

Gang Prevention: A Collaborative Response

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Introduction

“The American gang scene is poorly understood and is a great source of public concern, in spite of years of research and years of suppression and intervention efforts” (Esbensen & Osgood, 1999, p. 194). It is not clear how gangs intersect with the overall problem of juvenile delinquency. It is also unclear whether or not specific intervention and prevention techniques are needed to prevent gangs, or if prevention should be aimed at the broader goal of preventing juvenile crime.

The relationship between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency is well established. While child abuse and neglect do not inevitably lead to delinquency, history of child maltreatment is associated with an increased risk of crime and violence as a child matures (Wiig & Widom, with Tuell, 2003). Specifically, children who have been abused or neglected have been shown to be 4.8 times as likely to be arrested as juveniles when compared with nonmaltreated youth, and they are 11 times more likely to be arrested for a violent crime than are nonabused matched controls. Further, child abuse and neglect are associated with an earlier onset of juvenile crime by about a year. Physically maltreated youth are 2.35 more times as likely to be involved in a gang than nonabused youth. For children who have experienced sexual abuse, the odds of gang involvement are 1.77 times higher (studies cited in Wiig & Widom, with Tuell, 2003).

A recent prospective longitudinal study of 574 children followed from age 5 to age 21 found that youth who had been physically abused in the first 5 years of life were at greater risk for being arrested as juveniles for violent, nonviolent, and status offenses. They were less likely to have graduated from high school, more likely to have been fired in the past year, to have been a teen parent, and to have been pregnant or to have impregnated someone in the prior year while not married (Lansford et al., 2007). Mersky and Reynolds (2007) followed 1,539 children from kindergarten and found that both physical abuse and neglect were associated with violent delinquency outcomes, as did Crooks et al. (2007) in a prospective study of 1,788 students in two schools. Lewis et al. (2007) found an association between maltreatment history and carrying weapons. Youth with a maltreatment history perceived a greater need to carry weapons.

As a result, prevention of juvenile delinquency and gang involvement by children who have been maltreated must be an important concern of child maltreatment intervention.

Gangs form when institutional offerings and social structures are weak. They serve a function—to respond to the needs of alienated youth. Youth join gangs for status, security, money, power, excitement, and new experiences. The question faced by communities throughout the nation is, how can we promote the transition from teenage years to young adulthood and assist youth in becoming productive members of society? In particular, how can communities promote this positive transition for ALL youth, not just those with strong families and other advantages?

This article explores youth gangs and describes what innovative communities are offering youth as alternatives to gang involvement.

Defining Gangs

There is no single, accepted nationwide definition of youth gangs (NYGC, 2007a). The terms *youth gang* and *street gang* are often used interchangeably to refer to neighborhood or “street-based” youth groups comprising mainly individuals under age 24 who are jointly engaging in criminal activity (Lyddane, 2006; OJJDP, 2002). Most researchers use the age range of 12–24 (Esbensen, 2000). Eliminated from this definition are adult groups. Adult motorcycle gangs, prison gangs, or hate groups may be engaging in criminal behavior, but they are not the focus of this article.

Dewey Cornell, PhD, directs the Center for Violence Prevention at the University of Virginia. He noted (personal communication, 2007) that more formal and organized gangs are not simply juvenile groups but are operated mainly by young adults who use juveniles in subordinate roles. Thus, the more serious gangs are an adult problem that is secondarily hazardous to juveniles who are recruited into membership.

Gangs may be large or small. According to Esbensen (2000), there must be more than two youth in order to use the term *gang*. The group must also share a sense of identity. Identity can be shown by any combination of the following: a name, symbols, geography or “turf,” colors, hand signs, logos, clothing style, bandanas, or hats. The group must also have some stability and permanence. Most important in the definition of *gang* is group involvement in a pattern of criminal acts (Esbensen, 2000; Howell, 1998; Howell & Lynch, 2000).

Studies of large samples show that gang members are responsible for a large proportion of all violent offenses committed by adolescents. In various studies, gang members (who comprised 14%–30% of the sample) were responsible for 68%–85% of the crimes (various studies cited in NYGC, 2007a). Compared with nongang at-risk youth, gang members are much more likely to engage in serious offenses, such as selling drugs or possessing powerful, lethal weapons, and they are more likely to have extensive criminal involvement (Huff, 1998).

Youth gang structure can vary considerably. Unlike organized crime groups, most street gangs are loosely structured with transient leadership and membership and have informal rather than formal roles for members. Very few youth gangs meet criteria for classification as organized crime. For example, it would be rare for youth gang members to manage or control drugs at the organizational level, but they may be involved in street-level distribution, or they could be used by adult-based distribution systems (Howell, 2007; NYGC, 2007a).

Who Are Gang Members?

According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) (2002), youth gangs that are of concern to the

community generally consist of males who commit serious and sometimes violent crimes. As mentioned, the members range in age from 12–24 years. Youth typically begin associating with gang members by age 12 or 13 and join the gang between ages 13 and 15. Thus, gang membership will usually occur anywhere from 6 months to 2 years after the youth begins involvement with the gang (Howell, 2007; Huff, 1998). It is worth noting that youth gang membership is very dynamic and changeable, with most youth reporting gang affiliation of a year or less (NYGC, 2007a).

