Teen gangs

Law, Criminology

Teen Gangs Gang and group violence, while not a new phenomenon in Canada, is becoming much harder to dismiss as just boys being boys. Not only are girls seemingly becoming more involved in gang violence, but the violence of both sexes seems to be becoming more random, more vicious, more extreme. While many academics will dispute that violence among youth is increasing, few will dispute the fact that gang membership greatly increases the prevalence and frequency of serious and violent crime among both males and females. The intention of this paper, is to discuss at length one of the most defining characteristics of delinquent gang activity, and that is the use of, prevalence of, and characteristics of gang violence. Definitions of a Gang Are groups of youth who loiter on a street corner or at a shopping centre a gang? Are groups who get into occasional fistfights gangs? Are groups who steal or vandalize a gang? If a group uses a gun once, is it a gang? If a group uses sticks and bats but not knives and guns, is it a gang? Many argue that if a group is willing to use enough violence to kill others, whether in defence or aggression, then it should be considered a gang (Sanders, 1994). While others may argue that violence need not be a defining characteristic for a group to be considered a gang (some police forces define a gang as a group of three or more individuals who form an alliance for the purpose of engaging in criminal activity) the distinction between a 'gang' and a 'group' should not matter. As Gordon (1998) explains the term gang can be a misleading way of describing different kinds of gatherings of young people. The term gang is preferred as a better way of capturing the phenomenon; and analysts and policy-makers should be thinking in terms of a continuum ranging from a group of friends who spend

time together and occasionally get into trouble to more serious, organized criminal groups or gangs. The universal use of the word gang to refer to any situation that involves more than one person by the media all too often creates a misleading stereotype, thus the term gang is used to avoid such criminal stereotypes and exaggerated media images usually associated with the term gang. As explained by University of Toronto researchers, Doob et al (1998), " it is important not to equate offending in groups with gangs. If one defines a gang as a relatively stable, somewhat organized, group with clear or formal leadership, most groups of young people that commit offences do not qualify as gangs". All too often, we read of Asian gangs or Native gangs in the media, and it is important to eliminate the perception that violent youth gang consist solely of visible minorities or immigrant groups it's just that Caucasians avoid the label gang because the media does not identify them by race (Fasilio & Leckie, 1993) Violent gangs are white, they are black; most are primarily male, some are female; they are from lower class communities, middle class communities, and upper class communities. The Prevalence of Gangs Some contend that too much has been made of gang violence. They say the problem is overstated, and blown out of proportion by sensational crimes. Others counter that the gang problem is out of control, with police unable to protect people from crime. While this later view may be a little pessimistic, Spergel & Grossman (1997) do believe the trend for gang crime, especially gang violence, has been upward in scope and severity at least since the mid-1980's. From a Canadian perspective, Judge Penny Jones (1997) adds that we have seen a falling crime rate among 12-17 year age range. The only counter trend is the increase in violent crime among this age

group and especially worrisome is the phenomenon of group assault of a single victim or swarming. While youth gangs are not yet widespread, the violent acts that gangs commit do appear to be on the rise in Canada. In a 1993 study on youth gangs in Toronto, community psychologist, Frederick Mathews argues that while some may continue to argue concerning the prevalence of gang violence, " there is evidence to suggest that, at a minimum, there has been an increase over the past few years in the level of violence by youth, particularly gangs and especially in or around schools. For example: 1. Youth involved in violent acts and gang activity are getting younger in age. It is not uncommon now to find students in grades 1 or 2 committing serious acts of violence. 2. Girls are becoming more directly involved in gang assaults and are using weapons such as guns and knives. 3. The presence of guns and gun replicas in schools, and the widespread presence of other weapons. 4. School boards are reporting an increase in verbal and physical assaults on teachers and vandalism of teachers' cars and other property. 5. The individual schoolyard bully has been largely replaced by a group of youth who commit assaults and thefts, for example swarmings. 6. Students are reporting that they often do not feel safe at school or while walking to school 7. Extortion and drug dealing is becoming a routine part of the school day in some communities. 8. Intruders have become a serious problem for many schools. Although Toronto seems to be the national centre for violent youth gang related activity in Canada, police officers, courts, and communities across the country are becoming increasingly aware of their presence not in only in the larger cities but also in medium-sized and small cities, in towns, and in suburban communities. While these groups do not

