

# Youth gang culture and publics perception of gangs



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It is the intention of the following literature review to focus upon the gang and focus in detail on youth gang culture and look in detail the media coverage in relation to knife crime, the public perception of the 'gang'. To discuss why young people become involved in gangs and to discover during this literature review if poverty, race and ethnicity have a radical impact on who joins a gang plus who is a victim of a gang. In order to discuss the subjects noted above this review will also look in detail into previous research relating to gangs with a particular emphasis on youth crime. It is also critical to highlight that it is important to discuss key social theories which could be utilised to explain some of the above.

In recent years the media, government, police have used the term gang to generally refer to crimes which have been committed by groups of young people. Often crimes such as knife crime have been used by the mass media to portray gangs in a particular way. Often crimes such as knife crime have been used by the mass media to portray gangs in a particular way and also to draw public attention to this social issue. According to the Home Office 'There has been increasing public concern in recent years about gun and knife crime. While disturbing, the number of such crimes is relatively low and in a general population sample survey such as the BCS the number of victims is too small.'

Alexandar (2008)

More than 70 youngsters died at the hands of gangs in Britain in 2008. In London, 26 were stabbed to death. There are more than 170 gangs, with members as young as ten have been identified by police in London. Many

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teenagers now routinely carry a knife out of fear, in order to defend themselves if attacked. The penalty for straying into the wrong area is to be robbed, beaten or stabbed.

It is difficult to define specifically what a gang is due to the nature of these particular social groups. Gangs in the UK are currently seen as a collection of more than two people for example and often these gangs have a specific purpose. In recent years a collection of youths walking around the streets have become labelled as gangs in the media. Steven Sachs (1978) makes the following definition, a youth gang is commonly thought as a self-formed association of peers having the following characteristics: a gang name and recognizable symbols, identifiable leadership, a geographic territory, a regular meeting pattern, and collective actions to carry out illegal activities, it is “ a structured, cohesive group of individuals, usually between the ages of eleven and twenty-five, gang members can be male or female, but they are most often male. (Sachs, 1997)

According to Cohen (1955) “ Youth gangs participate in all kinds of activities such as extortion and intimidation, robbery, vandalism, assault, drug trafficking, stabbings, shootings, and sometimes even murder.

The following sections of this literature review will focus in detail at specific research which has been carried out previously relating to youth gangs and knife culture.

## **Study 1**

The first study was created in 2008 by Scottish centre for crime and justice research , they were awarded a research grant of £155, 000 by the <https://assignbuster.com/youth-gang-culture-and-publics-perception-of-gangs/>

Scottish government to undertake ethnographic research exploring the nature of youth gang involvement, and the nature of knife carrying by young people in Scotland, and the roles that such activities may play in young people's everyday lives. The research took place in five locations across Scotland and involved a multi-method approach, combining sets of interviews with young people, police, community and youth workers and other local area 'experts'. Two draft reports were submitted to the Scottish Government in spring 2010: the first providing a qualitative account of young people's involvement in youth gangs and the second drawing on an analysis of quantitative data from several sweeps of the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions of Crime (ESYTC). A core finding of this report is that gang members (inclusive of those who carry /use knives and other weapons) are drawn from areas of multiple deprivations. The evidence presented in this report suggests that youth gang members are likely to be highly visible as problematic individuals, in terms of their tendency to hang about the streets and their frequent alcohol consumption.

## **Study 2**

Youth Gangs in an English City: Social Exclusion, Drugs and Violence

The research Youth Gangs: The factors behind the headlines have been made by Judith Aldridge of the University of Manchester. The research provides an ethnographic account of contemporary youth gangs in an English city. The study involved 26 months of participant observation in 'Research City'; 107 interviews with gang members and their associates, and with key informants; and nine group interviews with non-gang youth, community representatives and parents. Findings showed a long history of <https://assignbuster.com/youth-gang-culture-and-publics-perception-of-gangs/>

territorial street gangs in Research City. From the 1980s, attention focused on drug-selling gangs engaging in lethal gun violence in marginalised black areas. This framed the way the issue of gangs was officially constructed across Research City; other white areas of the city where gangs presented a lower profile and level of gun violence received less attention. A combination of factors changed the nature of these gangs, in particular from their drug-selling focus. The findings from this research shows that Gangs today in Research City are ethnically mixed, loose, dynamic, interlinked territorial networks with far less organisation than expected and ephemeral, shifting and unstable leadership. Findings are presented in relation to: gang formation and the life course, violence, earnings, drug use, the role of women and girls, ethnicity, community, and statutory responses. Findings from the research have important implications for policy development, theoretical understanding of youth gangs in the UK, and methodological know-how.

The researches shows that one of many reasons why young people get in to gangs is peer pressure and wanting to look 'bad' and also young people are searching for some kind of family unit. Youth crime is simultaneously a social problem and an intrinsic part of consumer culture: while images of gangs and gangsters are used to sell global commodities, young people not in work and education are labelled as antisocial and susceptible to crime.

There was a general consensus that the issue of violent weapon crime by groups of young people is not a new phenomenon, and is in part fuelled by media. Group crime involving weapons transcends ethnicity and occurs across all races, with neighbourhood poverty and deprivatisation at the root.

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