Typically youth who join gangs have low-income, minority background, may be recent arrivals to the area, and live in poorly educated and socially distressed families (Esbensen, 2000; Howell, 1998). Gang members may live in isolated or segregated parts of the community, and they may confine their activities to local neighborhoods. These may be neighborhoods where drugs and firearms are readily available and other youth are delinquent (NYGC, 2007a).

Youth who join gangs often have histories of delinquency, substance use, and little attachment to school, school failure, and school drop out. While there is a consensus about the high rate of criminal activity of gang members, it is important to note that youth who join gangs are generally delinquent prior to becoming a gang member. Joining a gang enhances a youth's rate of criminal activity dramatically, but criminal behavior was generally present prior to gang membership (Esbensen, 2000; Esbensen & Osgood, 1999; NYGC, 2007a).

Families of gang members may be large nuclear or extended families characterized by low-income and minority or recent arrival status. They have high levels of divorce, separation, family conflict and frequent crises. There is poor family management and problematic parent-child relationships. There may be high levels of substance abuse, child maltreatment, and inadequate supervision of children. Parents of gang members, especially fathers, are likely to have histories of arrest and incarceration and may also be actively involved in criminal activity. There may be older siblings or uncles and fathers who have themselves been gang members (NYGC, 2007a).

Researchers question whether youth involved in gangs are appreciably different from other delinquent youth. It is not clear if youth in gangs are a separate population, and whether special techniques or efforts are necessary for gang-involved youth, or if the same approaches that are effective for delinquency in general are also appropriate for gang intervention (Esbensen & Osgood, 1999; Esbensen, 2000).

Girls in Gangs

In 2000, the National Youth Gang Center's survey of 3,018 law enforcement agencies indicated that only 6% of gang members were female. Respondents indicated that 39% of gangs had female members and only 2% of gangs were predominately female. These figures are similar to the 1998 Youth Gang Survey. Other researchers have offered estimates as well, ranging from 6% to 38% of gang members being female (studies cited in Howell, 1998).

Howell (2007) and Howell, Moore, and Egley (2001) claimed that more girls are joining gangs currently than in the past. During early adolescence, about a third of gang members are female

(studies cited in NYGC, 2007a). Females appear to leave gangs at an earlier age than their male counterparts. Gender-mixed gangs are more usual than in the past.

Independent female gangs are generally affiliated with male gangs. Female gang violence is more likely to involve simple battery or assault rather than homicide, and female nonviolent crimes consist mainly of substance violations (studies cited in Howell, 1998).

Community Conditions That Enable Gangs

There are several community conditions that enable gangs. First, the usual socializing agents (families and schools) are ineffective or even alienating. Adult supervision is largely absent. Second, youth have a great deal of free time that is not spent in positive, skill-building activity. Third, youth have limited access to careers or jobs. Finally, there is a defined place to congregate, usually a neighborhood (Moore, 1998, cited in NYGC, 2007a). The more risk factors youth are exposed to, the greater the likelihood of joining a gang (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2007). Those with seven or more risk factors at ages 10–12 were 13 times more likely to join a gang than those with no risk factors (Hill, Lui, & Hawkins, 2001).

Howell (2007) emphasized that the process of joining a gang can be gradual. Youth start by spending time with gang members, sometimes when they are quite young, and they are later assimilated into the group. Other youth associate with gang members but never join.

Youth join gangs for social reasons (to be around friends or extended family members who are already part of the gang). Some seek a sense of belonging. Youth also join gangs for perceived protection. It is less frequent that youth join gangs to make money or because of coercion. Some youth seek excitement; others are looking for prestige (Howell & Egley, 2005; NYGC, 2007a; Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2007).

James C. Howell, PhD, Senior Research Associate with the National Youth Gang Center in Tallahassee, Florida, commented, "Gangs are often at the center of appealing social action—parties, hanging out, music, dancing, drugs, and opportunities to participate with members of the opposite sex. Gang members are often looked up to by other adolescents because of their rebellious and defiant demeanor (personal communication, 2007)"

Dr. Cornell agreed that gangs could enhance status for youth and offer the opportunity to intimidate others. He added, "There can also be coercive processes at work that pull youth into gangs and keep them there, even when they want to leave. Some gangs threaten injury or even death to members who leave the gang (personal communication, 2007)."

National data show that in communities with populations of less than 50,000, gang problems are intermittent. In areas with populations under 25,000, only 10% of localities report persistent gang problems (Howell, 2007). Permanent gang presence is more likely in schools and cities with larger populations. There is also a strong correlation between the presence of gangs and both guns

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and drugs in schools. Public schools are more likely to report gangs than are private schools (40% compared with 16%) (Howell & Lynch, 2000).

History of Youth Gangs

Youth gangs are not a new phenomenon. Rather, youth gangs have been known throughout our country's history. Youth gangs may have first appeared in Europe or Mexico. No one is certain about when they emerged in the United States, although the earliest record places the time at the end of the American Revolution in 1783 (Howell, 1998). As the Industrial Revolution gained momentum in large cities in the northeast (such as New York, Philadelphia, and Boston), gangs began in those areas, and they flourished in Chicago during the industrial era when immigration and population shifts reached peak levels (Smith & Guerra, 2006).

