

The uk new gang culture criminology essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This chapter will be exploring the literature surrounding young males, gangs, violence and weapons. As well as the influence the hip hop culture can have on these young males. Different literature such as books, journals, government reports, newspaper articles and research studies will be examined and reviewed in order to view the current state of gang culture and violence in the UK. The following issues will be discussed in order to examine relevant literature on the study. Gang definition, the UK gang culture, gang membership, and the background of gangs in general, the possession and use of violent weapons and finally the influence of hip hop culture on young people.

The problem with definition

The term 'Gang' has had some issues surrounding its definition, and this is a problem that remains dominant within the UK based literature. The definition of the term has been mainly developed with reference to American gang culture (Fitch, 2009). Some theorists argued that a new definition of the term 'gang' should be given for the new gang culture in the UK. The logic behind some definitions given to describe the gang culture in America was investigated by Ball and Curry (1995); they believed that although it is easy to identify a gang, the real issue arises when attempting to create a definition. After engaging in a lengthy linguistic analysis of various ways to define gang, they proposed that "gang definitions would do better to focus on the abstract, formal characteristics of the phenomenon rather than connotative, normative content" (Ball & Curry, 1995, p. 240).

Ball and Curry (1995) also stated that old definitions for the term are acceptable but due to the frequent changes in sociological, political and

cultural changes it is important to have a new definition for the term, because the changes may affect the phenomenon of gang culture. Despite the need for a current definition, government and academic organisations believe that a fixed definition is essential in order to develop further research into gangs. For example the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) stated that it was difficult to determine the proportion of crime that contributed to gangs, because the agreed definition of gangs on the data base was non-existent (2007: 14). The Metropolitan Police Service (2008) also identified several other factors that differentiate a gang from relatively small, unorganised and transient peer groups. These factors include names, an organisable structure, and the use of violence and delinquent behaviour to promote group identity and to acquire social capital.

The UK New Gang Culture

The media, government and professional academics have all raised their concerns about the growing perception of gang culture in the UK. The media frequently report criminal activity, and in response some academics have argued that the media sensationalises the gang problem in the UK (Alexander, 2008). Other academics have also suggested that the need to understand and tackle the gang violence is more important instead of sectionalising gang violence (Bullock and Tiley, 2008). Following the media's numerous reports regarding the increase in high profile gang related crimes since 2007. Heale (2008: 13) noted that youth gangs have been frequently highlighted in the media. The fatal shooting of an innocent five year old girl in Stockwell in 2012, Is another incident that caught the media's attention. Thusa Kamaleswaran was left permanently paralysed after a gang related

shooting occurred at her aunts shop (Telegraph, 2012). The media suggested that the shooting was linked to youth gang violence; the metropolitan police gave a statement stating, " It is believed two black youths ran into the shop before shots were fired". Peter Robbins who is the counsellor from Lambeth council also gave a statement, " there is a fairly well known problem with gangs and guns in Lambeth" BBC News (2012).

Gangs are not only running into shops and causing injury to innocent individuals, they are also engaging in the American style drive by shootings. Drive by shootings occurred in Nottingham 2004, which killed Danielle Beacon and another shooting in Birmingham 2003, which killed two females Charlene Ellis and Latisha Shakespeare. These shootings also attracted the media attention, the American style drive by shootings suggested to the public that UK gangs where indeed becoming a lot more like the American gangs. Academics have criticised the media despite there being evidence of growing youth violence taking place in the UK. Academics believe that the media solely focuses on the dramatic consequences of gang violence, instead of how it can be prevented and tackled (Fitch, 2009: 2).

Deuchar (2008) suggested that the majority of gang members tend to predominantly be from black or ethnic minority groups. Despite this suggestion Bennett and Holloway (2004a) found that the majority of gang members were white, followed by Caribbean and Bangladeshi. Due to this inconsistency in literature surrounding the race and ethnic minority of gang members, it is clear that the race and ethnicity of gang members is not an important factor in researching gangs. So therefore this study will not focus

on race and ethnicity. Instead this study will focus on why young people join gangs and the characteristics of gang members.