usually exhibit the same degree of organization, criminality, and violence of gangs in some of the largest cities quite simply, violence is violence. Under-reporting While many government reports indicate that youth crime is on the decline (these again, do not account for the level or severity of violent crime), police say those figures are misleading because of under-reporting teenagers are afraid to speak up because of the nature of gang violence: " teen victims are extremely reluctant to report their victimization because of fear of retaliation; fear of getting friends or neighbourhood peers into trouble with the law; fear of not being believed or that nothing will be done by adult authorities which would leave the youth exposed to further violence and to ostracism; fear of being perceived as a 'rat' or tattletale; fear of appearing friendless, vulnerable, and socially rejected; and fear that parents will be upset with them for 'losing' articles of clothing or other possessions" (Mathews, 1993). Most gang-related crimes; extortion, intimidation, and assaults are based on fear, and quite simply, fear breeds silence. The Media's Role and its Influence For those who the seriousness of violent gang activity, the media is often to blame. Perhaps, one of the media's largest critics here in Canada is University of Saskatchewan professor, Bernard Schissel (1997), who argues that youth gang violence occurs, it is undeniably a problem in need of intervention. He suggests that the plague of gang violence is exaggerated and most importantly, the images of gang members in the media are based on stereotypes of class, race and family background that both foster and play into already existing stereotypes. In effect the concept gang has become a linguistic referent word that foster powerful reactions against visible minority youth and street kids. Mr. Schissel is not

alone in his views. Fasilio & Leckie, in a 1993 study of Canadian media coverage of gangs found that the media's characterization centres on portrayals that depict gangs as being a modern phenomenon, widespread, and a threat to society. Such depictions of the apparent widespread presence of gangs generates a 'moral panic' that, paradoxically, may do more to spur the growth of gangs than actually combat what may not even be a serious problem to begin with. An example of such a moral panic was demonstrated when a Toronto Star series on teen gangs in October of 1998 suggested that there were around 180 street gangs, in Toronto alone. The police chief, David Boothby, and the mayor, Mel Lastman, shortly thereafter stepped in to calm the shocked parents and communities, noting that police intelligence have identified about 80 street gangs operating in the city, 20 of which are hard core gangs. As demonstrated by DeKeseredy & Schwartz (1996) while referring to a study in England, the media also can amplify the behavior of targeted group, the mass media's coverage of these 2 groups (British 'Mods' and 'Rockers' in the '60's) created a moral panic that transformed loose stylistic associates into well-organized gangs. Police in Winnipeg seem to agree that the media can and does amplify gang behaviour - after finding gang members with clippings from crime articles, police and community activists asked media outlets not to print gang names. The fear was that gang members would escalate their violent game of one-upmanship as they competed for public reputation and status (Winnipeg Free Press, June 30, 1996). Characteristics of Gang Violence Most violent street crimes committed by youths these days, are committed in groups and the violence committed by gangs is often shocking in its ferocity and is

incomprehensible to ordinary citizens (two of Canada's most shocking and disturbing gang killings being those of Sylvain Leduc in Ottawa, and Reena Virk in Victoria). Along with the ferocious use of violence is the increasing availability of weapons. More weapons are not only becoming increasingly available, but they are being increasingly used. As Toronto Police Detective John Muise remarks " You rarely see one-on-one fights...It's gangs, it's weapons, and it's definitely more sophisticated in a brutal way" (Toronto Star, Oct. 24, 1998). Popular stereotypes of gangs and gang members depict them as highly organized, violent predators on society, while some of this may be true, most gangs are not that well organized, and many of their crimes are impulsive rather than with some directed purpose. This lack of organization coupled with their large arsenal makes them all that much more dangerous. As Howell (1999) refers to in study done on Los Angeles gangs, it is evident that gang incidents are generally more chaotic, with more people, weapons, offences, and injuries out in the open, among people less familiar with each other. While it is important to keep in mind here, that the larger, more cohesive and well-structured gangs of older adolescents and of young adults still exist. They operate side-by-side in the same community with the more volatile and violent crowd-like packs of youth" that characterize many of the gangs of today (Scheidlinger, 1994). While much gang violence is between the groups themselves, and some is used to mark out their turf, an increasing trend of violence is coming in the form of swarming - where a group surrounds and assaults a single victim, usually for their jackets or shoes -although there does not necessarily have to be a particular goal in mind. Other destructive gang/group activity includes defacement of