According to Howell (1998), the United States has seen four distinct periods of youth gang activity: the late 1800s; the 1920s; the 1960s and the 1990s. In the early nineteenth century, youth gangs in the United States were predominately Irish, Jewish, and Italian (studies cited in Howell, 1998). Modern American gangs may have grown from difficulties of Mexican youth trying to adjust to a new way of life in the United States under stressful conditions in the Southwest (studies cited in Howell, 1998). Feelings of displacement and resentment fueled the first prison gang in California in the 1950s (the "Mexican Mafia") (Smith & Guerra, 2006).



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Esbensen (2000) noted that in the 1960s, adolescents grew to 10% of the population, and this demographic likely contributed to the concern about youth gangs. There was a hiatus in the 1970s with gangs reemerging as a focus of concern in the 1980s and 1990s. The juvenile homicide rate doubled in the 1990s in spite of a general decline in juvenile violence (Esbensen, 2000). Dr. Cornell reported that the juvenile homicide rate declined drastically by the end of the 1990s and has continued to remain relatively low, compared with 30 years ago.

According to Howell (1998), there have been changes in gangs over time. Today's gangs are less concerned with territorial affiliations. They have increased mobility and much greater access to

weapons. According to Esbensen (2000) and Esbensen and Osgood (1999), the easy availability of lethal weapons gives new importance to gangs. The use of firearms is a major feature of gang violence. Gang members are far more likely than other delinquents to carry guns and to use them (NYGC, 2007a). Today's gang members also use drugs and alcohol more extensively, and some gangs are involved in drug trafficking.

Incidence

According to studies cited by Howell (1998), in 1980 there were gangs in an estimated 286 jurisdictions with more than 2,000 gangs containing nearly 100,000 members. By 1996, there were more than 31,000 gangs with approximately 846,000 members in 4,800 jurisdictions. An 11-city survey of nearly 6,000 eighth-grade students found that 9% were currently gang members and 17% said they had been involved in a gang at some point in their life (Esbensen & Osgood, 1997, cited in Howell, 1998).

Based on a nationwide survey, Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1999) estimated that 5% of schools and 36% of communities were experiencing problems with youth gangs. Of places with gang problems, most (65%) were urban centers with 16% being suburban and 19% being rural areas. The increase in rural gangs has been documented by others (Esbensen, 2000). In a 1998 national school survey (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001), 7% of boys and 4% of girls said they had belonged to a gang in the past 12 months (cited in NYGC, 2007a).

The 2004 National Youth Gang Survey, conducted annually since 1995, estimated that approximately 760,000 gang members and 24,000 gangs were active in more than 2,900 jurisdictions in 2004. The percentage of law enforcement agencies reporting youth gang problems declined from 1996 to 2004 in all four area categories (rural counties, small cities, suburban counties, and larger cities) although there have been slight increases in some areas since 1999–2001. In 2004, 12.3% of rural counties, 28.4% of smaller cities, 40% of suburban counties, and 79.8% of larger cities reported gang problems (Egley & Ritz, 2006). This survey has some limitations due to the method of asking law enforcement to estimate the incidence in their local areas without the benefit of a standardized definition of youth gangs.

The 2004 National Youth Gang Survey found that a high percentage of homicides were considered to be gang-related. In two cities, Los Angeles and Chicago, more than half of the nearly 1,000 homicides were considered gang-related. In the remaining 171 cities, approximately one fourth of all homicides were thought to be gang-related. In 2004, this represented an 11% higher rate than the previous 8-year average. However, more than 80% of agencies with gang problems in smaller cities and rural counties recorded no gang homicides (Egley & Ritz, 2006). Others agree. NYGC (2007a) noted that gang-related homicides are concentrated mostly in the largest cities in the United States where there are longstanding and persistent gang problems and a greater number of documented gang members, most of whom are young adults.

Demographics

The average age of gang members is between 17 and 18 years old with an age range of from 12 to 24 years (studies cited in Howell,

1998). Male members outnumber females by a wide margin (90% male, according to Esbensen, 2000, although in some gangs, females may be as many as one third of the members).

Gangs vary in size from large, enduring, territorial gangs (averaging 180 members) to small groups specializing in drug trafficking (averaging 25 members). In large cities, gangs may have much larger numbers (studies cited in Howell, 1998). Gangs can also be categorized according to the degree of structure. Structure can vary from a group of friends who band together to commit crimes to those that have a more rigid structure with rules.

A survey in the mid-1990s (Curry, 1996, cited in Howell, 1998) showed the ethnicity to be 48% African American, 43% Hispanic, 5% Caucasian, and 4% Asian. Another survey of 6,000 eighth-grade students in 11 locations found 31% of those claiming to be gang members were African American, 25% were Hispanic, 25% were Caucasian, 5% were Asian, and 15% were some other group (Esbensen & Osgood, 1999).

Researchers acknowledge that gangs are more likely to have disproportionate representation from minority groups (85%–90% in some studies). According to a 2001 National Youth Gang Center survey, nearly half (49%) of all gang members are Hispanic/Latino, 34% are African American/black, 10% are Caucasian/white, 6% are Asian, and the remainder are of other ethnicities (Egley et al., 2006, cited in NYGC, 2007a). It is important to note that the racial composition of gangs varies by locality and reflects the demographic composition of the larger community. Caucasians are 11% of gang members in large cities, but 30% of gang members in rural areas (Esbensen, 2000).

