14 years of age. Structure was described as the highest in sex-balanced groups in terms of specific rules, regular meetings and the use of symbols or colours. The level of delinquent activities was the highest in sex-balanced and majority-male gangs, followed by all-male and majority-female gangs. According to Howell, Moore and Egley (2002), gender-mixed gangs were now more common in the USA. Miller (2002a) indicated that female members were typically involved with gangs in their adolescence, in contrast to males who remained in gangs into young adulthood. She provided additional research evidence that found the peak gang involvement for girls to be around Grade 8 and 9.

Valdez (2000) maintained that unlike in the late 1980s, when female gang members usually occupied a supportive role, girls at present were members of gangs on an equal status basis, or had their own independent gangs with very similar attitudes, activities and violent lifestyle as their male counterparts — a finding supported by Delaney (2005). He reported that girl gang members had been found responsible for a variety of crimes such as drive-by shootings, stabbings, murder, attempted murder, carjacking, robbery and drug sales. Delaney observed that male members often used female gang members for selling drugs — in fact, drug-related offences were one of the most common ones committed by female gang members, along with violent crimes.

Nimmo (2001) provided some information regarding women gang members in Winnipeg, on the basis of their self-reports. The author described them as invisible members since according to her respondents (from community based agencies), female gang members were seldom identified as such; rather, they were seen as “going out” with male gang members. The estimates of the number of female gang members varied widely (10 to 50 per cent of gang members) from one respondent to another, as did the estimates of the proportion of Aboriginal women among them — varying from 60 to 98 per cent. The age of the female gang members was indicated to be 11 to late 30s, with those younger than 16 making up the fastest growing segment. Most of the known risk factors seemed to be present among these women: poverty, helplessness, growing up in a violent and dysfunctional environment, poor academic achievement, emotional, physical and sexual abuse by family members with severe alcohol or drug addictions, and some with gang involvement. These female gang members were said to have the lowest status in biker gangs, and the highest in the least-organized gang in Winnipeg, the Indian Posse. The respondents did not agree about the existence of any all-female gangs. Support for much of the above findings regarding proportion of male vs. female members, the extent of these women's involvement in gangs as well as the precipitating factors, is available in research based in the United States — cited in Miller (2002a).

Ethnicity/Race

Howell, Moore and Egley (2002) reported the existence of multi-ethnic or multi-racial gangs. Shelden, Tracy and Brown (2004) have presented a detailed ethnic/racial typology of gangs in the United States: the Chicano gangs in Southern California, the Asian gangs — Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodians including Mien, Hmong and Eurasian, Pacific Islanders — primarily Filipinos, but also including Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Guamanian and Hawaiian, Haitian, Cuban, Guatemalan, Salvadoran and Honduran. Also, there are African-American gangs and white gangs (e.g., skinheads). According to Spergel (1995), the major proportions of gang members as reported by the police, are blacks (African-Americans and Caribbean) and Hispanics (Mexican-Americans, Puerto Rican and Central Americans). A smaller proportion is comprised of whites and Asians. There is more racial diversity found in the West Coast of the United States, especially in Southern California. Asian and Pacific Island youth gang members include Korean, Thai, Cambodian, Hmong, Japanese, Samoan, Tongan, Filipinos and Chinese. Italian, Irish, Polish, Russian, middle-European, Albanian and Jewish gang members comprise the white gangs. Most gang members come from lower socioeconomic class and from disadvantaged, dysfunctional families and communities. Most female gangs were found to be from African American or Latina (Mexican or Puertorican American) groups, with a small but increasing number of Asian and white female gangs (Moore and Hagedorn, 2001) also coming into existence in the US.

Esbensen (2000) indicated that the popular belief that the majority of gang members come from racial minorities was a myth. In his opinion, with more representative sampling from the general population, it would be clear that

> [C]ommunity-level demographics are reflected in the composition of youth gangs; that is, gang members are white in primarily white communities and are African American in predominantly African American communities. (p. 4).

He reported that the results from the 1998 National Youth Gang Survey supported this view: white youths constituted only 11 per cent of gang members in large cities, but 30

per cent in small cities and rural areas. The OJJDP fact sheet (2002) on National Youth Gang Survey Trends from 1996 to 2000 indicated 47 per cent of gang members to be Hispanic, 31 per cent African American, 13 per cent white, 7 per cent Asian and 2 per cent other.

An OJJDP report (2001) maintained that immigration has also played a role in gang proliferation, and according to this view, successive immigrant groups such as Irish, Jewish, Slavic and other ethnic groups in the 1800s, followed by Cambodians, Filipinos, Koreans, Samoans, Thais, Vietnamese, and Colombians, Cubans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans and others have formed gangs. However, they conceded that immigration could not fully explain all the increase in gang problems.

Research on gangs in the Canadian context is sparse compared to research in the US. The 2002 Canadian Police Survey (results published in 2003) reported that nationally, the largest racial group of youth gang members was African Canadian/black (25 per cent), followed by First Nations (22 per cent) and the third major group was Caucasian/white (18 per cent). There were other gangs, such as East Indian and Pakistani as well. In Ontario, British Columbia and Manitoba, the existence of racially heterogeneous gangs was reported. Migration of gang members from other jurisdictions was considered to be one of the factors contributing to the expansion of gangs, and the impact of returning youth or adult prisoners also was seen as another contributing factor. There was one research report (Mackenzie and Johnson, 2003) published by Corrections Canada on women gang members, which utilized Correctional Service of Canada's automated database. The report provided information on 37 women gang members who had served or were serving federal sentences in Canada. The study compared the gang members with non-gang members matched on their age group and sentence length. Twenty-nine per cent of the gang members were Aboriginal compared to 23 per cent of the non-gang members. The gang member admissions constituted less than 6 per cent of all women offender admissions. Using the same database, Nafekh (2002) reported that 80 per cent of all offenders affiliated with a gang (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) in the Prairie region

were 25 years of age or younger at the time of admission to a federal institution, and that 75 per cent of these inmates was of Aboriginal descent.

A report produced by the Criminal Intelligence Service Saskatchewan (2005) stated that the estimated number of youth gangs in Canada based on a 2002 police survey was 434 with a membership of 7,071 — with the highest concentration in Ontario, followed by Saskatchewan. The known youth gangs in Saskatchewan, mostly Aboriginal, were the Crips, Junior Mixed Blood, Indian Mafia Crips and North Central Rough Riderz. About 70 per cent of gang members in Saskatoon were 18 years or older, and the average age of gang members in Regina was 24 years.

In Canada, some researchers (e.g. FCM 2002) stated that the publication of sensational reports in mass media regarding youth crime, lumping all such crimes as 'gang-related',

> …creates the impression that youth gangs are rampant across the country. Many of the images associated with youth gangs are racial and racist in nature. Certainly, using terms like “tribal youth subculture” does not help. .... Public concerns are escalated further when racial overtones are added. For instance, a study of Toronto Tamil youth (Balasingham, 2000) discovered there were significant differences between reality and the perceptions of police and school personnel about Tamil youth gang and group activities. Despite clear evidence that there is no connection between Tamil youth groups/gangs in Toronto and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, many of the front line police and school personnel believed there were such connections. This perception then gets communicated to the public. Tamil youth see “gang” activity as less cohesive and less formally structured, and as far less serious and threatening than the image that gets created in the public. All of this serves to further racialize and marginalize Tamil youth. (p.2-3).

The racial implication of suspected gang activities could have a strong negative impact on some youths. Brown (2004) interviewed a large number of persons from the African Canadian community in greater Toronto and reported that an innocent young man from a racial minority wearing certain kinds of clothes and accessories (e.g., baggy pants, a bandanna and flashy jewelry) might be perceived as a gang member. A simple encounter in school might result in the youth being thrown out under the discretionary power of the *Safe Schools Act*. Brown mentioned,

> Several youth say they have been “banned” by police — although most of these cases involved security guards — from visiting friends in certain apartment buildings. A ban under the *Trespass Act* means the person cannot come onto that property unless they can `prove’ the purpose of their visit. In the interviews banning was repeatedly mentioned as a sore spot. Proving legitimacy of a visit may include anything from having a letter of invitation—we were told of one such incident in a public housing complex—to being questioned or having security follow one to the apartment they say they are visiting. (p. 35)

Also, one youth interviewee said,

> A White teacher once told me, that the way she looks at it and the way the cops see it is like, when they see a bunch of white kids they call them a club. But when they see a bunch of black kids they call them a gang. (p.48).

Most research evidence demonstrates that youth gang members' age range is wide, from 8 to 50+ in some cases, that the average age tends to be 14 to 16, that there are more male than female gang members, and many gang members happen to come from socially marginalized and disadvantaged ethnic minority groups.

The Risk Factors: Why and how do youth gangs emerge and thrive? What societal/community/family characteristics foster the growth of such gangs?

A number of theories have been offered to explain the emergence of youth gangs (Shelden, Tracy and Brown, 2004). The major theories are explained below. (A) Social disorganization theory proposes that poverty, high density, poor housing, high mobility and high rates of unemployment foster crime. (B) Strain/anomie theory suggests that when opportunities to attain the cultural norms of success, such as money, status and power, are not equally distributed, people may resort to illegal means. (C) The cultural deviance theory maintains that certain subcultures contrary to the mainstream norms, values and attitudes may develop in poor communities, often characterized by female-headed families, which tend to be low-income. The youth get exposed to this deviant subculture quite early in their lives. (D) The Control/social bond theory argues that delinquency persists if the youth's bonds to the normal societal institutions — family and

school for example — are not established, or broken. (E) Learning theory suggests that deviant behaviour, attitudes and values are acquired by the youth through association with deviant role models. (F) Labeling theory proposes that people of greater power and status in a society define the concept of delinquency. Those labeled as delinquent most often come from poorer and disadvantaged segments, and may seek to associate with others similarly labeled. (G) Rational choice theory assumes that people choose freely to engage in criminal activities. (H) Lastly, Critical or Marxist theory argues that gangs are the inevitable consequences of social inequality caused by capitalism. The authors point out that the emergence of low socioeconomic class does not *necessarily* lead to crime; however, a structurally segmented labour market where minorities, due to their geographical segregation, most often end up with low-paying, unstable, dead-end jobs, might lead to a welfare economy and an illegal economy — as was found in Los Angeles Chicano gangs of the barrio.