property, impediments to the population, intimidation of local businesses, presence of community fear and anxiety, and a general destruction of community life (Burke & Fulton, 1992). The pack-like, sporadic, unorganized, and spontaneous groupings, which are characteristic of many of today's street violence, are greatly distinguished from earlier street gangs. Classic research on types of offences by juveniles, youths, or young adults in delinquent groups or gangs suggests that violent crime was less common in earlier periods than it is now (Spergel, 1995). " The gangs of the 1960's and 1970's comprised tightly-knit and stable youth aggregations which were frequently engaged in intra- and inter-group conflict. Planned rumbles which entailed hand-to-hand combat to revenge perceived grievances and to protect the group's turf were commonplace…When there were group anger and violence, the targets were invariably either hostile authority figures or neighborhood groups. Fists and baseball bats were the weapons of choice. The use of guns or the hurting of innocent bystanders, ever-present today, were then almost unheard of…these stand in clear contrast to the loosely-knit, short-lasting, crowd-like 'packs' of today, which have replaced many of the more stable and larger gangs" (Scheidlinger, 1994). Another changing characteristic of gang violence in Canada is related to the evolving nature of Canadian society itself. As Constable Gilles Gauvreault, a Montreal police officer, states, " in the old days, the English and the French used to fight a lot…but now you've got 40 different ethnicities in the same neighbourhoods, they all go to the same school, and they have easy access to weapons" (Montreal Gazette, Dec. 13, 1997). As will be briefly mentioned in a later section, clearly some focus needs to be put on reducing such growing

tension and hatred between various races and ethnicities. While much focus has been put on male gang violence, " young females are now more commonly involved in gang-related activity, assaults and robberies and are using more weapons, mostly knives, says Toronto Police Sergeant Guy Courvoisier" (Toronto Star, Dec. 10, 1996). As many police officers would themselves explain, it's not just the rate of violence among girls that they are concerned about, but the degree of violence being used. " Police and school officials report finding female perpetrated crime and violence becoming more frequent, that their violence can be as vicious and extreme as males, and that their victims tend primarily to be other girls" (Mathews, 1993) Some take the view that girl group violence is in fact, more extreme and violent. Understanding Gang Violence Decker and Van Winkle (1996) propose three answers as to why the level of violence is so high among gangs: (1) gangs (like the military) are organized for violence, (2) gangs amplify violence, and (3) gang membership is selected for violence. Gangs are organized for violence: The increase in gang violence, or at least the reported problem of gang violence in some cities can be attributed to many things, one of the largest factors is that gangs have more weapons than they had in the past. Honour in gangs is key to understanding their violence. Howell (1999) refers to a 1993 study in Chicago that found that " overall, most gang violence is related to emotional defence of one's identity as a gang member, defence of the gang and gang members, defence and glorification of the reputation of the gang, gang member recruitment, and territorial expansion" The effect of violence on gang cohesion or solidarity, " participation served to strengthen the group's symbolic solidarity. It affirmed

skinhead group identity, as the youths took action against those who threatened their solidarity. The violence provided an opportunity for individual members to display their worthiness to those in the group" (Baron, 1997). Power within the gang subculture is obtained by both money (through drug sales or robbery) and the number of violent acts committed. These acts of violence and criminal activity demonstrate a member's allegiance to the gang and ability to carry out such acts. Often, initiation into gangs requires an illegal or violent act. Also, recruitment into gangs often involves coercion or intimidation. Adolescent and prepubescent boys and girls fear being jumped, and thus join gangs as a necessity, to keep from being harmed. A simple event like walking home from school requires seeking protection from gang intrusions or assaults (Burke & Fulton, 1992). Gangs amplify violence Belonging to a group makes it easier for people to act in ways that are out of the ordinary, they no longer need to take individual responsibility for their actions; no one is responsible, or the group is responsible, or the group's leader. Anonymity can lead to the loss of a well-defined separate identity that embodies inhibitions limiting antisocial behavior (Staub, 1989). Scheidlinger (1994) identifies three intertwined group psychological processes that appear to be at work among these loosely-tied and unstable teenage groups: (1) A crowd-like condition where reason, control and judgement give way to strong, uncontrolled emotion, (2) De-individuation, a process wherein a person is prevented by group factors from becoming aware of himself as a separate individual (the de-individuated individual is guided by the group's immediate cues and emotions rather than by long-term beliefs and consequences), and (3) Emotional contagion, which can be