It is felt that minorities are overrepresented in gangs simply because minorities are more likely to live in areas and under conditions conducive to gang formation. Gangs proliferate in areas with social disorganization, so neighborhoods with this characteristic produce more gangs. Even though minorities are approximately one third of the U. S. population, minorities are more likely to be poor, to live in high-risk neighborhoods, and to be disenfranchised. The gang provides family-like relationships for adolescents who feel isolated and alienated from both their original and adopted cultures (studies cited in Howell, 1998).

According to Guerra and Smith (2006), studies conducted on gang involvement of ethnic minority youth point to a common set of risk factors. These include a sense of hopelessness, alienation, a need to belong, reaction against a negative ethnic identity, search for a positive identity, lack of family support and other family problems, peer pressure, fun, recreation, and economic gain. For some ethnic groups, there are limited opportunities for the development of protective factors, such as school achievement or involvement with prosocial groups.

There are efforts at both the state and the national level to confront disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system and in the child welfare system. The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) has an overview, vision, and proposed action steps on its Web site (www.cwla.org/programs/juvenilejustice/jjdmr.htm). The American Psychological Association has published a comprehen-

sive volume, *Preventing Youth Violence in a Multicultural Society* (Guerra & Smith, 2006), to highlight the importance of creating culturally compatible interventions to stop violence among youth of diverse populations.

It is important to note that the majority of youth who are from poor, minority families or who have absent or single parents do *not* join gangs or engage in violent activities. There are some differences between disadvantaged youth who join gangs and those who do not. Youth who join gangs are more socially inept, have lower self-esteem, and are more antisocial. They are more impulsive, more risk seeking, show less commitment to school, have less attachment to their parents, and communicate less with their parents. They have lower levels of interaction with prosocial peers (Esbensen, 2000).

Only a few studies have followed gang subjects over a long period of time. These studies have shown that the average gang member is involved in the gang for less than a year (Esbensen, 2000; Howell, 2007; studies cited in Howell, 1998; NYGC, 2007a). There do appear to be some areas with longstanding gangs that are multi-generational and more hierarchically structured. These gangs may have patterns of more long-term membership. For members of these groups, leaving the gang is more gradual and difficult, and it is possible that the gang may threaten members who leave or impose sanctions (NYGC, 2007a).

Consequences of Gang Membership

Prolonged gang membership can have devastating consequences for youth. The gang acts as a powerful social network, constraining the youth from prosocial behaviors and limiting contact with conventional activities. Gang members face other difficulties, such as doubling or tripling the likelihood of serious injury due to their criminal and aggressive behaviors. A cascading series of consequences includes school failure, school drop out, early parenthood, and unstable employment. Due to lack of skills and education, gang members face a lack of career opportunities. The strengthening of ties to criminal activity makes it likely that crimes will persist into adulthood (NYGC, 2007a).

Dr. Cornell (personal communication, 2007) commented about how gangs socialize their members. “Gangs isolate their members from nonmembers and from family who oppose gang membership. The process can have a strong psychological impact on the young members, bonding them to the gang and increasing their propensity to follow orders of other gang members. There are parallels between gangs and cults or other groups that exercise coercive control over members,” explained Cornell.

Prevention

Even though criminal activity escalates when a youth joins a gang, it is important to realize that criminal behavior occurs sporadically. Esbensen (2000) explained, “For the majority of the time, gang youth engage in the same activities as other youth—sleeping, attending school, hanging out, working odd jobs. Only a fraction of their time is dedicated to gang activity” (p. 2). Thus, prevention opportunities abound. However, there is little guidance about the best time for prevention activities and limited data about the effectiveness of intervention and prevention efforts.

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Should gang prevention efforts be offered to all youth or should at-risk youth be targeted for interventions? Gangs develop among socially marginal adolescents who are not engaged in either the school or the community. Should youth fitting these descriptors be targeted for help?

Should gang prevention efforts begin earlier than adolescence? Patterns of violence develop early and are longlasting. Violence does not simply appear, mysterious and full blown, when a youth enters adolescence (Slaby, 1998). Although patterns of violence can be altered through corrective treatment during adolescence and adulthood, interventions with younger children may be easier and more effective (Slaby, 1998).

The following sections review research on the known effectiveness of various gang prevention efforts.



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Police Prevention Efforts

The measurement of criminal activity is difficult under any circumstances. Experiments in police practices are fraught with problems. How does one, for example, measure the degree of respect police offer to citizens? Thus, according to Sherman (2007), only a few studies have produced strong scientific evidence about the effectiveness of police strategies. Sherman's analysis was supported by the National Institute of Justice, the research arm of the Office of Justice Programs in the U.S. Department of Justice.

After a comprehensive review of over 150 studies and sources, Sherman (2007) divided police interventions into practices with strong support, practices with little support, and promising practices. His focus included gang prevention but was larger in scope. Sherman noted that the effects of police on crime prevention are complex and often surprising. He also noted that there was not even one impact evaluation in the literature on the effect of police practices on gangs. Thus, the following literature relates to police efforts in areas broader than gang prevention and intervention.