Shelden et al. quoted Klein's (1995) conclusion in elaborating the origin of such occurrence:

> Uneducated, underemployed young males turn to the illegal economies enhanced by gang membership, including selling drugs in some instances. Older males who in earlier decades would have 'matured' into more steady jobs and family roles hang on to the gang structure by default. The newer gang cities like Milwaukee thus emerge, looking much like the traditional gang cities. (p.196-197).

Klein (1995) also maintained,

> It is not sufficient to say that gang members come from lower income areas, from minority populations, or from homes more often characterized by absent parents or reconstituted families. It is not sufficient because most youths from such areas, such groups and such families, do not join gangs. (pp. 75-76, Shelden et al. 2004).

In addition to these socio-economic theories, there are biological, intelligence-based, and personality trait theories (Delaney, 2005). The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) as a contributing factor to crime would support the biological hypothesis. The effect of mass media comes under the social learning theory. Przemieniecki (2005) examined the

impact of mass media portraying gang activities on the behaviour of youth and came to the conclusion,

> It is evident from the content analysis of news reports, interviews with law enforcement officials and gang members, and the analysis of gang-related films, that gang behavior can be attributed to the elements in social learning theory..... A gang film is also able to show other potential and current gang members how things are done in different parts of the country. ...the responses of the interviewees indicate that Hollywood has played an influential role in fostering the images of gang activities by identifying characteristics such as gang colors, language and gang names. (p.58).

Some scholars (e.g., Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2002; Moore, 1998) have observed that a normal phase of adolescence involves socializing in same-sex groups, not all of which evolve into gangs. Moore (1998) outlined four conditions in the process of gang formation: ineffective families and schools where proper adult supervision was lacking; lack of opportunities for pro-social activities; unavailability of good employment opportunities and access to a place to get together.

Valdez (2000) maintained that the earliest gangs in the USA consisted primarily of people from lower socio-economic status, and emerged in response to class distinction, prejudice and hatred. His view is consistent with the above that the risk factors for gang membership can be found in the community, family, school and peers. The availability of drugs and firearms and the community norms governing their use, economic deprivation, media portrayals of violence were some of the community factors. Dysfunctional and/or criminally inclined families, poor academic performance, problem behaviour in schools, and delinquent peers were other risk factors.

A detailed analysis of the history of a gang and its profile, including its activities can be found in the book *The Vice Lords: A Gang Profile Analysis* (Knox and Papachristos, 2002). The authors traced the development of the Vice Lords to the glamourization of gangs in American youth literature and movies in the 1950s - where gang became the popular model for youth rebellion together with some ethnic groups' (such as African-American) concentration in socially disadvantaged inner city areas. A small group of

African-American boys in an Illinois reformatory formed the Vice Lords gang in 1958. In the 1960s, smaller gangs were absorbed in more powerful and organized gangs such as the Vice Lords, Devil's Disciples and the Black P-Stone Nation; the gangs became involved in the drug trade. A number of government programs tried to utilize the gang structure to address the social disorganization of the inner city neighbourhoods — which inadvertently facilitated the cohesiveness and organizational structure of gangs. Knox and Papachristos observed,

> As a partial result of these [intervention] efforts, going into the 1970s the Vice Lords had achieved more than most gangs accomplish in their entire existence, including: (1) secured federal funding, (2) established legitimate businesses, (3) created a clear hierarchy within the gang, and (4) cultivated political and community contacts. (p. 11).

The Vice Lords even developed a written constitution and by-laws. The Vice Lords also became aligned with the Islamic faith, probably to have the convenience of holding meetings inside the prison and also due to the influence of the Black P-Stone Nation that had become the Islamic faith-based gang El Rukns.

Spergel (1995) commented,

> Age, gender, and culture as well as economics and community structure affect the character and development of the youth gang problem. Youth gangs — as they concern the larger community — comprise mainly male adolescents and young adults. The gang problem, however, is distinctive in particular racial, ethnic, and cultural, often lower-class, contexts. Not only poverty but social disorganization, especially population change and movement, are key conditions or pressures for the development of gang systems and subcultures. The way the factors of poverty and criminal opportunity, family and neighborhood disorganization interact and combine with racial and ethnic cultural traditions creates the basis of certain patterns of gang crime behavior. (p. 68-69).

Howell and Lynch (2000) reported that there was a prevalence of gangs in schools in certain American cities — with population ranging from 100,000 to a million. According to their report, 37 per cent of students surveyed in 1997 acknowledged the existence of gangs in their schools. The respondents who said there was a gang presence in their

schools included two-thirds of Hispanic students, almost half of black students and one-third of white students, and mostly middle-to late-adolescence pupils living in low-income houses. These respondents reported drug availability and personal victimization. These were mostly urban schools where a lot of security measures were necessary, indicating the lack of organization, effective discipline and safety in the school environment.

The Edmonton Police Service (undated Internet publication) identified a number of risk factors, similar to those mentioned above. Among them were family factors such as: stressful home life, parental non-involvement, low parental education level, low parental expectations, limited English spoken in home, abuse/neglect, ineffective parenting and permissive attitudes toward truancy. Among personal indicators they mentioned low motivation, low educational and occupational aspirations, low self-esteem, behaviour/discipline problems, alcohol or drug use, poor peer relations, negative police involvement and poor internalization skills. The community factors included lack of community support services, lack of community support for schools, high incidence of criminal activity, lack of school/community linkages, lack of recreational facilities, high transient population, lack of youth employment opportunities and community norms that were inattentive to alcohol/drug abuse. Finally, the school-related factors were low teacher expectations, poor academic background, incompatible home/school cultures, lack of educational options, negative school environment, lack of student responsibility, lack of effective attendance system, lack of effective discipline system and informal dress code.

A research report published (2001) by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) of the United States indicated that there was a significant rise in gang problems in US cities between the 1970s and the 1990s. This report mentioned drugs, immigration, gang names and alliances, inter-region migration, government policies, female-headed households, gang subculture and the media as the primary reasons for this increase. Drug addiction and drug trafficking of course have been considered as contributing factors in many juvenile crimes. It maintained that the government policies

of allocating funds to gangs in order to motivate them to abandon illegal activities seemed to encourage gang membership instead, as the policies were mostly interpreted by the beneficiaries as support for the gang lifestyle.

In discussing the risk factors for youth who join gangs, Wyrick and Howell (2004) commented that risk factors might include characteristics of the individual, of the family, poor school performance, delinquent peer groups and disorganized community conditions; and that a combination of such factors, especially from multiple domains, increased the likelihood of youths joining gangs. Individual risk factors mentioned were antisocial attitudes and behavioural tendencies, drug use, early dating, precocious sexual activity and negative life experience. Family structure, poverty, child abuse or neglect and poor parental supervision were among family characteristics predictive of gang membership. Poor school performance or dropping out of school, low academic aspirations, low commitment to learning, teachers' negative labeling as well as association with delinquent peers were found to correlate with gang involvement. Lastly, feelings of unsafe neighbourhood, presence of gangs in neighbourhoods, low informal social control, poverty and low level of attachment to neighbourhoods were community risk factors.

Media attention to gangs and their activities in the form of movies, novels, television dramas and even news features, according to this report, contributed to increased publicity and glamour. The authors believed that in the 1990s 'Gangsta rap' made this worse.

> The character and values of gang life described by the rappers differed radically from the images of *West Side Story*. Language was rough and insistently obscene; women were prostitutes (“bitches,” “ho’s,”and “sluts”) to be used, beaten, and thrown away; and extreme violence and cruelty, the gang lifestyle, and craziness or insanity were glorified. Among the rappers’ targets of hatred, scorn, and murder threats were police, especially black police (referred to as “house slaves” and “field hands”); other races and ethnic groups; society as a whole; and members of rival gangs. ..... Gangsta rap strengthened the desire of these youth to become part of a gang subculture that was portrayed by the rappers as a glamorous and rewarding lifestyle. (p. 61).

Delaney (2005) offers a similar view regarding glamourization of gang life style by mass media, and by rap music in particular.

Migration of gangs from big cities to smaller neighbourhoods or other cities was believed to be another factor in the proliferation of gangs. However, empirical evidence based on a survey of 800 cities did not support this view (Maxson, 1996), and led to the conclusion that although intercity migration of gang members was common, the reason for such moves often involved social necessities like the move of the families and could not account for gang formation in new areas.

Although not directly discussing the youth gang issue, La Prairie and Stenning (2003) concluded,

> there is no question that the particular demographics of the Aboriginal population of Canada (a higher proportion of people in the 'high risk'15 to 24 age group, lower education levels, higher unemployment, higher rates of substance abuse and addiction, etc.) lead to their over-representation in these vulnerable neighbourhoods, and hence to their overall over-representation in the criminal justice system. There can equally be little doubt any more that these "particular circumstances" of many Aboriginal people are reflected in Aboriginal involvement in both crime and the criminal justice system, both as offenders and victims. (p. 187).

Bjørgo (1999) mentioned that most gangs start out as a common group of friends and then go through a number of turning points in their attitudes toward their transformation into street gangs. These were: a commitment to crime (despite the fact that even the most criminally-oriented gang members typically spend most of their time on non-criminal activities); the group's own awareness of the gang identity, usually expressed in hostilities between rival gangs; and the community's response to their gang-associated activities.

In summary, research indicates that socio-economic, family-related, school and community factors that contribute to marginalization of youth, as well as negative

individual/biological factors may contribute to the emergence and continued existence of youth gangs.

Reasons for Joining Youth Gangs: Why Do Youths Join Gangs? Are the youth members themselves victims as well as criminals? Why should they be or not be considered victims?

The answers to these questions will necessarily overlap to a large extent with the content of the previous section. Researchers (e.g., Trump, 2002; Cureton, 2002) have suggested that youth join gangs due to a number of factors such as needs for power, status, personal safety and security (protection), belonging (to a surrogate family), friendship and loyalty, poverty, unemployment, alcohol or drug addiction, and failure of educational or other social institutions. Others have mentioned needs for love, structure and discipline, commitment, recognition, companionship, excitement, a sense of self-worth, acceptance, and family connections (Leese, Deen and Parker, 2005). The Edmonton Police Service (undated Internet document) confirms many of the above, and also explains that young people from a dysfunctional and/or abusive family, family with a criminal history, low academic achievement and those having a sense of low self-worth may be easily attracted to join gangs. Money — for drugs or alcohol — may be another strong motivating factor. Others may join due to intimidation by gang members. Manitoba Justice (undated Internet publication) refers to “stand-in family”, recognition, hero imitation, protection, threats, money, heavy peer pressure, and lack of choices due to unemployment to be among the reasons for joining a gang.