Background

Studies and research were conducted in order to give an insight into the increase of gang membership. Bennett and Holloway (2004a) found evidence from governments reports and newspapers to suggest that gangs in the UK and the number of gang members were increasing. Bennett and Holloway (2004a) argued that with the obvious increase in violent weapons and the possessions and the use of guns, the British gangs were not that different to the American stereotype that the UK often rejected. Research into gangs in America could not be generalised to the rising youth gang culture in Britain, despite the early research into gangs and youth groups. This was shown by researchers such as Downes (1966).

Subculture theorists in America have largely focused on the study of youth groups and gangs for almost over a century. Research into gangs in America mainly focused on the Chicago city, which is a research that has provided what is known as the first study into the gang culture phenomena. After the research in Chicago gang culture, subculture theorist Merton began his research into delinquent groups, with the help of Cohen (1955) and Cloward and Ohlin (1961). Merton's (1938) research on the 'Social structure and Anomie' thesis anticipated that the American Dream was at the forefront of every individual's aspirations in life. But not every individual would be able to acquire this. For example education was only accessible to some people and this led to anomie. Also deviant behaviours such as violence and petty crimes amongst young working class males who were most affected were

caused by the feeling of strain. Cohen (1955) extended the concept of social structure and anomie by explaining that in order to explain non instrumental vandalism and violence was due to status frustration. He stated that the individuals who felt frustrated would, ' gravitate towards one another to establish new norms and new criteria of status', and this would then form a delinquent subculture. (Cohen. 1955: pp. 66). This statement was further extended by Cloward and Ohlin (1961), they believed that every individual had access to legitimate and illegitimate opportunities and suggested three types of subculture. The retreatist subculture which fails to find legitimate or illegitimate means in order to succeed, so therefore the individual turns to alcohol or drug abuse while the conflict subculture is when individuals use manipulation of violence as a way of winning status. The criminal subculture describes a group of individuals who rely on theft and extortion as a means of getting income (pp. 1). The subculture that is most relevant to this research on the young males and the influence of hip hop is the Conflict subculture.

Downes (1966) systematic review found no evidence that Cloward and Ohlin (1961) retreats, conflict and criminal subcultures existed in the UK because the young males lacked structured cohesion that the American gangs boasted about. Cohen (1955) notion of status frustration was criticised by Downes. Downes (1966) believed that by Cohen conducting his research in only one borough meant that his findings may not be generalised to the rest of the UK. Despite this Downes concluded that the research into gang delinquency in the UK is a reflection of its absence (pp. 116). In addition to this Campbell et al (1982) believed that the gang notion belonged to

America, whilst the subculture notion belonged to the UK. As a result of this Campbell et al (1982) felt that a separate definition and research for youth gangs in the UK would need to be developed in order to provide a better framework for future research into gangs.

Gang Membership

It is believed that young people especially males are known to join gang memberships for different psychological or social reasons (Bennett and Holloway, 2004a). Some of the psychological reasons for young people joining gangs are believed to be because they have a desire for money, to gain status and respect from other gang members and the feeling of being protected and having a connection within the gang membership.

Psychological reasons for young people joining gangs usually develop from lack of effective support from their parents, family, teachers and the police (Harris et al, 2001). Sociological reasons have been heavily focused on in terms of explaining gang membership. Research by the NASUWT Teachers union (2009) found that if there is an absence or lack of positive role models in a young individual's life, then in order to build a social identity they will look towards accessible role models. Also the study found that young people from broken families where a father figure was not present are more likely to look up to individuals in gangs or family members involved in gang memberships. Wood and Alleyne (2009) found evidence that gang membership gives young people a chance to acquire powerful status amongst their friends, opportunity for excitement especially if they live a boring life. Protection from other gang members and most importantly it offers social support that is lacking in young people's lives from their family.