According to Sherman (2007), more focused efforts are more likely to prevent crime. For example, increased directed patrols in street-corner "hot spots" are effective. The optimal length of a

police patrol visit to a hot spot for the purpose of deterring crime is about 15 minutes. Proactive arrests of serious, repeat offenders and those driving under the influence are effective. Arrests of employed suspects for domestic violence (but not arrests of unemployed suspects) are effective.

Promising practices are also focused efforts. For example, there are preliminary data that support the effectiveness of police traffic enforcement patrols against illegally-carried handguns. In one study in Kansas City in 1995, officers were given training in detecting the carrying of concealed weapons. Gun seizures in the target area rose by 60%, and gun crimes dropped by 49%. A similar area in a different part of town showed no changes in guns seized or gun crimes. Adding additional police to assignments can be helpful, if the details are targeted. Problem-oriented policing, in general, is a promising approach (Decker, 2003; Sherman, 2007).

An innovative police tactic used traffic barriers to block automobile access to designated streets. The theory is that crime occurs partly because of opportunity, and blocking such opportunity can lower crime. The Los Angeles Police Department noticed that gang crime, such as drive-by shootings and street assaults, happened on the periphery of neighborhoods linked to major roadways. By reducing access to these areas through placement of traffic barriers, homicide and aggravated assault rates fell and were not displaced into other areas (Travis, 1998).

Community policing can be effective if focused on a crime risk-factor objective. For example, community policing can be effective if it is focused on improving police legitimacy. Modest but consistent scientific evidence supports that the more respectful police are toward suspects and citizens, the more people in their jurisdiction will comply with the law. Thus, making the "style" and the substance of police intervention legitimate in the eyes of the public, particularly among high-risk juveniles, can be an effective crime prevention strategy. Neighborhood block watches as a gang prevention technique, however, are not effective, according to Sherman's review. Sherman noted that the areas with the highest crime rates are the most reluctant to organize. Areas with effective organization often have little crime at baseline, making it difficult to document effectiveness.

Police storefronts are popular but have little data to show effectiveness. Likewise, newsletters show no effect on victimization rates. A less popular but more effective technique, according to Sherman, is door-to-door visiting by police for either seeking or giving information.

Another practice without research support is arrests of juveniles for minor offenses. Hiring additional police to provide rapid 911 responses, unfocused random additional police patrol, and reactive arrests do not, according to Sherman, prevent crime. Reduced response time is compromised by citizen delays in reporting crime and the small proportion of crimes that have direct victim-offender involvement.

An innovative effort is the use of civil injunctions barring gang members from "hanging out together" on street corners, cars, and other public places. The injunctions are aimed at disrupting gang activity before it can escalate. The injunctions also give police legal

reasons to stop and question known gang members who may have drugs or weapons. The injunctions can prohibit a range of gang activities, including carrying weapons, displaying gang symbols in certain areas, and even carrying spray paint. Civil injunctions were first used in Los Angeles in the 1980s. San Francisco, Fort Worth, Chicago, and Wichita Falls, Texas, are among municipalities using injunctions. The ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) and others criticize the technique and favor community programs (Cities try..., 2007).

Dr. Howell believes that targeted gang suppression has shown some success. He stated, "A three-pronged suppression strategy of selective incarceration of the most violent and repeat older gang offenders; enforcement of probation controls on younger, less violent gang offenders; and arrests of gang leaders in 'hot spots' of gang activity proved somewhat effective in the TARGET program in Orange County, California. Another targeted program in Dallas, Texas, showed some success in using aggressive curfew and truancy enforcement while targeting geographical areas that were home to seven of the city's most violent gangs (personal communication, 2007)."

Decker (2003) emphasized that law enforcement efforts target proximate causes of gang violence (such as threats gangs generate, the availability of firearms, and criminal opportunity) rather than fundamental causes. Suppression strategies such as surveillance, arrest, or incarceration respond to immediate needs for control rather than long-term changes that lower risk for gang involvement. Police have little opportunity to target fundamental causes of gang involvement, such as racism, unemployment, and the lack of proactive activities for youth.

Decker (2003) and others have emphasized the need for further research and the limited nature of studies to date. Suppression interventions show a "mixed report card," but in reality, little is known about the impact of specialized police units and other targeted efforts.

Community Prevention Efforts

Communities play an important role in establishing positive environments for teens, and a wide variety of interventions must be delivered at the community level. These include social work intervention, counseling and therapy, recreational activities, enrichment activities, and leisure activities. Despite the popularity of these and other interventions such as surveillance, mentoring, and tutoring, according to Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1999), the scientific literature does not offer support for any particular set of best practices for these interventions. The Office of National Drug Control Policy (2007), however, cited studies demonstrating that structured activities, volunteering, and after school programs can provide a safe haven for youth and are effective in lowering rates of violence, substance use, risky behaviors, and smoking as well as in improving success in school, both in terms of grades and behavior.