Shelden, Tracy and Brown (2004) described findings from Jankowski's (1990) study on why some youths join gangs. The reasons for joining gangs were believed to be the same as those for the emergence of gangs: (i) material reasons — "the bank serves as both a bank and a social security system" (p. 77) and the economic benefits of drug-dealing, (ii) recreation — company, friendship and excitement, (iii) a place of shelter and concealment, (iv) physical protection in an inherently unsafe environment, (v) refusal to continue the low-level employment of parents and (vi) loyalty to the community — not

joining a local gang is seen by some as not having a commitment to the community. Delaney's findings (2005) were consistent with the above: thrill-seeking, excitement or rush in living a gang life-style was another possible explanation for youths' joining gangs together with lack of legitimate job opportunities - often resulting from poor academic performance. Influence of antisocial peers, needs for acceptance, personal protection and survival were other possible factors.

Fleisher (2002) explained that in some cases, there were intergenerational factors contributing to gang involvement in youth. He presented the following table showing how the household of gang youth's parents causes a dysfunctional environment, which in its turn propelled youth toward poor school performance, addiction, homelessness, etc., and might lead them to join gangs. In the light of this analysis, these youths were not just gang members; they might also be considered victims.

Fremont Hustlers' Intergenerational Risk Factors and Social Capital Assessment (from Fleisher, Mark, 2002).

Gang Youth Parents' Household	**Gang Youth Parents' Household**
Household instability	Poor education
Domestic violence	Crime
Physical/Sexual abuse	Imprisonment
Drug/Alcohol abuse	Gangs
Gang youth household environment	Gang youth household environment
Family Traits	**Youth Traits**
Crime and imprisonment	School failure
Domestic violence	Drug/Alcohol abuse
Child neglect	Homelessness
Drug/Alcohol abuse	Teenage parenthood
Poor jobs, jobless	Anger and post-traumatic stress disorder
Gang Life	**Social Capital**
Property/Violent crime	Low social capital
Drug distribution	Low human capital
Inter-gang violence	Low bonding capital
Imprisonment	No bridging capital

The view that most gang members were victims of people in their lives and their environment has also been expressed by Shelden, Tracy and Brown (2004) when they

observed that a majority of gang members had grown up in an environment of crime and violence — prompting them to join gangs for protection. Data collected from 77 Detroit gang members by Brown showed that 74 per cent of them had participated in violence and 70 per cent had been a victim of gang conflict – 36 per cent had lost someone close to homicide. Often, these men said that they had very little choice but to engage in violence.

Miller (2002a) reviewed two decades of research on female gang involvement and conducted her own research on risk factors, the pathways of girls into gangs and the consequences of gang membership. She concluded that young women joined gangs in the hope of solving the multitude of problems in their lives, and then ended up increasing them in various ways, including choosing a criminal lifestyle. She observed:

> Unfortunately, responses to gangs and gang members are often punitive in nature, disregarding the social, economic, and personal contexts that cause gang participation. This punitive orientation toward gang members means that gang-involved youths are not seen as in need of assistance and protection, and this — coupled with the problems they face in their daily lives - has further detrimental effects on these young people (Fleisher, 1998; Moore and Hagedorn, 1996). Moreover, programming and policies targeted specifically to the needs of female gang members have been scant (see Curry, 1999). Given the findings I have detailed above, the best course of action with regard to young women's gang involvement should involve policies that consider the social, economic, and personal contexts that influence gang participation, gang crime, and young women's victimization within these groups. Initiatives that actually consider the best interest of youths are needed in order to rationally respond to gangs and young women's involvement in these groups. (p 196).

Data indicate that there are both push and pull factors that contribute to youths' decision to join a gang. These include: dysfunctional family — characterized by abuse and neglect, socially disorganized and crime-prone communities, poor academic performance, lack of opportunities for pro-social activities including legitimate employment, presence of gang members in family, peer group and/or neighbourhood leading to modeling, and needs for acceptance, love, discipline and structure, money, safety, personal protection and drugs.

Codes of Conduct for Youth Gang Members: Are there specific codes of conduct and rules for youth gangs? How are they enforced, and what are the consequences of non-adherence?

Cureton (2002) interviewed members of the Hoover Crips gang from South Central Los Angeles. In response to one of his questions "What are the rules of the 'hood' and how early do young children learn them?" the interviewees indicated that violence was a natural rule of the gang to protect everything they valued including their respect, money, territory and their interaction with women, and if a member engaged in violence while young, it enhanced the member's reputation as tough and not to be messed with. The researcher quoted one of the responses,

> If you want the answers to why killing, banging, robbing, and all that is going on, then I would have to say that we are doing it to them because they are doing it to us. ... The little homies learn it from birth, really. And as soon as they can get from under their parents' wing, the “hood” will drive them right to the gang. The gang will offer them respect, status, prestige, freedom, and success on these hot ass streets. (p. 92).

A detailed profile of gang membership was depicted by Valdez (2000). Typically, gang members strongly held a pay-back or retaliation concept, resulting in violence toward other gangs or sometimes even the public. They followed a code of silence, especially when confronted by law enforcement people, but also in their dealings with family and teachers. Respect was another concept considered extremely important to gang members — although the term “respect” was interpreted by them as fear [of being a victim of violence if anyone shows disrespect] — so respect must be earned by using violence and instilling fear. A corollary of the code of respect was retaliation for insults — perceived or real. Survival was most important, at any cost. In other words, any crime, even taking someone's life was considered justified in order to survive. Gang members often believed that even innocent bystander victims of violence 'should have known better'. Gang members were expected to have a total commitment or loyalty to the gang, their true family — where they felt they belonged and were loved — and this was particularly true with respect to hard-core members. They thought in terms of the collective, which made

rehabilitation efforts more difficult. This attitude resulted in a belief that each individual member had a “back up” when necessary.

The objective manifestations of gang membership, according to Valdez, were many. Gangs used graffiti to communicate with other gangs regarding their identity and to mark their turfs. Graffiti could also be used as a threat or a challenge against a rival gang, or as an insult. Gangs might use graffiti to advertise their activities, for example, of planned drive-by shootings. They could be found in school notebooks, posters, walls, mirrors, letters, magazines and even etched on drinking glasses. Colours were important too. Specific gang colours could be worn or used in shoelaces, clothes, belts, handkerchiefs and other articles. Gang members also tended to wear certain types of clothing and tattoos. Tattoos could be found on any part of their bodies, and might represent their gang names or other symbols such as a spider web, indicating a prison term. Other common tattoos were happy and sad theatrical faces. Gang members might also use burns and scars on their bodies. Body piercing, stylized haircuts, hand signs, use of gang slangs, stylized jewelry were other indicators of gang membership. Certain types of magazines (e.g., *Teenager*, *Can Control*, *Prison Life*, *Street Beat* and *Blood and Honor*) and certain types of music (Hip Hop and Gangster Rap) were often associated with gang membership.

Gangs tended to use slang. For example, some of the slang used by black gangs were: “Ace kool” meaning best friend or backup; “boned out” meant quitting or to chicken out; “break” meant running away; “base head” meant a person hooked on cocaine; “Babylon” or “man” was police; “bo” was marijuana; “get down” was to fight; “snaps” was money; “strapped” referred to a gang member carrying a gun. (Valdez, 2000).

Trump (2002) pointed out the signs of gang presence in schools as follows:

Graffiti or unusual signs or symbols on walls, in notebooks etc.;

Colours worn in clothing, bandanas, jewelry;

Tattoos on arms, chest or body;

Suspicious bruises, wounds, etc as an indication of initiation rites;

Unusual hand signs or handshakes;
Uncommon terms or phrases (gang slang); and
Sudden changes in youths' behaviour or secret meetings.

Similar to the above profile portrayed by Valdez and Trump, the handbook titled "Project Gang-Proof" (Manitoba Justice, 2001) also described the outward signs of gangs in Canadian communities. Graffiti on public or private property depicting names, symbols and characters were drawn to identify gang members and mark the territory. Gang graffiti might be used to advertise activities, to make threats or challenges, and distortion of graffiti was considered an insult to be avenged through violence. Gang graffiti was often in block letters, might contain gang colours, might include a gang name and might be crossed out by rival gangs. "Colours" was a term that referred to specific colours, types and styles of attire that included shoes, pants, shirts, baseball caps, key-rings, jackets and belt buckles. For example, the Crips, a Los Angeles super-gang, wore blue bandanas, while the Bloods, a rival gang, wore red. Bandanas might also indicate gang membership, and were respected like the national flag, to be protected at all costs (Delaney, 2005). Gang membership was even revealed by the way members stood, walked or through their hand gestures and other signals.

Knox and Papachristos (2002) provided direct quotes from the written by-laws of the Vice Lords. Some of these are as follows:

1. All members must be his/her protectors. If at any time a member is in trouble, in danger, or in need of assistance, you are to assist them, whether they are right or wrong, to the best of your physical ability.
2. All members are to live by the code of death before dishonor, (DBD), which consists of dedicating yourself to the organization. There will be no associating with the enemy on any occasion at all.
3. One must always be up to his/her title in which you have earned. If you are asked: Who you be? Or what you riding? Or what set do you claim? Dect. [sic] You are to state your organization, and be ready to defend its name at all cost.

> 4. All members must abide by the code of silence, (COS). Snitching, or ratting will not be tolerated! You are not to talk to any one [sic] outside of the family about any function pertaining to the Nation.
> 5. A Vice Lord is prohibited from aiding, or prompting the advancement of any enterprise, organization, etc. that are not under the 5-pointed star, with the one exception of religious beliefs.
> 6. A Vice Lord carries the duty of honoring the Nation, and all principles of the 5-pointed star at all times.
> 7. A Vice Lord must use the proper channels to resolve any, and all problems before acting on impulse, or renegade, with the exceptions of life endangerment, or situations that just can't be avoided.
> 8. A Vice Lord shall and will maintain peace at all times when able to do so. (p 51).

The authors also provided the meanings of some Vice Lord symbols and expressions: top hat meant shelter and "making it happen" and worn on the left identified the wearer as a Vice Lord; the cane meant "I'm conscious"; the dice stood for hustler or hustle; the Playboy rabbit represented the motto "move swiftly, silently and smoothly"; and a champagne glass meant celebration or "completed"; a black glove meant assassins; the diamond [of prosperity] stood for making money. The five-point star, a symbol of the Vice Lords, was described as symbolizing the five goals of humankind: Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom and Justice.

