

# Young people joining gangs for protection



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Youth are entering gangs from the ages of 14 years old. They do so for a variety of reasons, like money, power and protection being the three major ones. The average age of gang members is about 17-18 years old (Curry and Decker, 1998)

According to authors Sheldon, Tracy, and Brown (1997) in their book *Youth Gangs in American Society* the culprit for the formation and destructive behaviour of gangs is to be blamed on society rather than the gang members themselves. The problems of gangs started off from the mid nineteenth century as industrialization took hold. According to these authors social institutions are to blame. According to their research the gang culture started from the Hispanics and was then transferred to the blacks in the late 1960's.

During times of industrialization as population shifts were taking place the advent of gangs took place in America. According to the views of some authors they may have emerged as a response to Mexican immigrants who found it difficult to adjust in America, they had social as well as cultural adjustment problems after their migration after the Mexican Revolution (Vigil, 1988) They started gaining momentum in Chicago during the industrial era as migration started increasing. There has been a constant relation between population shifts and increase in gangs (Miller, 1992)

The ways of initiation are brutal and violent where boys are beaten at the time of initiation whereas girls are gang raped or beaten. They might also take part in violent group activities at the time of initiation to initiate people

in gangs. It is an implicit concept now that gang refers to a group of people who are involved in activities of violence and crime.

The youth chooses to join gangs for various reasons which can be money, identity, protection, fun, shock, academic problems, romance, family involvement and low self-esteem. These people are from not so well to do backgrounds and aspire to buy products that are well above their range therefore they are looking for easy money that they can make fast and is a lot. They either are involved in drug deals or in stealing/looting. Gangs offer a place for the youth to belong. As the number of broken families is increasing the gang memberships are also increasing. Youth feel a social protection as they have a place to call their own. It also gives them something to portray and be a part of. For some youth this is their idea of fun. They like living dangerously and their idea of fun borders on dangers and can have serious consequences. This can also be a way for young people to rebel against their parents or authority figure. Many young people have a romantic view of gangs and join them for the reason that it seems exciting and appealing. Other reasons include family involvement in gangs and low esteem issues.

The main reason found for youth joining gangs is for protection. According to a research by Decker and Van Winkle, 1996 youth join gains for personal benefits. Social and cultural norms and variables also push youth to join these gangs. The types of personal benefits received by the youth are not more than the need for security. This concept of security is multifold. A young person joins a gang seeking 1) monetary protection 2) societal protection 3) self esteem protection.

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Young people are seeking personal safety from a number of various sources. They may be seeking refuge and safety from other gangs and think that joining a gang will provide safety from them. Or they may be seeking safety from individuals and bullies. They might have committed a crime and are seeking refuge in the numbers of a gang.

Many people joining gangs are poor or without a steady source of income. They join gangs for monetary protection as they can get easy and fast money. They either deal drugs or participate in other criminal activities like stealing to get large amounts of money in a little time.

Panama is one such drug ridden territory that is reported to have 108 gangs that are fueled by drug trafficking and robberies. Drug trafficking is a major reason that can be attributed to the formation of gangs and this in turn is leading to inter gang fights which has contributed to a much higher murder rate in the region.(Reynolds, 2010)

People want to feel a part of something and belong. Children who do not get this feeling at home may turn to gangs to get protection. These young children look at the gang as a surrogate family who has their back and loves them and cares for them like their real family doesn't.

If a young person feels he/she has no aim and direction in his life and no purpose they may turn to getting membership in a gang to fulfill this part of their life and protect their self esteem. Being a member of a gang gives their life purpose and protects their self esteem from being bruised.

In many instances links to a gang serve as a purpose for a young member to join. For example in Brazil which is a highly drug ridden country family member of people in gangs tend to join gangs as there are a number of mouths to feed in the family and they see this as a fast and easy way to earn money. Also friends are motivated to join too for the same monetary reasons. In the absence of proper education and opportunities in Brazil a steady source of income is not common and monetary safety for them is provided by drug trafficking which most of the gangs are involved in.

Gangs are sought for social security where gangs are a part of the community and provide a place for the youth to belong where they come from drug ridden places like Mexico many children come from broken or unstable homes and don't get the kind of attention and care that they need, they feel that gangs are their surrogate families. In this way how he is perceived socially may depend on which gang he is a part of. This can add to his social prestige and his own psychological need to belong and be a part of something.

A gang is seen as a group of people who are trying to break the law and cause chaos in the community. However the relationship between a gang and their community is a very crucial one. The gang members and the gang as a whole try to establish strong ties with their community for four different reasons as illustrated by Sanchez-Jankowski (1991). First of all a gang needs a place to operate, normally there is one area of town that the gang belongs to and has power in. for this purpose they need to be able to be in good terms with their community. Secondly the gang members have to be continually recruited so they need the community for fresh recruits. Thirdly it <https://assignbuster.com/young-people-joining-gangs-for-protection/>

is a source of information as their community members impart all kinds of information that they come across especially about gangs from other areas and communities. Fourth the gang needs the community to psychologically “belong”. As mentioned before the gang members are looking for emotional and societal protection, therefore they also form an emotional bond with the community they are living in.

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This has created a lack of the basic protection that a young person needs. In the presence of such a situation a young person is denied social security where he comes from a single parent home or an unstable family, where the parents are unable to cater to the emotional needs of the child the child grows up craving attention, acceptance and belonging. In these situations a family or caretaker is also unable to provide financial security which leaves the child wanting more and wondering why. Material possessions then drives him to seek financial security for himself which again is not available to him as education and opportunities are scarce in such situations and an easy way out is found by joining a gang that traffics drugs or takes part in other criminal activities. Also in these situations where the crime rate is high

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young individuals might face threats to their own physical safety and the safe haven of gangs which are themselves involved in such activities and can thus protect the individual from physical security issues is a solution that is found. All these securities and protections are then looked for in a gang membership.