One program being piloted is Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach (Esbensen, 2000). This is a structured recreational, educational, and life skills program that targets youth at risk. A case manager keeps detailed records on the youths' school attendance,

their participation in program activities, contact with the juvenile justice system, general achievements, and problems. Prosocial behaviors are rewarded and proactive measures are taken if a youth breaks curfew, skips school, or associates with delinquent friends. A process evaluation of 33 programs (Feyerherm, Pope, & Lovell, 1992 in Esbensen, 2000) concluded that the Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach initiative by the Boys and Girls Clubs of America "is both sound and viable in its approach" (p. 5, cited in Esbensen, 2000). The program is rated as a Level 3 (promising) intervention by Helping America's Youth.

Another innovative response is the Los Angeles Homeboy Industries' Jobs for a Future project. Located in gang-afflicted East L.A., Homeboy Industries (OJJDP News, 2006) offers gang-involved and at-risk youth the opportunity to become productive members of society through a variety of employment opportunities. Their slogan is "Nothing stops a bullet like a job." To date, only anecdotal evidence is offered to support this program.

Child Protective Services Intervention

Since not all maltreated youth will join a gang or become delinquent, a thorough assessment of children known to be maltreated can identify those with additional risk factors, such as hyperactivity, impulsivity, low self-control, aggressive behaviors, discipline problems, poor academic performance, rejection by peers, and exposure to delinquent peers and siblings. This individualized assessment can match children and youth with an intervention that is tailored to address each child's needs. According to a 2001 bulletin by OJJDP, use of Structured Decision Making™ (a system that systematically evaluates risk factors) in child protective services has promise for breaking the link between abuse and delinquency (Wiebush, Freitag, & Baird, 2001).

Wiig and colleagues (2003) concluded that the front line of delinquency prevention should be the prevention of child abuse and neglect itself. There should be a continuum of prevention programs starting with the prenatal period and continuing through the school years. The earlier the intervention begins, the greater the likelihood for success. Thus, providing services and positive activities to younger siblings of youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system or known to be gang-involved may deter them from later criminal involvement.

School Prevention Efforts

There is a considerable number of gang prevention efforts within schools. Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1997) examined strategies nationwide in 848 schools and developed a taxonomy of 22 types of school-based gang prevention activities.

The most common gang prevention activity found in schools is the use of prevention curriculum. The second-most common strategy undertaken by schools is the control of school culture and school climate, which sets expectations for student behavior. About 12% of schools report using this type of strategy.

Most of the schools responding to Gottfredson and Gottfredson's survey reported that the major gang prevention efforts were directed toward the youth themselves. Efforts were less often aimed at parents and families to improve the supervision or management

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of youth. Interventions directed toward known gang members included counseling, social work, and psychological or therapeutic activity.

According to Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1999), many of the gang-prevention efforts in schools did not follow best practices and were insufficient to be effective. The researchers outlined what a prevention curriculum, instruction, or training should cover. First, the training should provide youth with the skills to recognize, resist, and refuse gang involvement. The curriculum should teach problem solving, such as how to generate solutions and choose between alternatives. Self-management skills such as goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement should be imparted, and there should be instruction on emotional control. Communication skills should be taught, as well as methods for understanding others' perspectives.

In addition to delineating the content of curricula, Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1999) also considered instructional methods that are likely to be most effective. Behavioral modeling, role playing, rehearsal, and skills practice were recommended.

Schools can target behavioral interventions toward high-risk youth as well. Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1999) offered some best practice methods for behavioral interventions. Schools should develop individualized plans for youth with specific written behavioral goals, and they should always monitor or track behavior. Tracking should be daily or more often. A baseline should be established prior to attempts at change. Specific rewards and consequences should be a part of the plan. If a student does not show change, then different reinforcement strategies or a different intervention should be tried. As a student improves, the reinforcement can be phased out or made more difficult to earn.

An example of a simple, low-intensity school-based program that can be delivered to as many youth as possible is G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education and Training). This primary prevention program is implemented by law enforcement agencies. Modeled after the DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program, the 9-week, one-hour per week curriculum introduces students to conflict resolution skills, ways to resist peer pressure, and the negative aspects of gang life. The program targets middle school students, primarily seventh graders, and has goals of reducing delinquency and gang membership, developing more favorable attitudes toward police, and increasing awareness of the consequences of gang membership.

In contrast to suppression programs or programs for at-risk youth, G.R.E.A.T. is intended for all youth. The G.R.E.A.T. program contains a middle school curriculum, an elementary school curriculum, a summer program, and family training. Five regional training centers also provide training to sworn law enforcement officers, including nine lessons: introduction to crime, victims and rights, cultural sensitivity and prejudice, conflict resolution, meeting basic needs, drugs and neighborhoods, responsibility, goal setting, gangs and how they affect people's lives, and resisting peer pressure.

A one-year cross-sectional survey of 5,935 eighth-grade students compared students who had participated in the G.R.E.A.T. pro-

gram during seventh grade to those who had not experienced the program. Students who received the training reported significantly more prosocial behaviors (lower levels of gang affiliation and self-reported delinquency, lower rates of drug use). Rates of selling drugs, victimization, and status offenses were similar (Esbensen & Osgood, 1999).

A number of differences were also found in students' attitudes. Students who had received the G.R.E.A.T. training showed more negative attitudes about gangs, reported having fewer friends with delinquency problems, had higher self-esteem, showed more commitment to success at school, and had more friends involved in prosocial activities. They also reported less impulsivity and higher levels of attachment to parents (Esbensen & Osgood, 1999).

