

Street gangs and violence

Law



Street gangs and violence The Causes Gang violence is caused when a group of young men, boys or girls residing in a particular neighborhood form a ‘gang’ in the pursuit of stealing, vandalizing and even killing innocent citizens in their own and neighboring localities (Wikipedia, 2006). Gangs, historically known as ‘play groups’ have been identified as pathological criminals rather than being functional groups of people working towards a goal, in a number of American-coined definitions.

Legal Definition

The Californian State’s jurisdiction has defined criminal street gangs as an organization or group whose primary activities include one or more serious violent criminal acts, a common identifying name or symbol and that its members have been involved in criminal gang activity (OJJDP, 2006). Of course certain parts of this definition can be debated by lawyers to see what constitutes as gang activity or membership in a gang but the definition comes across as accurate and acceptable.

Drug Trafficking

Street gangs have been wrongly perceived as not only causing violence in the neighborhoods they live in, but also establishing their play groups for drug trafficking purposes. A 1991 study conducted in Los Angeles reported that 25% of total gang members are involved in cocaine distribution but their primary intent was not drug trafficking (OJJDP, 2006). Similarly, Decker and Van Winkle (Sieberg, 2005) conducted several interviews to find most of the respondents admitting that drug dealing is a part of their groups’ activities but none of the members are compelled to do so. They had joined the gang for reasons other than drug selling.

Gang Control and Prevention

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For almost six decades, a number of gang prevention and intervention strategies have been developed and implemented in the United States to improve the conditions of the recipients and the neighborhoods they live in. Projects like Miller's Mid-City Project (1962) and the Chicago's Flying Squad Project (1992) have suffered short life spans due to slow response times and many changes in administrative priorities (Esbensen and Osgood, 1999). The government has recently stepped up its efforts to promote proactive community-based strategies for effective gang control - prevention, converting gangs into neighborhood clubs and mediation groups. The most effective program has been prevention, where after-school extracurricular activities are incorporated into the curriculum thereby preventing the possible higher rates of crime and violence by increased membership of a gang (OJJDP, 2006).

Police and Education

As the influence of gangs and level of street crime in America varies from area to area (Gellert, 2001), the policing methodology for dealing with gangs is different from state to state in America (Katz & Webb, 2006). As an example, the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) was introduced by the Phoenix Police Department in 1991 as a preventive measure to address the prevailing gang menace through the means of reducing and educating the consequences of gang activity to the young American population. In a span of five years, the project was incorporated into school curricula in 47 states. The program's objectives are to gear seventh graders with the skills and knowledge concerning conflict resolution, negative aspects of gang life, goal setting and resisting peer pressure imparted in the course of nine weeks. Positive effects have already been

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witnessed by the decline of gang membership over the years (Esbensen and Osgood, 1999). In conclusion, with proper development support, education and effective social programs, the young boys of the twenty-first century can be expected to spend more time on resolving conflicts rather than igniting them by forming gangs.

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