Whereas Marshall et al (2005) suggests that the reason for young people engaging in gang membership is due to their exclusion and alienation from mainstream society, particularly education and employment. Whilst most theorists offer an explanation as to why young people join gangs, they have failed to outline the specific features and characteristics of gang members. Evidence suggests that gang members tend to be male, involved in drug taking and supplying, more likely to carry weapons and are criminally active (Bennett and Holloway, 2004a)

Possession and the violent use of weapons

There are various literatures that focus on youth gangs and the use of violent weapons amongst young people in the UK. Some researchers believed that most young people were more likely to carry violent weapons due to the fear of being attacked by other young individuals or just because they believed that carrying a violent weapon made them look cool. (Lemos: 2004). The home office affairs select committee published a knife crime report in June 2009 which investigated the levels and causes of knife crime and the attitudes of the offenders. Knife crime has been and still is a persistent and worrying concern that has a huge impact on young people in the UK. During June 2012 there were approximately 29, 613 recorded offences involving knives and other sharp instruments, accounting for 7% of selected offences (Berman: Knife Crime Statistics, 2009).

In the UK more than 70 teenagers were violently killed by the use of violent weapons. Majority of these deaths were gang related violence's. In 2008 gang and knife crime were regularly featured in the media headlines, these crimes were mapped out in various locations around the UK, but London

suffered the highest number of crime amongst young people. Dr Bob Golding, who is a criminal justice lecturer at the university of Portsmouth, stated that “ knife crime is simply a symptom; you have associated with this a development of gang culture” (Golding, BBC News: 2008). The possession and the use of violent weapons were also reflected in Brooke Kinsellas 2011 report. Kinsella report was conducted following the death of her brother in a knife attack in 2008. The report also gave the public an insight into the seriousness of violent weapon crimes. Kinsella found that motivational factors influence young people into carrying violent weapons, these two factors were fear and fashion. In the report it was also discovered that youths reasons for carrying weapons was due to the fear of being attacked by other individuals, so therefor they felt the need to protect themselves. The reason that was more worrying was the need to be in possession of violent weapons because they believed it was fashionable or a cool thing to do (PP. 2).

Recently the media reported two incidents that allegedly occurred with five hours. The first incident was the shooting of a 19 year old male in Clapton, east London and the stabbing of a 16 year old male in Wandsworth, south west London. Although the police believe that these crimes where not linked to gangs, it just shows the frequent use of violent weapons within the community. (BBC, 2013)

Although it is difficult to determine the link between violent weapon crimes and gangs, recent research into gangs has noted the relationship between firearms and gangs (Squires et al, 2008). Evidence from Bullock and Tiley (2002) report suggests that 60% of firearm crimes can be linked to gangs

<https://assignbuster.com/the-uk-new-gang-culture-criminology-essay/>

meanwhile; the Home Office 2009/2010 reported 5% increase of injuries as a result of firearms. In order for the government to tackle the possession and use of violent weapons, they need to establish the main reasons why young people engage in violent weapons. As this could enable them or it could be a starting point for them to limit gang violence.

The Hip Hop Culture and the Influence of Hip Hop

Hip hop today is known as a cultural reform and social reconstruction. Hip hop first developed in the drug infested gang streets of the Bronx in New York City. Apart from the glamorous and provocative nature of hip hop, it is mainly associated with and for freedom, peace, equality and social harmony. Alongside creating a successful industry hip hop also gave ethnic minorities in America a chance to voice their opinions internationally, a civil rights movement that is still relevant today. Price (2006: 1) defines hip hop as “ a liberation movement in the form of a diverse culture, it was a next generation civil (human) rights movement sparked by ostracized, marginalized and oppressed inner- city youths... Hip hop culture has grown to represent urban, rural, suburban and global communities of all ages, genders, religions and races”.

One main factor that is mainly held responsible for the increase in gang violence is the hip hop culture. It is believed that the hip hop has a negative influence on young people. David Blunkett reportedly made a statement about gang violence, stating “ idiots like so solid crew are glorifying gun culture and violence”. This statement was made a year after one of the members from ‘ So Solid Crew’ Ashley Walters was sentenced to 18 months for the possession of a firearm. (Telegraph, Sally Pook: 2003). David

Cameroon also voiced his opinions on violent music. In the British society (2006) he asked BBC radio station 1, “ do you realise some of the stuff you play on Saturday nights encourages people to carry guns and knives?”