Two years into the evaluation of G.R.E.A.T., however, students were not exhibiting the promising returns found in the one-year study. In response, a national team revised the program to offer more active learning. Booster sessions were incorporated to reinforce skills taught in prior years. Pilots of the revised program were tested in 14 cities in 2001 and then implemented in 2002–2003.

A 5-year longitudinal evaluation study of G.R.E.A.T. showed modest positive effects of adolescents' attitudes and delinquency risk factors (such as peer group associations and attitudes about gangs, law enforcement, and risk-seeking behaviors). However, there was no effect on actual delinquent behaviors or on youth involvement in gangs. The research on G.R.E.A.T. underscores the importance of making a realistic assessment of what a time-limited (in this case 9 hours) intervention can accomplish. While the program met important goals of developing favorable attitudes toward the police and educating youth about the consequences of gang membership, it did not reduce the incidence of gang membership, nor did it impact future delinquency (Esbensen, 2004, in Ashcroft, Daniels, & Hart, 2004).

An example of a secondary prevention effort is the Montreal Longitudinal Study, which targets at-risk kindergarten boys who display disruptive behaviors. The school offers help to the parents and training sessions to the boys. Significantly fewer youth who participated in the program were found to be gang members at age 15 (Tremblay et al., 1996, cited in Esbensen, 2000). This program is rated as "Level 1" (highest rating) by Helping America's Youth.

Drug abuse prevention programs can be linked to gang prevention. It is well-established that adolescents who use drugs are more likely to engage in violent behavior, be involved in criminal acts, and join gangs. Conversely, teenagers who participate in gangs are more likely than nongang youth to be involved with drugs (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2007).

A recent study (Crooks et al., 2007) suggested that school climate can be important in mitigating risks for adolescent delinquency. Given the same individual risk profile, a student attending a school that was perceived by students as safe was less likely to engage in violent delinquency than was a student attending a school perceived to be unsafe.

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Improving Prevention Efforts

Despite the multitude of programs and efforts, substantial work needs to be done. Youth violence and young gang membership are complex problems. Many of the programs considered the most promising produce rather modest effects, often of limited duration. Even well-designed programs will have little impact unless teachers and staff receive preparation and training to implement the program and unless the school climate supports the program (Farrell & Flannery, 2006).

Phelan Wyrick, PhD, recently left the position of Gang Program Coordinator for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. He discussed how to improve prevention efforts in a recent article (2006). According to Dr. Wyrick, those engaging in prevention efforts must begin by identifying their communities' risk factors for youth gang involvement. The next step is making a determination about which factors in the locality are most amenable to change. Those factors can then be addressed by offering effective community, family, or individual services.

Dr. Wyrick (2006) stated that a balance of three components is needed for effective gang prevention: (1) attractive alternatives to gangs, (2) effective support systems for young people, and (3) accountability of young people to their parents, their schools, and their communities. He said, "Superior gang prevention efforts blend effective support systems with attractive alternatives to gangs, and target these services to adolescents who are most at risk for gang involvement" (p. 54).

Communities seeking guidance about effective approaches can consult Helping America's Youth, a broad nationwide effort of the Bush administration to engage all Americans in helping young people become healthy adults. Nine federal agencies worked together to rate programs and create a database describing effective interventions. Programs are rated "Level 1" (strong scientific evidence of effectiveness), "Level 2" (less strong scientific evidence), and "Level 3" (promising programs with some research support). The Web site currently lists 22 gang prevention efforts.

Comprehensive Strategy

Experts agree that a balanced and comprehensive approach to gang prevention is most likely to be successful. A comprehensive approach will feature prevention programs that target youth at risk of gang involvement to reduce the numbers who join gangs, will offer intervention programs and strategies to youth already involved in gangs to help them separate from the gang, and will include law enforcement suppression strategies to target the most violent gangs and older, more criminally active gang members (Howell, 2007).

The U.S. Department of Justice offers a comprehensive gang prevention model aimed at serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders (Coolbaugh & Hansel, 2000; Howell, 2003; Wilson & Howell, 1993). The model is based on findings from pilot studies in the late 1990s. The general idea is that communities should offer a range of options on a continuum so that each youth can be matched with the most appropriate intervention at a time of need. The model seeks to prevent youth from engaging in serious delinquency by focusing on the individuals at greatest risk, while also improving the juvenile justice system response. The continuum

of interventions should include suppression, immediate interventions, immediate sanctions; community-based offerings, aftercare services, and prevention.

The key components of the Comprehensive Gang Model include the following: strengthening families, supporting organizations (schools, churches, youth-serving programs), belief in prevention as the most cost-effective approach, immediate intervention to prevent escalation of behaviors or chronic behaviors, a system of graduated sanctions that holds juveniles accountable and offers public safety while providing needed programs to juveniles, and identifying and controlling the small number of serious offenders.

The primary objectives of a community's comprehensive strategy are to unify and enhance existing programs, to develop new programs to fill gaps, to increase communication and information



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sharing, and to monitor and evaluate interventions. A risk-focused planning approach can identify both the risk factors and the protective factors in the community.