Delaney (2005) observed that clothing was an important part of the gang life-style, and presented some examples: Duke University Sweatshirt, typically used by Gangster Disciples; North Carolina University Jersey worn by the Crips; Playboy Hat was associated with the Vice Lords; Bomber Jacket was perhaps used by the Blood Red Dragon; CK Jeans symbolized "Crip Killer" to some gangs in Los Angeles; Star of David was a token of hero worship for a fallen comrade by the Gangster Disciples; and Louis Vuitton Hat stood for prestige, worn by the Vice Lords.

It seems that gang members follow the codes of conduct or gang rules for two reasons: first they wish to belong to the specific gangs and therefore, to identify themselves as members for all the perceived benefits of gang membership; secondly, non-adherence can be judged as lack of commitment to gang membership and lifestyle, and punishment can be serious, even death. (Shelden, Tracy and Brown, 2004). One of the codes of conduct specified by the Vice Lords, for example, indicates: "Every order you receive pertaining to Nation business has a specific reason, and will not question unless a representative does not understand the specific order being given, failure to be a discipline representative will result in discipline actions that will be taken." (p174).

In sum, well-established gangs typically have codes of conduct sometimes including initiation rites and distinct style and colour of clothing; they use graffiti, tattoos and special terminology to identify themselves, to mark their turfs as well as to publicize their future plans/actions including threats. The price of non-compliance could be physical punishment, even death.

TT

Criminal Activities of Youth Gangs: What do we know about the scope and nature of what youth gangs do or are involved in — for example, drugs, violence, extortion, car theft and other petty crimes? How much of this involvement is real and how much is perceived (for example, through media portrayal)? Do we have any hard empirical evidence?

Researchers (e.g., Shelden, Tracy and Brown, 2004; Esbenson, Peterson, Freng and Taylor, 2002; Gordon et al., 2004) agreed that criminal activities including weapon-related offences, violence, property crimes, shoplifting and drug use were more prevalent among gang members than among other delinquents. As part of the national evaluation of the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.), Esbenson, Freng, Taylor and Osgood (2002) conducted one cross-sectional and one longitudinal study of gang members with an average age of 14 years. They reported that compared to non-gang youths, gang members participated in more, and more serious, types of illegal activities. They were found to be involved in drug use, drug sales and violent offences as part of the

initiation process into gang membership, although the temporal sequence was not understood. These findings were confirmed by a longitudinal study in Pittsburg (Gordon et al., 2004). Youths engaged in drug selling, drug use, violent crime and property crime to a much greater extent after joining gangs than before, even when they were already predisposed to such activities. This study, however, did not support the finding from other research regarding persistence of drug-related offences after youths left a gang.

Moore and Hagedorn (2001) observed that data from a 1992 survey of law enforcement respondents and other empirical evidence indicated female gang members were less involved in violent crimes than male gang members. They usually committed property crimes and status offences, and drug offences were one of the most common offences committed by them.

Jankwoski (1990, cited in Shelden et al. 2004) studied 37 gangs of which 27 made some money through legitimate means. They also engaged in illegal activities involving drugs, stolen guns, auto parts, and electronic equipments, providing services such as protection and demolition (e.g., by arson) of property, protecting prostitutes and their pimps, extortion, punishing delinquent borrowers of money and setting up gambling rooms. Jankowski also argued that gang members engaged in violence because gangs attracted 'defiant' youths who wanted to prove their worth, and to increase their status among other gang members. Use of violence occurred for a variety of reasons: to cause fear among own members or among those of rival gangs, to prevent violation of gang codes, to punish people who were perceived to cause a member disrespect or perceived as a threat to the member's self-worth, for fear of being reported to the police, protection of territory, rivalry over female companions, for disciplinary purposes and even personal support of another gang member (Shelden et al. 2004).

On the basis of a literature review, Shelden et al. (2004) concluded:

> Gang members commit a variety of crimes, although the extent to which they contribute to the overall crime problem is not known with any degree of certainty. The crimes they tend to commit are similar to the kinds of crimes committed by

> other delinquent individuals — that is, mostly property and drug offenses. The extent of the violence committed by gang members is not nearly the level portrayed by the media, and, in fact, gang members' contribution to the overall rate of violence is relatively small. There is little question that the presence of drugs also accounts for increased criminal activity of youth gang members. Drug dealing on the part of gang members is significant, but not to the extent that is portrayed by the media. (p.134).

Wiesel (2002) indicated that the police survey—respondents in her study reported a variety of gang-related crimes. These were: motor vehicle theft, arson, assault, burglary, drive-by shooting, selling crack, powder cocaine, marijuana and other drugs, graffiti, home invasion, intimidation, rape, robbery, shooting, theft and vandalism. The gang member respondents supported the finding.

Street gangs (which may include youth gangs as associates) are believed to commit a wide range of crimes: homicide, drive-by shootings, assault and battery, robbery, burglary, breaking and entering, larceny/theft and motor vehicle theft (including carjacking or forcible taking of a car), vandalism involving graffiti, witness intimidation, extortion and rape. Rapes can be used to initiate female members or as a punishment or intimidation for the victim and potential victims (sometimes outsiders), or sometimes even as entertainment. In addition, gangs (not necessarily youth gangs) are believed to be taking over the drug trade in America (Delaney, 2005). Howell (undated, found in National Youth Gang Center website) observed that some large youth gangs, such as Chicago's Vice Lords, were heavily involved in drug use and trafficking. Even within other gangs, there were drug-selling cliques. He also pointed out that youth gang wars over drug markets in Chicago were responsible for more than 100 homicides during 1987-1994. Drug trafficking, one of the criminal activities of gang members, has sometimes been considered to be related to gang homicides (Howell, 2005) as drug trafficking seemed to provide a likely context for extreme violence. Howell also believed that youth gang homicides involved a natural progression from the dynamics of everyday gang activities. He observed that as access to and use of lethal firearms had been increasing, the rate of youth gang homicides committed with a firearm had been increasing concomitantly.

Knox and Papachristos (2002) reported that in Chicago area alone, there were nine major Vice Lord groups with their own leaders, and Vice Lord gangs were reported in existence in 29 states and more than 400 cities. However, despite the similarities in structure, constitution and codes, they were rival gangs in different geographical areas. The authors indicated that Vice Lords were responsible for 3,113 gang-related incidents in Chicago between 1987 and 1990, and for more such crimes outside Chicago. Of these, 27 were homicides, 1,355 were aggravated batteries, aggravated assaults and 1,731 were drug-related incidents. These authors believed that the documents of Vice Lords demonstrated a clear tendency toward anti-semitism and terrorism (defined as achieving objectives by means of violence and being driven by the ideology of violence), and that both the anti-semitism tendency and the Islamic identity might make the Vice Lords attractive contacts (through the Internet, for example) for other terrorist groups in and outside of America. They rated the threat level of the Vice Lords as one of the highest among all US gangs at 9.25, above the threat level of Gangster Disciples at 9 because of the former gang's history of killing police officers. It is not clear, however, whether the Vice Lords can by considered *youth* or adult gangs.

Respondents of the 2002 Canadian Police Survey in the Provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba reported that a large proportion of youth gang members were involved in drug- trafficking (74%), burglary or break and enter, and assault (68%) and theft of auto/exportation (55%). In these three provinces, youth gang members' association with organized crime groups was believed to the highest with respect to drug trafficking (42%) and assault (32%). Youth gang members' involvement was considered low in criminal activities such as immigration fraud, smuggling of consumer goods and fraud (based on 95% of responses), followed by forgery/uttering and sexual assault/ rape (90% of responses), and chemical drug manufacture (88% of responses).

A study of Aboriginal youth gang members in Canadian federal institutions that compared them with a sample of matched non-gang inmates, found that gang members were more likely to be convicted for robbery offences, assault or a weapons offence, but

not sexual offences. There was no difference between the two groups with respect to homicide, drug possession and drug trafficking (Nafekh, 2002). A study of female gang members in Canadian federal institutions (Mackenzie and Johnson, 2003) reported that there were larger percentages of gang members convicted of assault, drug trafficking, drug possession, robbery, sex offences, and theft, as compared to non-gang member female offenders.

Another emerging trend was noted in the 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment conducted by the National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations. The report indicated that gangs were increasingly using technology as young people with technological expertise were joining gangs. They were utilizing cell phones, the Internet in communicating with each other, to facilitate their criminal activities and even to commit crimes such as producing fraudulent cheques and counterfeit money. They also used the Internet to track legal proceedings and identify witnesses for intimidation. They have been said to use walkie-talkie cell phones, police scanners, surveillance equipment and equipment for detecting microphones or bugs to impede law enforcement activities. They used the Internet for Internet-based prostitution and online video gaming, pirating of movies and music, selling gang-related music, clothing, and other gang symbols, and even for phishing attacks which persuaded unsuspecting Internet users to give their passwords, information on their bank accounts and credit card information on fake websites - leading to identity theft and financial loss for the victims. Gangs were reported to use the Internet for notifying members of meeting dates and for distribution of information. According to the law enforcement respondents to the 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment, many members of Asian gangs were involved in these high-tech offences.

To summarize the research findings: gang members commit a variety of offences ranging from minor to serious, such as: graffiti, burglary, theft, vandalism, motor vehicle theft, arson, assault, drive-by shooting, selling crack, powder cocaine, marijuana and other drugs, home invasion, intimidation, rape, robbery, shooting, and homicide. They also

engage in frauds, pirating and selling movies and music, identity theft, witness identification and intimidation, and communicating with other members of their gangs through cell phones, and the Internet.

Impact of Gang Involvement: How does gang involvement impact on individual youth themselves, on their families, on communities, and on community institutions (e.g., schools, Canadian justice system, health care system)?

Research documents that gang—members account for a disproportionate amount of crime in communities. (e.g, Gordon et al., 2004; Thornberry et al. 2004). Curry (2000) found a positive correlation between self-reported gang involvement in early adolescence and delinquency as recorded by the Chicago police department. Gangs tend to attract youths who are predisposed to antisocial behaviour and attitudes (the Selection hypothesis); however, gang membership also facilitates crime by association with delinquent peers and encourages youths' involvement in crime (the Social Facilitation hypothesis). This delinquent lifestyle disrupts the normal transition from adolescence to adulthood. Gang members are more likely to drop out of schools, live with girls/boys without getting married, become teenage fathers/mothers and have no stable employment (Thornberry et al., 2004).