Despite the perception that the hip hop culture glamorises gang and violence, there is very little research. United Kingdom based research has dismissed the concept that hip hop influences young males into gangs and violent weapon. Hallsworth and Silverstone (2009) suggested that “ style and music do not define the relationships between the individuals and the violence that they do, or the weapon they carry” (pg, 362). There is no empirical support for the statement; however they do believe that those who carry weapons tend to imitate the American hip hop style by carrying guns. Well-known hip hop artists spoke about the comparison between hip hop and the trend of violence amongst young people in the communities. 50 Cent who has recently turned to acting and being an entrepreneur refuted claims of there being a connection between hip hop and gun violence. Stating that his music was more a reflection of his experiences in life, rather than a glorification of assault weapons (CBS News, 2013).

Hip hop and gangs have always been linked in some form. It is believed that the hip hop culture has created and influenced gang violence over the decades. Literature in the UK regarding the effect of hip hop music on young males and gangs on focuses on deviant behaviour in adolescence, whereas literature in the USA have a wider range of research and literature. Miranda and Claes (2009) researched the possible link between preference of rap music and deviant behaviours such as, drug use, violence and street gang involvement amongst French - Canadian adolescents. Miranda and Claes
<https://assignbuster.com/the-uk-new-gang-culture-criminology-essay/>

found that despite trying to control the adolescent deviancy, a significant link can still be found between rap music and deviant behaviour. However despite their finding they did not find a link between hip hop and street gang involvement. This shows that there needs to be future research in order to come to a conclusion as to whether or not there is an association between hip hop and gang violence (Miranda and Claes, 2009).

The issue of rap music lyrics and how they may have an effect on young people has been approached by Kubrin (2005 study). Kubrin conducted a content analysis of rap songs in America, she also addressed the use of violent weapons suggesting that “the gun becomes a symbol of power and a remedy for disputes” (pg, 363). Research from Miranda and Claes and Kubrin, found that young people joined street gangs in order to acquire status and a social identity, which is seen and stated in the music they listen to. Because the majority of these studies are based on American and Canadian individuals, it is possible that the findings cannot be generalised to gangs in the UK.

Methodology

This section will explain the methodological approach that this research has adopted in order to establish if the hip hop culture has an influence on youth gangs and the use of violent weapons in the UK. By conducting a qualitative literature based research, an integrated theory in the study of youth gangs and violent weapons can be responded to. The only advantage of conducting a literature based research is that the reading process is time consuming and the discretion of the researcher means that only relevant data will be

used in this research. A systematic review of literature and a content analysis on four hip hop songs, alongside a semiotic analysis on two hip hop videos will be conducted in order to establish if a relationship between hip hop culture and youth gangs exists. Due to this research being formulated through an analysis of research and theory, an interpretivist epistemological position has been conducted.

At first a qualitative research was initially considered in order to gather data and in order to answer the research question. The majority of research in to gangs and the use of violent weapons are normally conducted through qualitative surveys and interviews with current or past gang members and offenders. Qualitative research also includes collecting raw data and this is an approach that is normally conducted in administrative criminology and by government and academic researchers (Jupp, 1989). These types of primary research would be dangerous and difficult to replicate as an undergraduate student.

Research Design

The research design of this study discusses the literature in the form of a systematic review. Government reports, journal articles and published texts on gangs and the use of violent weapons from the last decade have all been reviewed. Secondary data has been used to conduct this study. The secondary data has been used with caution and all literature used are from trustworthy sources. Literature based research has its strengths, and they mainly fall on the fact that the research is able to analyse data that is already available because the time consuming research has already been conducted by academics. There will be no contact with current or previous

<https://assignbuster.com/the-uk-new-gang-culture-criminology-essay/>

offenders who have been involved in gangs or crimes involving violent weapons, so the potential harm and risk involved in this research is minimised. However not conducting a primary research means that there is no control over the variables and so it is acknowledged that the rationale may be different to the present study. therefore this research has been conducted carefully in order not to manipulate the literature to support the hypothesis of the present study (Bryman, 2008). By conducting a content analysis of hip hop song lyrics, this study will be able to establish whether the genre of music can be held responsible for the behaviour of youth gang members or whether claims by the media are false.