The U.S. Department of Justice (1999) has published a description of a five-part model for responding to gangs. This model includes the components of the comprehensive approach previously described.

First, community residents and leaders must join together and plan, strengthen, and create opportunities for youth. Both gang-involved and at-risk youth should be targeted. The next step is an objective, community-wide assessment to determine whether or not a gang problem exists and the dimensions of that problem. Without assessment, the nature of the gang problem, if any, will not be known (Howell, 2007). Guidelines for community assessment are available from the National Youth Gang Center and from Helping America's Youth.

It is recommended that prevention programs operate in the target community. The location could be a store front, or programs could be housed within an existing facility such as a Boys and Girls Club.

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In some communities, key service employees meet weekly to discuss service needs.

Second, outreach workers should engage gang-involved youth. Outreach workers can encourage youth to attend school, help gang members obtain job training and seek employment, and link them with social services. Interventions should match the level of youth gang involvement with more intensive services and more restrictive sanctions for youth involved with more dangerous and entrenched gangs. Higher-risk youth should have individualized treatment plans (Howell, 2007).

Third, the interventions must provide and facilitate access to academic, economic, and social opportunities. Innovative projects include a graffiti "paint-out," community health fairs, recreational opportunities, and neighborhood activities. One program provided a computer literacy lab. Program efforts can include advocating for gang members when they are confronted by the criminal justice system, with the goal of transforming the gang from antisocial to prosocial activity. However, it should be noted that some efforts at advocacy have had unintended consequences of increasing gang cohesiveness and leading to an increase in gang crime. In general, projects based solely or primarily on community organization and detached workers have failed to reduce delinquency and gang activity (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999). Evaluations of more comprehensive programs that include detached workers have been more promising (Esbensen, 2000).

Fourth is gang suppression and holding gang-involved youth legally accountable for criminal actions. Efforts in this area include the Flying Squad in Chicago (which gave the impression of an omnipotent police force by saturating a 5-square-block area every night) and the Los Angeles CRASH program (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums). This effort used uniformed officers, street surveillance, investigative follow through, and arrests. They also enacted new ordinances, such as curfew laws, anti-loitering legislation, and civil injunctions limiting the ability of certain groups to congregate. There have been legal challenges to some of these ordinances.

Last, the U.S. Department of Justice model advocates facilitating organizational change and development through a team "problem-solving" approach consistent with the philosophy of community-oriented policing. The model includes development of recreational activities and community improvement campaigns, such as better health care, sanitation, and education.

The Comprehensive Gang Model is rated at "Level 2" by Helping America's Youth, and a research summary is located on the Web site. The model has been piloted in at least six sites throughout the nation with mixed results (Spergel, Wa, & Sosa, 2004, cited in Howell, 2007). Two of the five sites involved in the national OJJDP demonstration project had positive outcomes while three sites did not. The sixth site was evaluated with a quasi-experimental design and showed positive results on several measures.

Communities should be prepared for considerable effort over a long period of time, based on lessons learned from other large-scale projects. For example, the Safe Kids/Safe Streets project designed

to improve community responses to child abuse and neglect found that it took 9–12 months for project planning and collaboration building. The pace of progress varied depending upon numerous local factors, but the evaluation suggested that developers should expect that an initiative of system reform will require 8–10 years. Communities are urged to start with a few activities that have a strong stakeholder consensus and to operate as a learning community (Cronin, Gragg, Schultz, & Eisen, 2006).

Conclusion

Esbensen (2000) noted that prevention strategies must include primary, secondary, and tertiary efforts. Primary prevention would include programs such as G.R.E.A.T., described earlier. Such programs are offered broadly to all youth and endeavor to convince youth to avoid joining or associating with gangs. Secondary prevention efforts are those that target at-risk children, generally using a more comprehensive intervention rather than a simple educative approach. Tertiary prevention works with individuals who are already gang-involved and offers alternatives to gang involvement.

However, overreliance on prevention is unlikely to impact youth gangs. A balance of prevention, intervention, and suppression tactics is likely to be far more effective (Howell, 2007; NYGC, 2007b; Wyrick, 2006). For example, the G.R.E.A.T. prevention program could help youth in gang-problem areas avoid joining a gang while an Intervention Team could work with active gang members. The most violent gangs and gang members could be targeted by a Gang Suppression Unit.

Efforts to prevent, intervene, or suppress gangs must be systematic, sustained, and based on both local knowledge and on up-to-date scientific research. An effective program model is likely to contain multiple components, such as prevention, social intervention, rehabilitation, suppression, and community mobilization supported by a management information system and rigorous program evaluation (Howell, 1998; Wyrick, 2006). Thus, a comprehensive model, such as advocated by the U.S. Department of Justice, is necessary. Piecemeal efforts are unlikely to be effective.

Implementation is also crucial. Even the most successful program model, if poorly implemented, will achieve disappointing results. "Implementation is our biggest problem," asserted Wyrick. "Solutions to gang problems require long-term commitment. Quick solutions tend to not have lasting impact (personal communication, 2006)."

Youth with strong, supportive, and caring families are unlikely to become delinquent or join gangs. For those youth who are lacking family support, and for youth who have experienced maltreatment, the community must find ways to offer them connectedness and caring; and the community must remain committed to ongoing efforts.

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