described as an automatic spread of behavior from one person to another or to a whole group. The crowd is a drug that puts conscience and reason to sleep, frees the imagination, emotions and instincts; the crowd is a strong drink that makes you drunk. Baron (1997) in his study of a group of skinheads in Edmonton found that the group itself appeared to encourage and support violence as a tool of dispute settlement; hens methods earn the praise of peers, indicating some sort of group approval. Lucy Pierce, a youth worker in Edmonton, says " most of the girls who get involved in fights would never take such action on their own. It's a group dynamic. It grows until it explodes" (Toronto Star, Dec. 10, 1996) Gang membership is selected for violence: Violence is an important part of the gang experience, it is the motivation for many young people to join their gangs, is typically part of the initiation, and is ever present in the lives of most gang members (Curry & Decker, 1998). Debra Pepler, director of the LaMarsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution at York University, says violent group action can forge powerful emotional bonds. " It's fun to do it. It brings a group of girls very close together. A gang or a defiant group can provide incredible reinforcement." (Toronto Star, Dec. 10, 1996) There's strength in numbers, and girls are finding out just how powerful they can be. Being part of a violent group makes members feel empowered and provides them with a sense of security, a sense of family. Gang violence is also enhanced because gangs often attract young men who, frankly, enjoy violence (Sheldon et al, 1997). Members are expected to always be ready to commit violence, to participate in violent acts, and to have engaged in some sort of violence in their initiation" (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996) Police say many fringe

members sometimes known as wannabes, eventually will be involved in some of the worst activities; brutal assaults, armed robberies, and swarming in attempts to earn respect from the gang. Mathews (1993) takes his own view, and provides a model which suggests how these gangs come to use violence: Youth members bring a number of personal factors that may provide behavioural cues to act in a violent, aggressive, or antisocial manner (some are able to resist peer pressure, others are not), those who have such dominant factors may then feel supported by a social context or background (repeated exposure to gratuitous violence on television and in film) that diminishes victim impact or endorses the behaviour to continue, then, if they are not apprehended or punished for their actions their behaviour is reinforced, increasing the likelihood it will be repeated or escalated.

Numerous theories have been developed and used to account for gang membership and violence. Some have been already mentioned: peer pressure, diffusion of responsibility, support and a feeling of solidarity, and a need to take risks. Others, such as social learning, addresses what the youth sees on television, what they see among their peers, and what they see in their own home; they learn from what they see and act it out. Another view is that youths join gangs as a result of being 'alienated' from the rest of society and a feeling of lack of opportunity, or as a response to poverty. While a number of police, sociologists and outreach workers may agree that in some cases the street gang phenomenon is the consequence of an 'endemic and unrelenting' cycle of poverty, racism, family breakdown and unemployment, this does not account for a large majority of gang violence. " Most of the gang-related activity in cities in southern Ontario involves middle

class youth as victims and perpetrators. The majority of these gang members come from intact families, and have access to material comforts, career pathways, part-time jobs, and other supports" (Mathews, 1993). Risk Factors Risk factors can be defined as life events or experiences that are associated with an increase in problem behaviours, such as drug use or gang activities. For example, being the child of a single-parent who is often absent from the home and lacks adequate support, can be considered a risk factor. The negative influence of a friends or sibling can be another. Risk factors can be divided into five categories: individual characteristics, peer group, school, family, and community. Long-term studies of adolescents in Canadian and American cities: Montreal, Seattle, Washington and Rochester, suggest that the most important risk factors for gang involvement include; negative influences in the youths life, limited attachment to the community, over-reliance on anti-social peers, poor parental supervision, alcohol and drug abuse, poor educational or employment potential, and a need for recognition and belonging. The Seattle study found that children and youth are two to four times more likely to join gangs if they are affected by these factors. Youth at risk or already involved in gangs tend to be from groups that suffer from the greatest levels of inequality and social disadvantage (Klein, 1995). Individual risk factors include prior delinquency, illegal gun ownership, drug trafficking, desire for group rewards such as status, identity, self-esteem, companionship and protection, anti-social attitudes, aggression, alcohol and drug use, early or precocious sexual activity, and violent victimization. Peer risks contain a high commitment to delinquent peers, street socialization, gang members in class, friends who use drugs or who are gang members,

