

What influences
juveniles to join a
gang?



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When it comes to gangs, juveniles are the ones that are being lured in the most. You'll come across a certain neighborhood and encounter juveniles that are almost around the age of 12-18. You may ask what influences them to be in a gang? Regardless of the many crimes and violations they'll have to commit in order to be granted in. There's been various studies out there that reveal so many factors that makes them want to become a part of these organizations. Some are: male partner gang involvement, disadvantaged neighborhoods, family structure and peer association. These factors tend to come into play often because of what these juveniles endure, personally, and makes them want to become a part of something that will give them a sense of power and acceptance.

To start off, when it comes to knowing what a gang is, it can be defined in various ways. There's no right definition but there are certain ways to describe what it is. In the textbook, "American Street Gangs", they go into detail about how gangs are a group of people who band together for any number of reasons". Which may include criminal activity, delinquency and rule of certain territories (neighborhoods). Here are some interesting statistics about gangs based on the Federal data (Justice.gov):

America showed 95% of criminal activity was caused by youth gangs, youth gangs are more violent while engaging in illegal money-making activities, and has increased in gang violence especially within large cities. With all that being said, you can see how much of a negative impact gangs are making towards society and the youth.

Female juveniles are also considered gang members and tend to join gangs because of relations to their boyfriend or partner. As stated in an article,"

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The Relationship Between Male Gang Involvement.”, it goes in depth with the idea that females whom are involved with gang members are highly likely to join a gang too, especially in ages between 13-17. The article points out important factors that come along with it, such as emotional abuse and how that can lead them to being gang-involved partners, they’ll seek comfort on being engaged in drug activity, crime and other acts that they’ve never done before. However, it’ll also cause negative outcomes such as mental risk factors, intimate partner violence and objectifying them as sex objects. This concludes that female juveniles who are involved with gang members, will most likely follow their steps out of love and respect, regardless of the outcomes. Another article that goes into detail of female juveniles in gangs, known as, “ Female Gang Members”, tells us that throughout the years, rates on female juvenile gang activity have increased. An interesting quote I came across states, “ they’re afraid of our gang, and because I’m in the gang, people show me respect and wont mess with me. I like that feeling of power”. With that being said, you can see how female juveniles feel when being involved in a gang. The sense of power and fear other people have towards them, contrary to not being in a gang and don’t get the respect they think they deserve.

Another factor that influences juveniles to become a part of a gang is being in disadvantaged neighborhoods. When it comes to impoverished neighborhoods, more gang activity is being exposed because of the lack of resources the community has. In other words, gang members make money by the distribution of drugs and crimes, making people that’s in desperate need, become a gang member. The fact that neighborhoods play a huge

role, environmental deterioration and social disorganization, as talked about in "Affiliation to youth gangs During Adolescence", are the effects of an impoverished neighborhood. The views a juvenile has towards society are also important because if they feel a sense of unattachment towards their norms, it makes them want to engage in delinquency and crime. Gang organizations feel as if they have control of everything and run every block in the neighborhood. Why? Because of lack of social control and collective efficacy. Neighborhoods that are most impoverished, tend to be at risk of being controlled by youth gangs. These neighborhoods are seen as a playground for them, giving them access to hang around in every corner, playground and front porch because of the fact that people are scared of them and won't do anything to interfere; not prevented. This concludes that juveniles that live in a disadvantaged neighborhood are more likely to get in a gang because that's all they see around them, especially growing up, being exposed to gang activity at an everyday basis makes it difficult for them to avoid it. From a personal experience, I have lived in a neighborhood where there was gang activity everywhere you'd go. In the Little Village area, where I grew up, I'd see juveniles as young as 12-17 that would hang with the heads of gang members and follow the same steps they would. It was really upsetting seeing a 14-year-old boy on the corners selling drugs just to make dirty money, the reality of it was surreal.

Family structure is one of the issues that occur the most. Many juveniles will experience lack of family support, love and guidance and can lure them away. Parental supervision tends to lessen when there's problems such as: single parent households, parents being incarcerated, neglecting their child

and relatives being involved in gangs. The loss of a father or mother figure can really have a negative impact on a juvenile, causing them to contribute to criminal activities and bad habits. Especially when it comes to losing a father figure, juveniles don't have that strict supervision or support a man will give to his son contrary to a mother. In other words, family structure impedes socialization. In effect to that, juveniles will turn to gang organizations because they feel a sense of belonging, loyalty and connection, something they would look for within their family. In the textbook, "American Street Gangs", it states a pretty compelling fact, "families that can't provide enough security or support so the gangs become their kind of surrogate family" (page 84). In other words, if you're committed to the gang, they will reward you with protection, power and love. In the text, it defines what a gang is and what characteristics it consists of, which is a group of more than two members, fall within certain age groups, share a sense of identity, require permanence and most importantly are involved in criminal activity. With that being said, you can conclude that being in a gang, you have to follow strict regulations but also, there's a sense of loyalty/trust, love, being respected/feared and actually feeling a part of something. Take for example, the Latin Kings. In a video Gangland, they show how much they value their gang members and look out for one another, but are very critical when it comes to anyone turning their back on them (distrust, snitching, which is telling on someone).

Lastly, peer association is also one of the factors that influence gang membership. Nowadays, juveniles will make friends with anyone that shows them acceptance and since they tend to be susceptible, it's easy for them to

fall into temptation. A lot of gang members tend to recruit juveniles the most because they'll do anything for money, power and the reputation. Take into consideration the differential association theory as a factor for antisocial behavior. Edwin Sutherland was a famous social theorist and came up with this theory, which he defines as, all behavior is learned. Such as: learning criminal behavior, process of communication within the gang, and getting to know the basic principles of a gang and incorporating it to their everyday lives and do everything that is expected of them. It can be seen as peer pressure but in this case, juveniles are committed to this. This theory best describes peer association because of the fact that many of these juveniles will do whatever it takes to become a gang member, they'll endure any violation just to become one of them. Seeing gang members gain power and have all the things they desire, will definitely influence juveniles to want it as well.

To conclude, juveniles tend to start being involved in gangs at such an early age despite the negative consequences they'll face in the long run. Factors such as family structure, peer association, disadvantaged neighborhoods and relationships in gangs will definitely influence a juvenile to join these organizations at whatever cost. It's important to take into consideration that most of this can be prevented with the right guidance and support from their family. Gang membership will only take you so far; death or in jail, just for their show and satisfaction and it's really not worth it.

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