There is another type of impact of gang-related activities especially on other young people and their communities. In a neighbourhood where youth gangs are active, most often other youths between the ages of 16 and 19 are victims of violence. This results in an unstable social environment where learning the norms and values of the larger society becomes difficult (World Youth Report, 2003). Thus, presence of gangs in communities causes fear and more social disorganization within those communities. Gang members threaten the safety of students in schools, recruit children, or at least provide wrong kind of role models for children, and make lives of ordinary citizens insecure. Gangs today are said to be more prone to violence as well as more technologically knowledgeable, thus they pose a great threat to all citizens. Howell and Lynch (2000) reported,

> The presence of gangs is correlated with criminal activity and the use of self-protective measures that indicate an atmosphere of perceived danger in the school environment. It is not clear, however, that gangs are a direct cause of criminal victimization at school. Belonging to gangs may be a type of self-protection employed by students in response to threatening school and community environments. (p 7).

A Criminal Intelligence Services of Saskatchewan report (2005) cautioned,

> What is important to remember from various research on gang activity is that gang involvement significantly increases an individual's chances of being arrested, incarcerated and severely injured. (p 3).

The report also maintained that during the last 10 years, gangs [not just youth gangs] in Saskatchewan have been responsible for the expenditure of a huge amount of resources in law enforcement and criminal justice. The direct costs on the communities resulting from the crimes were reflected in terms of reduced economic viability, higher insurance and health care costs, decline in property values and increased legal expenses, while the indirect costs to the community were fear of crime, fear of unsafe living conditions, injured family members or lost lives and lost potential. The report explained that residents in gang-infested communities might not feel confident to utilize public facilities such as parks and playgrounds, nor would they participate in community events or cooperate with the police for fear of victimization. They might experience powerlessness, marginalization, emotional stress and loss of faith in the government to provide them with safe living conditions, and also in the justice system. Thus, the more a community experiences gang problems, the more likely it might deteriorate into disorganization.

In addition to the World Youth Report (2003), several other researchers (Miller, 2002b; Thornberry, 1998; Thornberry et al. 2003; Thornberry et al. 2004; Peterson et al.2004) pointed out that gang involvement, especially participation in violence, also increases the likelihood of youth being victims of violence, since the primary targets of gang violence have been found to be members of rival gangs. Similarly, Curry, Decker and Egley (2002) stated that research literature demonstrated the close relationship between gang

membership and a criminal lifestyle, and also between offending and being crime-victims. They noted that more than a dozen of 99 respondents in Decker's 1996 study had been killed within five years after the study was completed. Peterson, Taylor and Esbensen (2004) reported,

> ...an enhancement model best fits the pattern of the relationship between violent victimization and gang membership for youths aged 12 to 16. Gang members had higher levels of victimization than non-gang youths prior to their gang involvement, their level of victimization generally was greatest during their gang membership, and, while victimization decreased after the youths left the gang, their levels of victimization remained significantly higher than those of non-gang youths' victimization rates." (p. 812).

The victimization experiences examined longitudinally were simple assault, aggravated assault and robbery. This consistent evidence of gang members' high rate of victimization is understandable when considered in a context where most of them carry guns and/or knives, supposedly for their own protection and the protection of their turf, of profit from drug-selling, one of the most common gang activities, and because of gun-carrying peers (Lizotte et al, 2000).

Mackay (2005) interviewed Aboriginal youths and adults in Saskatoon to examine their sense of home and belonging. In response to the question of how gangs had affected them, four respondents stated that there was no impact on them. Three male participants believed gangs had affected them in positive ways, such as providing them with someone to depend on or by connecting them with other people or by adding to their Native identity. Ten participants responded that gangs had affected them in negative ways. They themselves or their relatives or friends were victims of gang violence. Some other respondents indicated that they had experienced intimidation by gangs, and some had committed a crime because of gang influence. Furthermore, Mackay observed,

> All participants expressed concern about safety in the neighbourhood. The physical environment contributes to the danger for youth and children. Specifically participants identified the following as typical danger zones to be avoided: run down buildings; too few or burnt-out street lights; idle kids unsupervised, hanging out in groups and vulnerable to gang initiation; dirty

> needles littering the ground: sex trade workers; far too easy access to drugs; and, police don't and can't protect them in every situation they face. The participants talked about how frightening the youth gangs are. They spoke of how the gang members are ruthless, and have no fear of consequences. (p. 23).

Review of pertinent research has shown that most gang members had children (at a young age, such as teenage or young adulthood), and for female gang members, this fact had a major long-term influence on their lives (Moore and Hagedorn, 2001). Male gang members, unlike their female counterparts, rarely took responsibility for their children. Moore and Hagedorn observed that in Los Angeles, female Mexican Americans who joined a gang were mostly considered unacceptable to the wider community and this additional marginalization prevented them from an opportunity to marry non-gang members. By contrast, only one-fifth of male gang members married females involved in gangs.

A prolonged association with gang life is considered to impede youths' social development by limiting their access to pro-social contacts and normal life experiences such as academic pursuit or employment (Thornberry et al. 2003; Thornberry et al. 2004). It is likely that the long-term effects may leave such youths with very few options later in life for leading a normal life and getting a good job, thus forcing them to lead a life of criminal activity.

Based on research on Central American gangs, Ribando (2005) comments,

> Gang violence may threaten political stability, inhibit social development, and discourage foreign investment in Central America. Many analysts predict that illicit gang activities may accelerate illegal immigration, drug smuggling, and trafficking in persons and weapons to the United States. Some analysts maintain that contact between gang members in both regions is increasing, and that this tendency may serve to increase gang-related violent crime in the United States. Others assert that unless the root causes of gang violence, which include poverty, joblessness, and the social exclusion of at-risk youth, are addressed in a holistic manner, the problem will continue to escalate. (p. 1).

Researchers believe that gang membership has both short-term and long-term consequences for the youths and the community. Examples include risks of arrest, of incarceration, of injury and/or a violent death, non-transition to normal adult life-style that includes legitimate employment. The impact on the community, justice system and health care system is also enormous, and sometimes not well recognized. Financial cost due to gang activities in all these domains is considerable; in addition, there are social costs in lost potential and fear of crime inhibiting normal activities of citizens.

Interconnection Among Youth Gangs: Are youth gangs interconnected in any way or are they primarily rivals? Are there inter- and intra-community links between youth gangs?

A research report by the OJJDP (2001) suggests that in the earlier part of the 20th century, most gangs were locally based; autonomous groups and their names reflected this feature. Examples were: Southside Raiders, Twelfth Street Locos, Jackson Park Boys. Other gangs chose more threatening names such as Cobras, Warriors, Los Diablos, Mafia Emperors. During the 1960s,

> a number of gangs adopted a variant of a common gang name. In Chicago in the 1960's, the Vice Lord name was used by about 10 local gangs, including the California Lords, War Lords, Fifth Avenue Lords, and Maniac Lords. These gangs claimed to be part of a common organization—the Vice Lord Nation—related to one another by ties of alliance and capable of engaging in centrally directed activity. (p. 58).

Researchers are not sure if these gangs are in fact linked and centrally coordinated or if these gangs simply want to portray themselves as parts of a big, powerful organization. Delaney (2005) maintains that in the United States, there are "super-sized gang nations" or local gangs which have alliances with larger, super-sized gangs, known as nation coalitions, such as the Crips, the Bloods, the People, the Folks, and the Asian Gangs. However, based on their research on the Vice Lords, Knox and Papachristos (2002) commented,

> the Vice Lord culture and structure provide an effective gang "starter kit" for new gangs that carry with it the weight, history and reputation of one of Chicago's oldest street gangs. (p. 15)…

and there is

> no overall Vice Lord Consortium Meeting or anything of that nature suggestive of daily, on-going interaction or collaboration. (p.13-14).

No conclusive empirical evidence is available to suggest that youth gangs are interconnected within a community or among different communities. Some evidence exists, however, to indicate that there is considerable rivalry among gangs for control of territories and violence is a common tool used to establish control.

Leaving Gangs: Do the youth members generally join gangs for life and graduate to the membership in adult gangs, or do they outgrow such loyalties? If the latter is true, what inspires them to do so? Are there problems and impediments if members wish to leave the gang?

In a detailed review of literature on leaving the gang, Decker and Lauritsen (2002) found that most of the information available was descriptive in nature. In their own field study based in St. Louis, the reasons discovered for leaving were varied: threat or fear of personal injury, family members or friends were victims of violence, moving away from the city, or just not known. Some responses also pointed to concerns about jobs or families. Fifteen of the 24 ex-members said they simply quit the gangs — without using any particular method. The authors commented that in most cases, gang membership was a transitory experience for youths, but 'aging out' or leaving gangs due to a more mature orientation towards life did not seem to happen in all cases. Another study reported that 15 per cent of boys were gang members at age 14, but only 4 per cent were members when they were 20. The researchers concluded, "Gangs simply become a less salient feature of boys' lives as they age." (p. 829, Lizotte et al, 2000).

Delaney (2005) supported the above-mentioned reasons for a member's wish to leave a gang. Horowitz (1983) reported that

> peripheral' or 'fringe' members found it easier to leave the gang than did “core” members, due to lesser involvement in gang activities and reduced dependence on the gang for social or instrumental support (p. 54)

— a crucial point.

Howell, Moore and Egley (2002) also confirmed that gang members, especially the marginal or non-hard core members, could leave and typically tended to leave the gangs after a while (sometimes a year) relatively easily. Other research (e.g, Decker and Lauritsen, 2002) generally supported this finding. Marginal or peripheral gang members usually were able to leave a gang without much problem, unlike the more long-term and hard core members, who found it more complex and risky, and needed this process of dissociation to be more gradual. Decker and Lauritsen (2002) surmised that even after making a decision to leave a gang, a gang member might find it difficult to do so because of continued identity as a gang member to rival gangs, the police and the community. The difficulties of finding legitimate employment and past involvement in gang activity were other possible obstacles.