interaction with delinquent peers, and pre-teen exposure to stress. School risk factors include, poor school performance, low educational aspirations, especially among females, negative labelling by teachers, high levels of anti-social behavior, few teacher role models, educational frustration, low attachment to school, and learning difficulties. Family risks factors of family disorganization including broken homes and parental drug and alcohol abuse, family violence, neglect and drug addiction, family members in a gang, lack of adult role models, parental criminality, parents with violent attitudes, siblings with anti-social behaviours, and extreme economic deprivation. Community risk factors such as social disorganization such as poverty and residential mobility, presence of gangs in the neighbourhood, availability to drug access, available firearms, cultural norms supporting gang behavior, and feeling unsafe in neighborhood (Howell, 2005). Evolving risk factors Gang involvement is a process that happens over time. This process is influenced by the life trajectory and individual, familial and social experiences of a young person. Several studies indicate that risk factors associated with gang involvement are present long before a youth joins a gang. For example, youths who were the most behaviourally and socially maladjusted in childhood were found to be the most likely to join and stay in gangs for several years. Unless appropriate actions are taken to address the factors that result in more serious crime or gang involvement, early negative life experiences and subsequent involvement in crime will only reinforce the path towards continued delinquency. Additionally, it appears that not only entry into gangs, but also prolonged membership is associated with a greater risk of delinquency (Howell, 2005). Protective factors and prevention

In addition to preventing youth from joining gangs, it is important to reduce membership duration for youth who belong to a gang and to provide appropriate services (drug treatment, employment and educational opportunities) once they leave the gang. Strengthening protective factors plays an important role in reducing youth gang involvement. Protective factors are positive influences that mitigate the impact of risk factors and decrease the likelihood of problem behaviour. Drawing on evidence regarding gang prevention, the Community Solutions to Gang Violence project in Edmonton helps increase protective factors among youth by: building positive relationships and patterns of interaction with mentors and pro-social peers; creating positive social environments through community, family and service organizations; promoting social and economic policies that support positive youth development. What is evident is that there is no single risk factor or set of factors that are predictive of gang membership and gang violence, it is oftentimes quite unpredictable; societal aspects, community aspects, family aspects, school aspects, peers, and individual characteristics each and all have a role. Gang Violence in Schools Though violence in schools is not yet out of control, the presence of gangs poison the learning environment for other students and compromises teachers' and school officials' efforts to maintain a safe environment. Schools also provide a readily available supply of victims (Mathews, 1993). While violence may not be anything new to high schools, the safety in and around schools can never be taken for granted. For those teachers, parents, and members of the community that see their childcare's schools as places that have the typical disturbances, but nothing serious, Mathews reminds us that objective

assessments of the seriousness of offences cannot capture the impact on victims or the climate of fear that can build in a school environment from persistent incidents of what might appear to an outside observer to be 'less serious' forms of intimidation. Many parents and school staff can also mistake a low incidence of reporting to mean an absence of problems, when in fact fear and intimidation by gangs and students' mistrust that educators will respond to their disclosures keeps young people silent. Clearly, reliance on official disclosure and documented rates of violence can not capture the nature of the fear experienced by victims, or the climate of unrest and violence in some schools. Despite the significant influence that gangs have upon violence and crime in schools, it would be wrong to portray them as so potent that schools are powerless to respond. Indeed, the perception of gangs as all-powerful frequently leads schools either to react excessively harsh or to be so intimidated that they don't take any action at all. Prevention of Gang Violence Gang violence may not be as common as much of the public thinks, yet it is far too common and far too lethal to be dismissed easily or waved away. It is also essential to not just talk about the problem and scare people but to look at ways to deal with it, because there are a lot of things we can do. We must learn from the experiences and mistakes of many US cities and start planning prevention efforts early and avoid some of the more serious youth gang problems that they are now facing. Legal Approaches Law enforcement agencies in the US are now acknowledging that their social control methods (arrest and incarceration) are not working. Get tough approaches on their own will not solve the problem we need more. Reiss makes the point that since young people often