Out of the four songs that have been analysed, two demonstrate how the hip hop culture can influence young males, particularly in regards to joining gangs and the use of violent weapons. The two other songs acknowledge social exclusion as a reason for delinquency and encourage young males to avoid engaging in youth gangs and live a positive life. The last two songs have been chosen in this research to show that not all hip hop songs glamorise violent behaviour and some hip hop songs express struggle and motivate young males to engage in positivity. The Song lyrics where obtained from lyric databases such as, Metro lyrics, lyrics mode and AZ lyrics. Even though the validity and reliability of these lyrics are questionable, all the songs used are from official version on ' YouTube', a reliable video broadcasting website. Due to the fact that majority of the songs analysed are likely to contain words and languages that are likely to be difficult to understand, a slang website called ' Urban Dictionary' was used as a means to translate any difficult words.

Analysis

Key themes have been highlighted in the literature articles; these themes include repetition, differences and similarities. The themes have been highlighted through a process of thematic analysis during a systematic review of the literature (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). The following analytical chapters will be discussing these themes in relation to theory, by doing so it justifies a response to the recommendation that more theory is need to guide future research on this topic (Miranda and Claes, 2004; Wood and Alleyne, 2009).

Firstly the song lyrics will be discussed ion relation to the themes that have been highlighted through the thematic analysis. Song lyrics will be discussed in order to evaluate whether or not the music that is marketed to youths encourages the use of violent weapons.

Ethical Considerations

With regards to ethical considerations, this type of research does not involve as many ethical issues as primary research. For example, the absence of participants means that there is no need for informed consent and there are no issues regarding an invasion of privacy or deception. There is also no need to consider data protection or storage, due to the fact that the research studies and reports have been published and are available to the public.

The following ethical considerations relate to the present study, and are in keeping with the British Society of Criminology's (BSC) Code of Ethics (2006). As mentioned above ' the physical and/or emotional well-being ' of the researcher will be maintained as there is no contact with past or current

gang members (BSC, 3. ii). The BSC also states that researchers should, “promote equal opportunity in all aspects of their professional work and actively seek to avoid discriminatory behaviour” (3. iv). While writing this paper, every effort has been made not to address young male gang members in terms of age, gender and racial or ethnic group sensitively and to use non-biased language. The views, beliefs and practices of young gang members have not been disrespected in any way, as this dissertation is focused on developing a theoretical understanding of the behaviour. Also, by conducting a systematic review of the literature and analysing it through the themes that have been developed in the content analysis, arguments for and against hip-hop influencing violence and weapon use have been established, and therefore the views and practices of young gang members have not been disrespected.

With regards to participant consent (4. iii), young gang members (past or present) have already consented to taking part in a published research study, and so any data from interviews that have been conducted in previous studies is deemed acceptable to use as secondary data. However, if an entire data set was used for the present research, a Research Ethics Committee would have been required to conduct an expedited review (Economic and Social Research Council). One of the major limitations with this type of research is that some sources, especially internet sources may not be reliable, so during the research phase, emphasis was placed on using data and internet sources that are known to be reliable. In cases where perhaps the reliability of internet materials was uncertain, such sources were approached with caution as stated. Furthermore, a conscious effort has been

made by the author not to manipulate or misinterpret the findings to suit the research question. Further to this, no preferential judgement has been made towards certain research findings in order to place more weight on one side of an argument. As stated in the BSC's Code of Ethics (3. iii) as being mandatory, all research papers, theoretical articles and media articles have been appropriately referenced in order to give the original author full credit for their work in the field.