Delaney (2005) indicated that many gang members became members of prison gangs when they were adults. Based on research conducted by Curry and Decker (2003), Delaney also maintained that leaving a gang was possible, albeit after a physical beating by fellow gang members for disrespect and at the risk of being a victim of violence by rival gangs without the personal protection offered by one's own gang. However, he observed that many gang members opted to continue remaining gang members, and risked being a homicide victim or going to prison.

In her study of Winnipeg female gang members, Nimmo (2001) found that some community agency respondents thought once these women were in, it was impossible for them to leave the gang; others thought it was not that difficult. The former held that

protection was a significant issue for the gang members — if they wanted to leave the gang, they would not only lose the protection from rival gangs, but also will need to fear their own gang members. Some women had their families involved in gangs for generations, and therefore, leaving gangs would mean social isolation as well.

Based on empirical data, the Canadian Training Institute (2003) cited a number of reasons for gang members' wish to leave a gang: fear for their personal safety and a desire for a new life — as stated by a Montreal youth gang member; one of the obstacles in leaving a gang was said to be the difficulty of rebuilding one's non-gang identity afterwards. A Vancouver study indicated additional reasons: gang members losing interest in their gang member identity; incarceration of key individuals; incapacitation (via death or drug abuse); and maturation. It also indicated that a strong social support network and provision of skills were important requirements for a successful integration of ex-gang youths into the mainstream.

Bjørgo, a Norwegian researcher (1999) observed that constant turnover was common in youth gangs, due to the following reasons:

• Aging out of gang life through natural maturation and new priorities in life;

• Defeat of the group by external use of force such as police and community efforts to combat gang problems;

• Loss of external enemies or threat: For example, some gangs (Warriors) in Norway with an anti-racist image had emerged as a reaction to a racist gang called Green Jackets. The members of the Warrior gang turned to profit-oriented crime when their rival gang disappeared.

• Loss of identity, status and image: of being tough and able to defend the gang's territory:

• Corrosion of group cohesiveness, solidarity and attraction value — sometimes because of internal conflicts, which could be reinforced by police, teachers, youth outreach workers and parents.

• Fragmentation of the group into smaller units which might be too weak to survive, but might lead to the formation of new gangs if support for normal life was not available to these youth.

It was easier for gang members to leave the gangs if they were in the process of disintegration from these natural causes, which would reduce the probability of punishment for leaving, Bjørgo believed. However, like some of the other scholars, he too cautioned that unless there was a solid support network available for these ex-gang members to integrate into the mainstream society, they might go back to gang life by default.

A few longitudinal studies conducted in areas of emerging gang problems demonstrated that most youth tended to stay in gangs for one year or less (Thornberry et al., 2003; Thornberry et al., 2004). Howell and Egley (2005) surmised that these results might not generalize to areas characterized by chronic or long-standing gang-problem, where multigenerational and/or more hierarchically-structured gangs were common.

Most researchers believe that for most youths who join gangs, gang membership is a transitory experience — lasting for one year or less. However, in some circumstances such as multi-generational or highly- structured gangs, youths, especially the hard-core or long-term members, may find it difficult to leave gangs. The desire to leave a gang may arise from natural maturation and wish to lead a stable, "normal" life, and/or fear for personal safety, of incarceration, from experiencing loss of key individuals to drug-abuse, injury or death. A strong support network and provision of life-skills are crucial for the successful re-integration of these youths into the mainstream. But some youths may never give up the gang lifestyle and join prison gangs as young adults.

Association Between Youth and Adult Gangs: Are youth gangs linked with adult gangs? Are youth gangs linked with Organized Crime groups? Are there cross-national links? Are there any links, directly or indirectly, to terrorist groups or activities?

Some researchers believed (e.g., Valdez, 2000) that since youth gangs were involved in drug marketing, the Mexican drug cartels would have a strong influence on the recruitment and activities of street gangs and prison gangs. However, they (e.g., Braga, 2004; Valdez and Sifaneck, 2004) also indicated that youth gangs might be involved in drug trafficking and selling, without being in control of these activities — which were the domain of the organized crime groups. Spergel (1995) quoted Thrasher's (1936) comment regarding the connection between youth gangs and adult criminal organizations

> [There is] no hard and fast dividing line between predatory gang boys and criminal groups of younger and older adults. They merge into each other by imperceptible gradations.

He believes,

> Youth and adult criminal subcultures are more integrated since the 1970s than they were in the 1950s and 1960s. The changing nature of organized crime includes the entry of newer minority groups, greater competition among nascent criminal organizations, an increased number of older youths and adults in street gangs, and the expansion of street-level drug markets. .... [T]he increasing concentration of unemployed males in certain Hispanic communities may be hastening the transformation of traditionally violent youth gangs to organized drug dealing. The links between street gangs and organized crime exist across race/ethnicity and culture and national boundaries (p. 131- 132).

Spergel observed that youth gang members (from 13 to 19 years of age) were often recruited by organized crime groups for a variety of services such as to be lookouts, couriers, messengers, distributors and sales persons for drugs. Such connections with organized crime groups have been reported to exist with Hispanic, Irish, African-American, Asian-American, Pacific and Asian gangs. He also mentioned that according to Chin (1990a), the Chinese-American gangs had the closest and most direct connections with organized crime groups such as Tongs. These youth gangs victimized local businesses by intimidation and were involved in extortion, protection, robbery, prostitution and drug trafficking — but also in some legitimate businesses.

As mentioned already, Knox and Papachristos believed that the documents of Vice Lords

demonstrated a clear tendency toward anti-semitism and terrorism (defined as achieving objectives by means of violence and being driven by the ideology of violence), and that both the anti-semitism tendency and the Islamic identity might make the Vice Lords attractive contacts (through the Internet, for example) for other terrorist groups in and outside of America. Delaney (2005) pointed out that skinheads, who could be considered a gang, were closely associated with racist groups such as White Aryan Resistance (WAR), the National Alliance, the New Order, the White Student Union (WSU), Aryan Nations, the Church of Creator and the Ku Klux Klan. He also observed that many street gangs fitted the defining characteristics of organized crime.

Ribando (2005) in her report to the United States Congress stated that recently, the arrest of 103 members of the violent Central American gang Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) in several American cities caused increased concerns of the press and policymakers to the effects of crime and gang violence in Central America, and its impact on the US in terms of transnational activities. According to this report, the two major gangs that were active in Central America with transnational connections to the United States were the “18th Street” gang (also known as M-18), and its main rival, the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13).

The report indicated that citizens in several Central American countries identified crime and gang violence among their top concerns, and Honduras and El Salvador have recently enacted tough anti-gang legislation. Among other gang-combating strategies, in Guatemala, a US agency known as USAID, has proposed a crime prevention program that would provide a model youth home for disadvantaged youth, including former gang members, and offer more educational and employment opportunities for at-risk youth.

A National Gang Threat Assessment was conducted by the United States National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations in 2005. The report presented a grim picture of a close business relationship between street gangs (likely including youth) and organized crime groups. The 116 law enforcement respondents indicated that youth gangs and organized crime groups, in many cases, were involved in similar criminal activities of which drug-related offences, most often in collaboration with Mexican drug-dealing organized crime groups, were the most common. They cooperated for the economic

benefit as well as for expansion of their activities. The respondents identified two other organized crime groups — Asian and Russian — with whom the youth gangs were considered to be linked. The report stated,

> Asian-based OC groups are often involved in multiple criminal activities. This includes drug trafficking, credit card fraud, illegal gaming, and money laundering. However, violence remains a defining characteristic of these organizations. (p. 3).

According to these respondents, other organized crime groups too had associations with youth gangs as the following table (p.3) from this report shows:

Percentage of Agencies Reporting Association Between Gangs and Organized Crime Entities (by Type of organization)

Type of Organized Crime Group	Percentage of Agencies
Mexican Drug Organizations	78.4
Asian	28.4
Russian/Central/East European	24.1
Colombian Drug Organizations	16.4
Dominican Drug Organizations	12.9
Middle-Eastern	6.9
La Cosa Nostra	6.9
Italian	6.0
Nigerian	4.3
Albanian	3.4
Other	11

Russian organized crime groups were reported to focus solely on profit and to have contacts with a variety of gangs. Many of the organized crime groups also engaged in human trafficking, migrant smuggling and prostitution-related activities in partnership with local gangs (and, probably, youth members of these gangs).

The report indicated that only a small percentage of surveyed law enforcement officials believed that gangs were associated with any domestic or international terrorist organizations or extremist groups within their jurisdictions. Among those who thought such associations existed, most said that the gangs were connected with domestic terrorist groups such as white-supremacist groups. However, within the prison walls, the

probability of gang members forming liaisons with terrorist group members was seen as high. As the report stated,

> Despite the lack of documented connections between gangs and terrorist groups, the potential for such associations is well established. Previously documented associations (both known and suspected) between American gangs and international terrorists include the association between El Rukns (also known as the Black P Stone Nation) and the government of Libya in 1986 and the potential connection between the Latin Kings and the Armed Forces of National Liberation. Prison gangs seem to be particularly susceptible to terrorism recruitment. (p. 5).

It went on to say,

> Many security threat group (STG) inmates additionally have ties to terrorist groups, and those who do not may be susceptible to recruitment by terrorists. For example, 27 STG inmates at the Administrative Maximum Security Prison in Florence, Colorado, represent al Qaeda, the Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS), and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Of these STG inmates, 18 have formal terrorist training. (p.6).

Results of the 2002 Canadian Police Survey indicated that out of 63 respondents affirming youth gang activity in their jurisdictions, 44 per cent (n=28) believed that youth gangs had established associations with organized crime groups, as subordinates or affiliates (peers or partners). Across Canada, 40 per cent of these relationships were with Aboriginal/Native Canadian organized crime groups, followed by Asian organized crime groups (22 per cent), Outlaw Motorcycle organized crime groups (22 per cent) and traditional organized crime groups (7 per cent). Relationships with Eastern European/Russian organized crime groups and Mexican/Central American organized crime groups were considered to be less evident.

A report published by the Criminal Intelligence Service of Saskatchewan (2005) pointed out that Aboriginal gangs in that province ranged from local, loosely structured, short-lived youth gangs to highly structured regional adult gangs with organized crime group characteristics. Their activities paralleled this evolving sophistication: property crimes,

street robberies, rival gang violence, firearms offences, home invasions, drug trafficking, witness intimidation and other extremely violent acts aimed at controlling communities.