commit offences in groups, it becomes clear that incapacitation strategies based on incapacitating only a portion of the group (or the gang, for that matter) are doomed to failure since the unit that offends may be the group. The loss of a single member may, in fact, lead to other people being recruited into the group, in effect increasing rather than decreasing the number of offenders in the community (Doob et al, 1998). The Harvard Law Review (1994) points out that one prevalent response in the US has been to impose juvenile curfews, which bar youths below a certain age from city streets after established hours and prescribe various criminal penalties for violations. However, curfews fit into a pattern of law enforcement that focuses on suppressing gang violence but that neglects the social causes of gangs violence suggests that using curfews as part of a law enforcement war model against gangs oversimplifies the issues and is not effective in reducing crime Deterrent Approaches The Little Village version of the Gang Violence Reduction Program developed by Spergel and his colleagues consists of two coordinated strategies: (1) targeted control of violent or potentially hard-core violent youth gang offenders, in the form of increased probation department and police supervision and suppression, and (2) provision of a wide range of social services and opportunities for targeted youth to encourage their transition to conventional legitimate behaviours through education, jobs, job training, family support, and brief counselings (Howell, 1999). The Boston Police Department's Youth Violence Strike Force uses three techniques. First, probation officers and police officers, patrolling the streets in teams, identify gang members, enforce conditions of probation, and increase sanctions for probation and parole violations.

Second, an explicit communication campaign, often carried out face-to-face with gang members, delivers the message that gang violence has provoked the authorities' suppression approach and only an end to gang violence will stop suppression activities. Third, gang mediation specialists are deployed to gang hot spots (Howell, 1999) . Evaluations of these projects have proven somewhat positive in controlling gang activity, but they are more of a reactionary approach than preventive. Community Approaches Through his interviews with relevant groups, Mathews (1993) concludes his report with a number of recommendations for police, schools and the government. They include: recognizing the seriousness of the problem; the need for a joint effort (schools can't handle the problem on their own, neither can police, neither can the government, neither can the students); victims and the non-offending majority need to see that they will be protected and assisted and that offenders will be held accountable; recognize the growing problem of racial tension in gang conflicts; better implementation of the 'alternative measures' provisions of the young offenders act; discuss and educate all concerning; violence in society and on television; education, education, education. The Toronto Star series on teen gangs (October, 1998) concludes with a number of proposals developed by psychologists, educators, police and others who work closely with youth. Which include: debate the causes of violence and gang issues as part of the curriculum, like sex education; expand anti-violence programs earlier in elementary schools, introduce anonymous reporting programs and anonymous surveys to keep track of the problem and to address the problems that turn up, increase funding for after school clubs and sports programs for students, and develop programs to

work with parents and students in the community to break down ethnic barriers. What must be recognized is that no single agency, community group, law, piece of legislation, or approach alone is sufficient to successfully address a complex problem such as gang violence. Any good strategy will need to be a long-term strategy. Further Thoughts In a family, one of the more important functions when talking about youth and their family is the assurance that the youth is satisfactorily socialized into the norms and values of society. The bond between parent and child is formed in the first five or six years of their life. Without sufficient care to complete this function, the youth is at a high risk of forming this bond with someone else. I feel as parents see children pay more attention to what an adult does than to what the child does. When parents who are already apart of a street gang or who are engaging themselves in criminal activity, they send a message of acceptance of the actions they make to their own child. But what can society contribute to families across Canada? The answer targets the parents. A broader array of programs on parenting skills should be offered to all Canadian parents so that they are trained and supported to take care of their children. Enforcing structure and rules upon their children help them distinguish what is right and wrong. If these actions are taken in the family, this could help solve this teen gang problem. For many Canadian youth, the sight of gangs within the school's walls and on the school's fields is common. I feel that challenged adolescents take their issues to the school ground and relate them with others, thus forming gangs through their own anger. Schools are meant to educate children so that they have a future full of many opportunities. It is their chance to explore what interests them and

what doesn't, but with the on going and increasing amount of violence, drug use and other gang related activity inside the school. It is said that one of riskiest times for a teenager for being involved in gang related activities is between the end of school and when the parents return home from work. Research shows that during 3: 00 and 7: 00 pm. is the riskiest times for substance abuse, theft and other juvenile delinquency (Nairne, 1996). Schools need to provide solid after school programs to keep teenagers busy and active during these times. If they can gain interests in their youth, then it will encourage them to stay off the streets and do something that will benefit them and others. Ifeel in every community and in every society across Canada, there are thousands of unique opportunities for youth to take. Opportunities to help expand their own futures, contribute to their society and to provide a personal income. But instead, youth are turning to gangs because of the profits that are made illegally by selling weapons, illegal substances like drugs and alcohol, and even their own bodies. Since street gangs across the country are dynamically engaging in street level sales of crack and powdered cocaine, there is an on going motivator for gang members to stay within their groups much later in their life. Thus the battle over Canadian streets is becoming increasingly more difficult because of these great profits members make. To solve this issue, the powerful business communities must create more meaningful economic opportunities for both at-risk and gang involved adolescents. This provides programs to teach youth high demand skills such as building trades, so that they build their own futures and make a profit. By targeting these two groups of adolescents, it helps reduce current gang members off the streets and also prevents youth