Analysis and Discussion

This section provides a discussion of the type of hip hop music that young males in gangs listen to, and the literature that surrounds gang's research. The sections in this chapter are in relation to themes that emerged from the systematic review of the literature. These themes are drug dealing, street credibility and postcode wars. First a qualitative content analysis of the hip hop song lyrics will be discussed, focusing on the lyrics that appear to promote gang affiliation, weapons and violence. As well as songs that promote change and encourage young people to be positive. Although the aim of this research is to establish whether or not it is the hip hop culture that influences young males to join street gangs and the use of violent weapons, it is believed that majority of hip hop artists flaunt their lifestyle choices and attitudes in their music and imagery. Due to the hip hop culture originating from America, this research will focus on songs from the US and UK as it is believed that young people in the UK imitate the American culture.

The first theme that will be discussed is drug dealing, some young males engage in drug dealing as a means of making money so they are able to

attain the status and lifestyle that is portrayed by hip hop artists. This theme will be discussed further with relevance to Carnish and Clarkes (1986) rationale choice theory, followed by Cohen (1955), Merton (1983), Cloward and Ohline (1961) Sub cultural strain theories. And the theory of differential association (Sutherland and Cresseys, 1970). The second theme that will be discussed is 'street credibility'. This theme is believed to be the most prominent in literature concerning gangs and the use of violent weapons. Young males have a desire for street credibility in order to gain power, status and respect. Street credibility will be discussed further in relation to Tafijal and Turners (1985) Social identity theory, alongside the masculinity theory. Finally the concept of postcode wars will be discussed through Akers (1998) social learning theory and Bourdieu (1986) social capital theory. Also Maslow hierarchy of needs theory will be discussed in relation to the themes and why young people engage in the activities. Majority of these theories discussed in this chapter originated from America. This research only uses theories that have been accepted and applicable in the UK.

Analysis of song lyric

In order to establish if the hip hop culture has an influence on the behaviour of young males in gangs, a qualitative content analysis has been conducted on the type of hip hop music youth gang members might listen to. Out of the four songs that have been analysed two represent how hip hop cultured can glamorise gangs and violence (Appendix 1& 2), while the other one acknowledge social exclusion as a reason for delinquency (Appendix 3) and the final song represent how the hip hop culture can encourage young males to avoid youth gangs and live a positive life (Appendix 4).

Two prominent themes have been established through the thematic analysis of the song lyrics. These themes are ' weapons' and the violent use of them and ' drug dealing and drug use'. These themes have been mentioned both separately and in connection with one another in the song lyrics from Skepta and Giggs. These two artists glamorise the fact that they are able to profit from drugs and buy fancy items and that they are able to be in possession and use violent weapons. Whereas Professor Green (Appendix 3) describes the challenges of living and growing up in a lower class community like Hackney, east London. He describes Hackney as a " jungle", he also states that " kids with sticks and knives, troubles what you find. Professor Green lyrics show that crime is normalised and engaging in criminal activities is how the majority of young people have grown up.

Skepta and Giggs have devoted majority of their lyrics to using drug dealing as a means to acquire expensive items and the use possession and use of violent weapons. The glamorisation of weapons is clearly seen in Skepta and Giggs lyrics. Giggs states that if he arrested for a murder then it could have been the man that had the weapon before me". Also Skepta states that he " switches clips, like hollowman switches chicks", meaning that he switches his guns like ' hollowman' which is Giggs stage name, switches females. This statement by Skepta clarifies ACPO's (2007) findings that firearms have been circulated through gangs for many years. Both artists make reference to a particular weapon ' gun' in their lyrics, for example Skepta states a " Mac" and Giggs states a " 4. 5". Both artists have made references to being prepared to kill in order to protect their territory from rival gang members and if they have been disrespected. Another theme that has developed

through the analysis of song lyrics was the need for 'social identity'. Giggs cited in his lyrics "black gang" which is a name associated with Peckham boys an area where Giggs is well known and grew up. The need for social is also noted in Skepta lyrics, he mentions "SN1" which is an abbreviation for 'Spare No One'. It is believed that some gangs avoid the use of the name gang within their group, organisation, crew and brotherhood, because of the negative links with the term (Katz, 1998: 115).

The final song lyric that has been analysed is from "Nas - I know I Can" (Appendix 4). In this song Nas talks about how the world has changed in terms of drugs, violence, having sex and growing up too fast especially young people. As a well known hip hop artist who has previously m