Mackenzie and Johnson (2003) examined gang affiliation among women incarcerated in Canadian federal institutions. They were able to obtain information from 32 of their 37 subjects (ages ranged from 20 to 67). The data showed that 11 were members of Aboriginal gangs, six were affiliated with Asian gangs, another six were associated with traditional organized crime groups, three were members of motorcycle gangs and the other six were associated with street gangs, white supremacist groups or terrorist organizations. It is conceivable that in the prison, these gang members might form liaisons or working relationships.

The 2004 Annual Report of the CISC maintained that Aboriginal-based gang recruitment efforts mostly focused on Aboriginal youth in both small and large communities, on reserves and in prisons, and thus ensured the supply of future (youth) street gang members. This also meant that the youth were at a risk of getting involved in low-level opportunistic, spontaneous and disorganized criminal activities like drug trafficking (marijuana, cocaine and crack cocaine and methamphetamine). If these youths chose to remain in gangs, they might also get involved in more serious and violent crimes such as prostitution, break-and-enters, robberies, assaults, intimidation, vehicle theft and illicit drug debt collection. This type of situation invariably endangers the youth themselves and their communities. The report commented that these street gangs were associated with organized crime groups, such as the Hells Angels and Asian-based networks, and obtained drugs, guns and assignments from them.

In sum, it seems that although not all youth gangs have associations with organized crime groups, some gangs (especially street gangs) most probably do. It is also conceivable that in gangs characterized by fluid structures, some young adults will form liaisons with adult gangs. Another possibility that needs special attention is that youth gang members tend to be brain washed and recruited by terror groups, especially within prison walls. It

would be rather easy to attract youths with anti-social, anti-mainstream attitudes, and convince them that they need to fight against social injustice by whatever means.

Data Collection on Youth Gangs: Is it possible to use UCR data to examine reported youth gang activities?

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) (2002) observed,

> During the past decade, there has been growing concern about youth gangs forming in several Canadian cities. These gangs have been responsible for a spate of sensational violent crimes. This has led to public demands for stiffer penalties and greater protection of the public. However, little Canadian research is available on the nature and extent of the youth gang phenomenon. Crimes involving youth gangs are difficult to decipher from official crime statistics. For example, Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) only include charges against individuals. This makes it difficult to obtain a complete statistical picture of the nature of youth gang activity in Canada. (p.11).

Fortunately, we are able to note that a recent report stated that Statistics Canada has added new data elements for identifying organized crime and street gang activity to the latest version of the incident-based crime survey (UCR2) (Uniform Crime Reporting Survey) (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2005).

The Canadian Police Survey (2002-3) found that nationally, almost half of respondents (46 per cent) reported using some form of computerized gang intelligence database.

Meeker and Vila (2002) discussed the issues in developing and maintaining a regional gang incident tracking system and observed that in order to capture accurately and utilize information on gang activities, it is important to have cross-jurisdictional, interagency cooperation. They described an effective incident tracking system that was developed in Orange County, California. It was based on establishing clear goals by a police chiefs' association, developing a Memorandum of Understanding, involving close participation of university researchers for their expertise and scientific credibility of the project, assigning the primary responsibility for gang-related issues to a standing Gang Steering Committee and not using individual-level data to avoid juvenile offender-related legal

issues. A detailed description of the development of the Geographic Information System (GIS) -based regional gang incident tracking system, including a specimen coding form for recording and coding data, can be found in Chapter 10 of the book *Responding to Gangs: Evaluation and Research* (Meeker et al. 2002).

Tucson police found that developing a comprehensive database on youth gang members (ages 17 to 25) was extremely useful in combating gang-related crime. The database included the following information on gang members: personal data including aliases, associates, home, school and work addresses and phone numbers; similar information on their associates; information on associated or registered vehicles; facts and circumstances regarding the manner of intelligence gathering; and confirming information about gang membership of suspects. The Tucson police used the Coplink program for integrating information and linking the computer-aided dispatch system, records management system, the gang database and all of the department's computerized databases — as well as databases of other police departments in other cities (Garigan and Rodriguez, 2005). Following these examples, it might be possible to develop an effective gang-related incident tracking system that does not rely on individual offence data currently collected in the Uniform Crime Records system.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2000 Internet publication) recommended:

> Each city's gang program should be supported by a gang information system that provides sound and current crime incident data that can be linked to gang members and used to enhance police and other agency interventions. At a minimum, law enforcement agencies must ensure that gang crimes are coded separately from nongang crimes so that these events can be tracked, studied, and analyzed to support more efficient and effective antigang strategies.

Extent of Gang Problem: How prevalent are gangs?

The 2005 national gang threat assessment in the USA concluded that gangs were a problem no longer limited to major city centres, but had expanded to suburban areas and

rural communities. The estimated number of gang members as reported in the 2002 National Youth Gang Survey were approximately 731,500 and there were 21,500 gangs in the United States. The Survey found that all cities with a population of 250,000 or more and 87 per cent of cities with a population between 100,000 and 249,999 reported youth gang problems, with the associated problems such as violence, intimidation, robbery and other crimes such as drug trafficking. Thus, existence of gangs, and especially drug trafficking as an indirect factor seemed to erode the social environment for all citizens. A national study of Aboriginal communities in the US (Major, Egley, Jr., Howell, Mendenhall and Armstrong, 2004) found extensive youth gang problems in these communities, with 23 per cent of community respondents reporting their existence. Larger communities seemed to experience more youth gang activities and more violent crimes than smaller ones (Egley, 2005).

In Canada as compared to the United States, according to the results of the 2002 Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs, the problem was much smaller. The number of gangs was reported to be 434, the number of youth gang members was 7,071 or the percentage of youth gang members per 1,000 people was 0.24. However, the researchers pointed out that under-reporting, denial, the inherent limitations of law enforcement data and even the lack of agreement about the definition of gangs and youth gangs might have contributed to the survey results.

The law enforcement community in Saskatchewan (Criminal Intelligence Service Saskatchewan, 2005) has noted that given the demographic trend and the current youth gang problems, future recruitment of youth to gangs and gang related crimes would increase among Aboriginal communities in Saskatchewan which can claim the dubious honour of having the highest concentration of youth gang members (1.34 per 1,000 people).

In Canada, the *Juristat*, 2003, Vol. 24, No. 8 reported:

> There were 57 youths aged 12 to 17 years accused of homicide in 2003, 15 more than in 2002 and 8 more than the previous 10-year average. The youth homicide rate had generally been declining bbetween 1995 and 2001. As in previous years, youth were more likely than adults to kill other youth and young adults. Of the solved homicides committed by youth in 2003, about half (54%) of the victims were between 12 and 24 years old compared with about one-quarter of victims killed by adults.

The *Juristat, 2002*, Vol. 24, No. 1 stated:

> From 1992 to 2002, about one in 10 homicides involved activities such as trafficking or the settling of drug-related accounts. Cocaine was involved in 60% of these drug-related homicides. Based upon the UCR2, young adults aged 18 to 24 had the highest drug-related offence rate in 2002 (860 offences for every 100,000 people), followed by youth aged 12 to 17 (645 offences for every 100,000 people). Rates for both cannabis possession and cannabis trafficking offences were also highest among young adults aged 18 to 24, followed by 12- to 17- year-olds in both instances. The age group 18 to 24 also recorded the highest rates for cocaine trafficking and possession. Rates for both offences declined with age. ... Most homicides tended to occur in intergang rivalry over turfs where drug-sale was a major activity. The availability of lethal weapons such as firearms has also increased the probability of homicides caused by gang wars.
>
> From 1992 to 2002, 684 homicide incidents in Canada were reported to be drug-related, representing 11 per cent of all incidents during that period. Cocaine was involved in 60 per cent of drug-related homicide incidents, while cannabis was involved in 20 per cent, heroin in 5 per cent and other unspecified drugs in 15 per cent. In addition, 26 per cent of all drug-related homicides were also gang-related. From 1992 to 2002, British Columbia and Quebec each accounted for 29 per cent of drug-related homicides, the highest proportions. They were followed by Ontario, with 24 per cent.

The Prime Minister's Office (2005) stated:

> Research clearly indicates that guns, violence and gangs are correlated. Statistics Canada's 2004 Homicide report counted 81 victims killed last year as a direct result of their involvement in illegal activities such as drug trafficking and gang violence. Studies also show that the proportion of homicides resulting from gun violence is rising in Toronto and in other major urban centres. In 2004, Statistics Canada reported 172 homicides in Canada as a result of shootings (representing 28 per cent of total

> homicides), which is 11 more than in 2003 and 20 more than in 2002. (p.1).

Taken together, the above picture is alarming, and it is not too far-fetched to assume that many of these incidents could have been youth gang-related.

Covey, Menard and Franzese (1992) had reported that youth gang phenomenon existed worldwide. Gangs were present in Canada, the United States, Australia, South and Central America, the Caribbean, Great Britain, France, Spain, Germany, Russia, India, China, Taiwan, Japan and regions of Africa.

The Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence (Perron and White, 2000) conducted a nation-wide survey in Australia to get an accurate picture of the youth gang phenomenon, and concluded that there was an exaggeration by the media — that the reality was very unlike the situation in the USA. The survey results indicated that there were about 54 reported youth gangs, some of which seemed to have been formed on an ethnic line; others were inspired by skinhead, graffiti, heavy metal music, occult interests and thrill seeking or escape from boredom — and most simply mimicked the movie "Colors". Most members were males and the age range was 15 to 18 years. The offences committed were opportunistic and minor such as theft including shoplifting, robbery, soft drug use and sale and occasional violence. Drug trafficking or turf wars were not found to be a major characteristic of youth gang membership. It seemed that these gangs had only a few long-term hard-core members and others were transients. Therefore, extreme loyalty to gangs was rare. However, the researchers cautioned that the known preconditions for gang formation such as poverty, high level of youth unemployment, uncertain job market, racial diversity and ethnic ghettos in some cities and tensions among different groups of young people in schools and streets — were emerging in Australian cities too, and needed to be addressed proactively. We should note that the above-mentioned survey data reflected the situation existing in 1991. In a more recent publication, White (2004), in discussing the possible community responses to youth gang problem observed:

> [T]here is very little in the way of empirical data that tells us how many “gangs” actually exist [in Australia], of whom they are comprised, and what they do.(p 1).

To sum up available empirical evidence: it seems that youth gangs exist in almost every continent, mostly in large cities and urban areas, but increasingly, also in other areas.