from joining a gang. I believe unquestionably youth gangs are a major problem in Canada. The assorted institutions in each community must all perform their own functions that are required to maintain the society. If this doesn't happen, youth gangs will continue to roam the streets of Canada. By addressing the issues of youth gangs with children who are trying to find their way, possibly Canada can control our juvenile problems and reduce these gangs. Street gangs and their members are here to stay. They will remain an ever present feature of Canadian life despite the best efforts of police to suppress them, of courts to punish them and of communities to prevent them. Perhaps it is simply part of the human nature to make the same mistakes over and over again, despite the aching lessons learned by our ancestors. Nevertheless actions can be taken within these institutions and as a result the problem will be reduced. I continue to hold the value that in every society there are various structures, known as institutions, which perform certain functions that are necessary to maintain society. If one of them fails, one outcome is the growth in the rate of youth turning to street gangs. In 2007, Canada had 434 youth gangs with roughly 7000 gang members nationally. Of those, 175 members were here in London dispersed into 10 street gangs (Klein, 1995). These organized groups of young adults form these groups for the purpose of intimidation and violence upon others in order to gain power and recognition from individuals. Some youth turn to gangs because of their desire for money, power, and respect, while others are in it to make a profit by selling weapons, drugs and alcohol. Even children are being influenced from their own parents to put their trust and lives into these detached groups. A short life is only expected for those in

gangs as they are either prosecuted, seriously injured, or more likely murdered. There are so many different reasons why kids join gangs. Some do it to get revenge on someone and some do it because they enjoy doing bad things to people. Why some kids enjoy these things we may never know but we do know why they do them. These are most of the reasons why kids join gangs. For protection, because of poverty they think they will get money by stealing it. Some are influenced media. They be recognizable to other children and to be popular, they might have been forced to join, racism, some want to prosper from the benefits of the gangs criminal activity and some just use violence to deal with their problems. These are the main reasons for gang activity in your neighborhood. I have learned the most common ways to prevent your child from getting involved in criminal activities include: enrol your child in a local sports team, work with the police and other agencies to make sure there is no suspicious activity going on in your neighborhood and if you do see any report it as soon as possible. You should remove any racism from your childrens' life and always show your children love, guidance, respect and protection at home. Provide them with a strong education. Monitor what your child watches all the time and be sure not to allow them to watch gang retaliated television. And, most important support your child's decisions all the time and if it is not the right one guide them to choosing the one that you think is correct. Conclusion Young people tend to want to spend a lot of their free time with other young people. Not surprisingly, they tend to commit offences when together. For these reasons, there will probably always be some gangs within society that are going to not only commit crimes, but that will commit violent crimes. This does not

mean that nothing can be done or should be done however, because group violence is becoming far too disturbing to ignore. Perhaps the most unsettling is the fact that an overwhelming number of students feel safe in school only part of the time or not at all. As Baron (1997) points out, we as a society " cannot hide from the gang violence problem as the wounded and the dead keep piling up in emergency rooms and morgues". With that statement, we need to be careful not to judge all young people based on the violent and criminal activities of a few. With all the media attention being given to teens involved in gang activities, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that most young people are concerned, law-abiding citizens. Fear of youth, either as individuals or in groups, has lead to the murder of innocent or mischievous teenagers, when panicking adults misunderstood their actions and reached for their guns before asking questions. Briefly, we know that the more risk factors that a youth experiences, the more likely he or she is to join a gang. Research also suggests that the presence of risk factors in multiple categories increases the probability of gang involvement. The increase in gang violence and crime in some Aboriginal communities has been attributed in part to an increasing youth population, inadequate housing, drug and alcohol abuse, a high unemployment rate, lack of education, poverty, poor parenting skills, the loss of culture, language and identity and a sense of exclusion. Gang cohesion, culture and lifestyle are also important considerations to lower the incidence of gang related occurrences. References Baron, Stephen W. Canadian Male Street Skinheads: Street Gang or Street Terrorists in The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology. v. 34(2), May 1997. Burke, Lisa Porche and Christopher Fulton.

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