

# Gang violence: why do people feel the need to do it

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



## **Gang Violence in America**

Gang violence has been an issue affecting America for over a century. The subject itself has caused numerous controversies amongst the public, politicians, and even celebrities. Some feel that gang violence in America has greatly increased in recent years, while others feel gang violence has decreased. Personally, I feel that gang violence has increased despite attempts from federal and local governments to stop the chaos. There are many questions left unanswered that I would like to address pertaining to gang violence: Why do people feel the need to join gangs? Do gangs offer more benefits than dangers? Has gang violence increased in recent years? If so, why? Since gang members are such low-key members of society that usually commit illegal activity it is often hard to get the truth of what really goes on at the heart of these gangs. However, I am determined to find out at least the majority of the truth.

### **The Curiosity**

I have been interested in the concept of gangs my entire life. I did not grow up in the best city in America, but I also did not grow up in the worst either. I mostly saw television specials and found them intriguing. Contrary to most people, I do not find myself getting enveloped in the violence or other illegal activities of the gangs; I find the members themselves interesting. While many of them may be hardened criminals, they also have such strong, loyal attitudes that I admire in many ways. I do disagree with their actions and violence, but I feel it would be very fascinating to find out more about gangs

and the members within. It seems as if it is a whole new world— an intricate web of respect, hatred, and loyalty that I yearn to explore.

### **Current Knowledge**

Gangs have always fascinated me, but I never really thought of it as a subject to research. It was more of an observation than an appropriate research topic for school. The information that I know from gangs has been told to me through word of mouth or seen on various television programs. While I would like to think the information I have learned so far is accurate, there is no way of knowing unless I match it to credible sources.

The first question that I am asking for this research is: why do people join gangs? Based on my prior knowledge, I feel that people join gangs for security. Some people do not have family or friends, or honestly anyone to turn to, so they think that these gangs will form around them as a family. Another reason I would see as likely is financial stability. Not everyone is born into money and not everyone is taught valuable lessons that allow them to find appropriate jobs in the future. If people are unable to get hired for whatever reason, (whether it is their looks, attitude, or even reputation,) gangs are typically an alternative to real careers. While it is not a guarantee, I feel most gangs do commit illegal activity that leads to financial gain. When you are stuck between losing your house and not being able to feed yourself or joining a gang to provide; I can see how the temptation of gangs and the streets can reel you in, so to speak.

Another question I have regarding gangs is: do gangs offer more benefits than dangers? Of course, this would depend on the attitude and perspective

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of the individual members, but I would have to assume that for the most part they do not. As I said previously, I can see how financial security and lack of friendship (or any sort of relationship) can lead people to believe gangs are appealing but I just do not see that being a good enough reason to live such a life of desperation. It is no secret that most gangs conduct illegal activity so is that risk of prison or jail time really worth it? Any sort of incarceration immediately takes away any hope of the benefits available; there is not much companionship or financial security within jail. You cannot take care of your children, manage your life or home, or really do anything from a jail cell. Those that take their gang activity very seriously even risk death every single day. Again, at that point, you would be left with nothing anyways. It is all a matter of perspective and opinion, but I just do not feel the benefits outweigh the risks. I am greatly looking forward to researching the opinion and justification of others for this question.

The final question I am seeking an answer to is: has gang violence increased in recent years? From what I have heard and seen on television, I am going to assume that it has. Based on an extremely rough estimate, I would guess that gang violence has gone up at least 5% in recent years. I have recently heard of more homicides, drug charges, and robberies than I have in my life. Even small cities are beginning to get more and more affected. There has also been a noticeable increase in gang-related television programs. While not all of them are documentaries, most are at least based on true stories. In order for these programs to gain funding, there must be new, interesting, even more intense gang tales presenting themselves day after day.

## **The Hunt**

The process of researching gang violence and activity was not as easy as I had expected it to be. The issue that I ran into frequently was that a lot of the information was subjective. Since the subject has to deal with people who vary as individuals, it was difficult to get concrete information. However, once I began researching the action of gang violence more than the gangs themselves, I found that I had a lot more success. I first began my research by immersing myself in (way too many) documentaries on television regarding gangs. My absolute favorites were Gangland which premieres on History Channel and Lock Up which premieres on MSNBC. It was interesting to see the perspectives of many gang members and the daily activities of gang members in and outside of jail cells.

After the “ fun” part of research was over it was time to get down to real business. My first instinct was to call a local deputy and request an interview to just see how the county deals with gangs, gang violence, and perhaps even get some documented statistics. I was getting organized to take this step and I then decided it was not a wise plan of action. After some critical thinking, I decided that my town is too small to really know of true gangs and gang violence. We may have had members travel throughout, but I am fairly certain there is no real reoccurring gang violence within the city that would give me the answers I was looking for. Unfortunately, that meant I was unable to get a real primary source of information.