Addressing the Gang Problem: Can youth gangs and related issues be dealt without dealing with possible underlying causal factors in the community, such as unstable neighbourhoods and poor academic performance?

Steve Shropshire and Michael McFarquhar (2002) of Manchester, United Kingdom commented,

> The gang culture's impact, effect and consequences extend beyond the conventional wisdom that treats the problem as an isolated issue purely within the context of criminal activity. It is not just a crime issue it is also a social, an economic and a public health issue. Social Services, education authorities, public health authorities, local authority housing, Connexions, schools and urban regeneration bodies all need to place a higher priority on addressing both causal and symptomatic factors and problems. (p.2).

On the basis of research literature review, Huff (2002) similarly observed,

> ... [G]angs are not *the* problem; they are instead a dependent variable — a symptom of more fundamental, causally prior independent variables that have numerous dysfunctional consequences for our society, one of which is gang-related crime. (p. 293).

Vigil and Yun (2002) expressed a very similar view. They suggested that enforcement alone, without attention to the causal variables for gang problems, is likely to be inadequate.

Spergel (1995) indicated that social intervention strategies applied in the 1960s and 1970s were not effective in reducing gang problems, but the lessons learned were valuable in the development of newer approaches. He recommended a more comprehensive, coordinated and wider approach at the grass-roots level that focused on providing outreach services to youth gang members. He further observed that in creating social

opportunities for younger children at risk, it would be extremely important to establish community education facilities for their parents as well in local schools. For adolescent gang youths, a helpful step would be to create links between a well-structured learning experience and work opportunities — as a viable alternative to gang activities for survival. Similarly, for older youths and young adult gang members, it would be beneficial to provide them with employment opportunities. In other words, he suggested addressing the root causes of gang problem instead of relying simply on reactive suppression strategies.

A United Nations Report (2003) maintains that efforts to fight gang membership that are based only on the criminal aspect of gang problems are the *most ineffective*, since the socio-economic and other factors that cause youths to join gangs are not addressed. It further argues that since the youth gang members are often afraid of the mainstream society, they join the gangs for acceptance and security. It recommends community-based programs combining prevention, intervention and suppression strategies, with particular attention to the mutual relationship between the social institutions and the youth at a given time and place (for example, pre-gang or about to leave a gang), and observes,

> Efforts to guide juvenile gangs towards socially acceptable avenues of behaviour are needed. At present, most rehabilitation initiatives are not working to redirect the energies or potential of gang members into socially desirable activities. One promising area of prevention work involves strengthening the position of victims by developing relevant programmes and training for them and supporting victims' associations. The problem of youth victimization is still characterized by a certain theoretical vacuum. Recent studies have shown that differentiation between offenders and victims is based not on sex and age, but on differences within each gender ..... These and other gender-related considerations must be borne in mind in the development of prevention programmes. ..... However, it must be acknowledged that the thoughtless expenditure of money, time or effort for spontaneous or poorly developed measures will do little to solve the problem; research and evaluation must therefore be integrated into all prevention efforts. (p. 206).

Research indicates that gang phenomena are extremely complex in their origin and functioning, in which socio-economic, psychological, family-related, personal factors, to name just a few, contribute to youths forming, joining and remaining in gangs. It would

be naïve to think that the problem can be solved without addressing these underlying issues.

Responsibility for Addressing Gang Problem: Who is responsible for countering youth gang development and their activities — agencies, community, government, family, or other?

Not too many researchers have addressed this issue directly. However, Pappas (2001), in discussing contemporary solutions to gang problems in the US suggested that youth-serving agencies should take an initiative. Since most problem-riddled communities are not aware of federal, state and non-profit agency grants, these agencies could make them aware and assist them to obtain such grants for developing community-based intervention programs to prevent and/or reduce gang problems. However, many successful programs (e.g. Boston Operation Ceasefire, see Braga and Kennedy (2002)) have been initiated by the law enforcement agencies, in partnership with university researchers, social service agencies, churches, and community/neighbourhood organizations. Some private citizens consider the possibility of vigilantism if in their perception, the law enforcement agencies are inactive or ineffective. Given the role of the law enforcement community, it is conceivable that the police could act as a catalyst in getting together the key stakeholders, in developing targeted programs based on complete and accurate assessment of gang incidences, and in implementing them. It is also abundantly clear from available research that the police cannot solve the gang problems alone — they need to have effective partnerships with a wide range of community organizations, parents, youth and other government officials.

It seems that law enforcement community has a logical role in providing leadership in efforts to counter youth gang development and gang-related activities, in partnership with communities, societal institutions such as schools, universities and churches, outreach workers, youth and family counselors. The RCMP's community policing foundation and restorative justice principles are especially consistent with playing a leadership role in this area, provided there are sufficient resources available.

Conclusion

Research indicates that some of the common reasons why youth gangs originate and thrive are the fulfilment of basic needs such as:

love, companionship and belonging (to a surrogate family)
recognition, self-worth and acceptance
power, status and thrills
structure, opportunities and discipline
physical safety and protection.

It is easy to see that the social institutions that normally satisfy these needs are family, school, neighbourhood and community. Therefore, the risk factors that increase the probability of youth not having these needs met in a healthy way may often cause them to join gangs. These factors may include growing up in disorganized neighbourhoods and in unstable, impoverished, dysfunctional families; poor academic performance, low attachment to school and teachers; associating with delinquent peers; and engaging in various forms of problem behaviours. Such background factors as experiencing racism and marginalized social status, poverty, lack of family and community support, and media portrayal of violence and criminal lifestyle are also often associated with the primary risk factors. Therefore, intensive efforts aimed at the reduction of the risk factors for youth at greatest risk must be undertaken. On the other hand, the protective factors are considered to be high self-esteem, highly-developed social, intellectual and problem-solving skills and good academic performance — many of which are either the antecedents or the consequences of good family support, discipline and guidance, good role models in a vibrant, stable neighbourhood or community, opportunities for pro-social activities, for learning life skills, and a realistic hope for positive opportunities in life, including legitimate employment.

So the basic premise for any prevention and intervention effort seems to be that programs must be targeted at providing at-risk and gang-involved youth legitimate alternatives for

fulfilling their needs. In other words any gang-reduction or -prevention program must include support and counseling for families, especially for hard-to-reach families and communities of at-risk youth, education and training for youth for earning an honest livelihood, skills for conflict resolution, and recreational activities (for example, after-school programs) that provide youth a healthy lifestyle alternative as well as a sense of self-worth and self-respect. Anti-bullying programs may also help in reducing children's and adolescents' reliance on physical violence for protection and personal safety.

Empirical evidence has shown that community mobilization was one of the most effective strategies in addressing gang problems. This implies garnering support and full participation of neighbourhood residents, churches, and educational/social/outreach agencies in both urban and rural communities, in all socio-economic levels and racially homogeneous or diverse neighbourhoods that are affected. Community mobilization and strengthening and sharing resources at the grassroots level need to be integrated with long-term prevention strategies in any gang reduction program.

Research also points out the effectiveness of a multi-faceted, multi-partner, comprehensive, and balanced strategy to prevent, reduce and combat gang problems. Youth and the media should be considered major players among the partners. The bulk of the empirical evidence discussed in this report seems to suggest that a combination of prevention, intervention, and targeted suppression (of known violent gang members) strategies work most effectively in addressing gang phenomenon. It is also crucial, according to Spergel (1995), a recognized expert in gang research, to develop policies and programs based on appropriate targeting of institutions and youth, the stage of gang involvement of the youth and the stage of gang problem in the community — based on systematic, comprehensive and accurate data.

Finally, anyone developing an intervention strategy will need to be cognizant of possible politics of the situation - for example, the perception of being too tough vs. too soft with the youth. They will need to strike the correct balance in their approach, and in order to gain community support, be perceived by the community as fair and sensitive. The

RCMP already emphasizes problem-oriented policing based on observation, analysis and targeted response in training its cadets. A complex situation such as this supposedly pervasive and ever-increasing youth gang problem, especially where racial tensions might exist, may require education and extensive training of police in more advanced and complex problem-solving and interpersonal skills.

Recommendations:

1. Community stakeholders should acknowledge the existence of gang problem and undertake a systematic and comprehensive assessment of the nature and extent of the problem of each community as the first step in developing any policy or program. This should include an objective assessment of the extent of the problem, the nature of the gangs and their activities in each Canadian community.

2. Official data on youth gangs and their criminal activities and information from probation and parole officers, schools, community-based youth agencies, prosecutors, corrections officers and community residents should be systematically collected. Researchers have also observed:

> long-term proactive investigations of entire gangs are more effective than short-term, reactive investigations of individual gang members. (OJJDP, 2000, Internet publication)

3. The law enforcement community is well positioned to provide leadership in gang prevention and reduction efforts. However, available empirical evidence points to the merit of using multi-agency coordination and cooperation, and it seems that any policy or program development is more likely to succeed if other community institutions (e.g., schools, university research community, church, youth organizations and families), service organizations and members of the justice system (policy makers, probation officers, prosecutors and defense lawyers) are also involved as team players. In fact, research indicates that community mobilization at the grassroots level was the most effective way of addressing gang problems. Representatives of at-risk youth and those involved in gangs might also be valuable resources.

4. All key players need to come to a consensus on definitions of critical concepts and terms such as “youth gangs”, “gang activities” “gang codes”, “community”, on the principles of prevention, intervention and suppression, on the immediate, interim and long-term strategies as well as their objectives and the allocation of respective

responsibilities for implementation of planned strategies. All key players need to recognize that the strategies should be based on the unique needs of each community and on the stage of the problem. In at-risk areas, awareness, education and training might be beneficial for preventing young children from joining gangs; in areas with existing gang activities, intervention focusing on providing services to gang youths might be effective, and in areas with serious gang problem, targeted suppression (as was practised in Boston) might be necessary.

5. Key players should consider an ongoing collection of information through community-wide surveys, self-reports of youth and official records, monitoring and sharing of gang-related information for implementing collaborative, interrelated strategies of formal and informal social control. A combination of data collection methods would ensure comprehensiveness. Accurate data collection is absolutely essential for a targeted approach to gang problems. (A recent report stated that Statistics Canada has added new data elements for identifying organized crime and street gang activity to the latest version of the incident-based crime survey (UCR2) (Uniform Crime Reporting Survey) (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2005)).

6. An evaluation component should be included in any such program.

7. Adequate resources and their proper allocation are essential for such an initiative to be effective.

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