Though this felt like a defeat I decided to continue thinking about it for a day or two to come up with some real, solid information. In the meantime, I

began doing extensive internet research on gangs and gang violence. At this point I began watching interviews found online, reading newspaper articles, searching for valuable sites, and even reading portions of online books. I found one of my most useful sources to be the website of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The information found on their site is credible, concise, and very useful. Another great source I was able to find was the website of the National Gang Center of America. This source provided interesting statistics and facts that were sure to help me answer any questions I wanted answered. While I do wish I would have went after the primary source, I am confident that the sources I have since found provide me with solid, accurate, and interesting information about gangs and their activity.

### **My Discovery**

Gangs have existed for decades and truly do not appear to be going anywhere. Even though it is blatantly obvious that gangs are “ bad” they still are able to recruit more and more criminals every single day. Why do people feel the need to join gangs? Is there some sort of hidden sense of accomplishment? Members of the organization “ Gang Alternatives Program” that operates out of Los Angeles, California have posted some fairly good suggestions to their website about gang recruitment. It is said that people join gangs for a number of reasons. Some of these reasons are: lack of family, need for food/money, desire for protection, peer pressure, family tradition, or even just pure excitement (Gang Alternatives Program 2008). While these are just a few reasons, the reasons of gang members joining are honestly all varied and are quite subjective. Some join gangs for more

personal reasons while others simply join for fun; there is no single reason behind why individuals join gangs since it all depends on circumstances.

When contemplating whether or not to join a gang, I imagine that many people begin weighing the benefits to the dangers involved. Therefore, I am curious to know if gang members feel gangs offer more benefits than dangers. Unfortunately, I was unable to get a real answer to this question since it is very difficult to research. Honestly, I feel the real reason it was so difficult is because no one wants to publicly talk about the “ benefits” that come with gangs. They are seen as a nuisance and as a great danger to all of society. Therefore, why would media rave about the fantastic benefits that come from gangs? Looking back, I suppose I should have thought more logically about this question.

While I was unable to find the supposed benefits of gangs I was able to find a bit about the risks of living within a gang (of course) and the violence that accompanies it. The major risks that accompany living life in a gang are obviously death and jail time, but there are other risks as well. Some other very serious risks of being a gang member include: possible injury or death to families, probable drug addiction, bad reputation (will affect you forever; future jobs, schools, etc.), injury during gang violence, and even constant paranoia of death or danger around every corner (Goldsboro Police Department).

In 1996 famous rapper, Tupac Shakur released a hit single called, “ Hit ‘ Em Up” that embodied the dangers of gang life by issuing threats to many East

Coast rappers. In this song he speaks very violently of what he would do to these rival gang members and their families. He even says, " Now you about to feel the wrath of a menace" (Shakur " Hit ' Em Up"). Tupac was able to do a great job of presenting the violence and even lifestyle that is associated with gangs (and gang rivalries). After extensive research I was able to find an online interview of an ex-member of California's notorious 18th Street Gang. This was a Hispanic man who joined the gang in just 1977. At the time of the interview, at 46 years old, the man said, " I love the penitentiary... I miss going to jail... I got arrested for attempting to murder of a police officer" (" Ex 18th Street Gang Member Interview"). Truly, I feel that is the most terrifying part of gangs; once you are in, you are in. There may be ways to get yourself " out" but that lifestyle and that past haunts you forever. Personally, I feel that constant fear and regret is no way to live life.

The final question I wanted answers to was: has gang violence increased in recent years? If so, why? Based on data provided by the National Gang Center it is absolutely certain that gang violence has increased in recent years. According to the data collected, gang violence in America has increased nearly 12% since 2001 (National Gang Center 2011). What could possibly be the reason for this? In a novel about gang violence an author writes, " These factors (immigration, urbanization, ethnicity, and poverty) produced conditions that make the formation and growth of gangs more likely" (Decker 2). I also read that, " Gangs and their members... are usually concentrated in minority, low-income, and socially, if not physically, isolate sectors of communities" (Spergel xiii). Based on this information it would be



safe to say that America is becoming more urbanized with high levels of segregation, ethnic diversity, and poverty. With the economy in such turmoil I do not foresee gang violence or gang recruitments lessening at all in the years to come.

### **What I Am Taking Away**

All of the research that I have done about gangs and their activity has given me a sense of security. As I had mentioned previously, I am not necessarily surrounded by gangs daily, but that does not mean that the thought does not lie in the back of my mind. I feel more secure and knowledgeable about people that are seen by most as a fear. While I do not agree with their ways of life, I am also now able to understand them better. Even if they are participating in illegal conduct, they are still humans and there is still a method behind their madness. This has taught me a great lesson of not judging prior to hearing the circumstances.

This research has always taught me that the economy and environment that someone lives in truly does affect their future. As I was growing up I was always told, " You are a product of yourself, not your environment." Now, I must respectfully disagree with that statement. I understand that not everyone who grows up in environments with urbanization, poverty, and immigrants will become gang members, but it is still important to know that these environments often make the youth feel as if they have no other choice. This has made me appreciate the life that I live and the good graces that I have received throughout my life. I appreciate that I have never been put in a position that means surviving or compromising my entire life and

reputation. I feel more sympathy than anger for those that have been. Deep within the heart of gang members, I feel that they know this is neither the life that they desire nor the life that they need to make the best of themselves. Gang violence may be rising, but that does not mean that we cannot do our best to discourage it.