Youth Gangs: Gender Differentiation in Gang Prevention/Intervention Programs

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Youth Gangs: Gender Differentiation in Gang Prevention/Intervention Programs

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By
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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Statement of the Problem

Female youth gang membership is a problem society is currently facing. In the 1980s, researchers started focusing their research on female gangs and memberships. However, female gang participation is underestimated and under reported. It is important that prevention and intervention programs are readily available for gang members. The current prevention and intervention programs are not gender specific and lack focus on females. Therefore, females are not getting the proper programming in order to restrain from gang participation.

Method of Approach

This paper uses secondary research which includes empirical studies, statistics, and theoretical findings. Online resources, textbooks, and direct information provided by gang prevention and invention programs themselves are also utilized. The application of theories such as the social learning theory, social bonding theory, and the strain theory, can be used to explain female behaviors and can be incorporated into existing gang prevention and intervention programs or developing new programs. Without improvements to the current programs, females will not properly be addressed and the female gang membership will remain the same.

Conclusions and recommendations regarding gender specific gang prevention and intervention programs are based on the collected information presented within this study.

Results of Study

Through reviewing secondary data and the current programs available that address the issue of preventing and intervening gang membership, it is concluded that the current programs
are not effectively addressing female needs. The programs lack direction in which focus on females. The current programs address both sexes; however there is limited attention to females as their needs are different than males. In order for these programs to effectively have an impact on females, gender specific programming is necessary. This includes intake requirements as well as age specifics which should be incorporated in the program criteria. The gang prevention and intervention programs should include services such as healthy relationships, self esteem building, pregnancy, eating disorders, as well as other needs that are directed towards females. With gender specific programming, both genders will receive adequate services for gang prevention and intervention.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Female gang participation has been a problem in society for many years. When reviewing raw data on female gangs, many sources underestimate the extent of female gang participation. According to the National Gang Center (NGC) (2011), female gang participation rates have been steady throughout the years. In 1998, 7.7% of gang members were female (NGC, 2011). In 2002, the number decreased to 7.3% and in 2007, the number decreased further to 6.6% (NGC, 2011). The rates vary through the years; however female gang membership remains a problem in society today as there is limited research and lack of acknowledgment by law enforcement.

Research in gangs has primarily focused on male gang membership. According to Moore and Hagedorn (2001), researchers face serious obstacles with studying female gangs as they often have to settle for unrepresentative samples. Methods of data such as surveys, self reported data and arrest rates are limited and misconstrued so female members are not fully accounted for.

Prevention and intervention programs addressing youth gang membership are often times focused on males only (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). These programs do not address issues that females face and need. The programs are based off prior data and studies which are mostly based on males. A successful intervention and prevention program would address the issues directly associated with females. Current intervention and prevention youth gang programs are not properly addressing female needs.

Statement of the Problem

Current programs do not address the specific needs of females. Gender specific gang prevention and intervention programs are critical. The most recent data from the 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment reveals that 10% of law enforcement agencies are not reporting exclusively female gangs (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2010). Young females have different
needs than males such as self esteem and identity, mentoring, and healthy relationships that should be incorporated into programs. Current programs are offered at community levels through law enforcement, schools, and non-profit organizations. These programs are neither gender specific nor age specific. In reviewing current programs, only a few specify the specific needs for females but they are not well known national programs for example, the Phoenix Gang Intervention and Prevention Female Program and the Family and Youth Services Bureau Programs for Females. Programs like these need to expand nationally and set examples for other gang prevention and intervention programs to incorporate the needs of females into their programs. Gang prevention and intervention programs must incorporate gender specific programming to reach the needs of both males and females in order to be effective in reducing the gang membership rate.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide background information on five gang prevention/intervention programs and provide recommendations to improve said programs to equally serve female youths as well as recommendations for future programs. Female youth have different needs than males and without gender specific program the programs are not properly serving the female gender. With the continuing growth of youth female participation in gangs, gender specific programs are necessary and without them, the increase of involvement may be more prevalent.

Gender specific prevention programs must include all issues facing females today. There are many differences in why females join gangs and programs need to thoroughly address these differences. Some program improvements for females could be focusing on healthy relationships, building self esteems, mentoring, and education. Further issues that could be
addressed are child bearing, eating issues, past abuse, and issues with prostitution. Counseling should also be available for the young females.

Prevention and intervention programs need some changes as many have not shown to be overly successful. With the presentation of secondary data as well as theory applications and recommendations, a program could better serve the community and young females.

**Methods of Approach**

This paper uses secondary research which includes empirical studies, statistics, and theoretical findings. Online resources, textbooks, and direct information provided by the gang prevention and invention programs themselves will also be utilized. The social learning theory, social bonding theory, and the strain theory are used to help determine program recommendations. These three theories can be applied in many youth females as they deal with negative social bonds as well as strain. Conclusions and recommendations regarding gender specific gang prevention and intervention programs are based on the collected information presented within this study.

**Limitations**

Limitations include the availability of secondary research relating to female youth gang membership. The majority of research is not gender based or is only directed towards male gang membership. Further, some of the research available is considered outdated. Also, research involving female gang memberships can be inaccurate and underrepresented.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review is divided into three sections. The first section will address statistics of female gang members from the National Youth Gang Survey, arrest rates as well as self reporting data. The second section will focus on the types of female gangs and characteristics of the females involved. The third section will be an overview of female gangs in school. The fourth section will focus on the issue of female gangs in prisons and jails. The fifth section will focus on various case laws and enhancement penalties regarding gangs. Lastly, a program review will be provided on five current gang programs available on their approaches to prevent or intervene gang participation as well as their focus on female membership.

Statistics

Many statistics regarding youth gang membership as well as female gang participation are outdated. Statistics are provided by the National Youth Gang Survey as well as national arrest rates. Self reporting data is also a useful source when looking at statistics on gang membership.

National Youth Gang Survey

The National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) conducts an annual survey of law enforcement agencies to assess gang problems in areas such as presence, characteristics, and behaviors throughout the United States (NYGC, 2011). The sample consists of various agencies in larger cities serving populations of 50,000 or more, suburban counties, small cities with populations between 2,500 and 49,999, and a random sample of rural counties (NYGC, 2011). The National Youth Gang Survey started in 1996, and has continued today. The last published survey was in 2008. A review of the 2008 National Youth Gang Survey provided the following results:
- Estimated that 32.4 percent of all cities, suburban areas, towns, and rural counties experienced gang problems in 2008
- Approximately 774,000 gang members and 27,900 gangs are active in the United States
- The number of gangs increased by 28% and membership increased by 6% from 2002 to 2008 (Egley et al., 2010).

In further review of the results of the 2008 National Youth Gang Survey, 15% of larger cities, 13% of suburban counties, 18% of smaller cities and 12% of rural counties reported that more than half of the gangs in their jurisdiction have female gang members (NGC, 2011). The table below provides the percentages of female membership from the 2008 National Youth Gang Survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gangs With Female Members</th>
<th>Larger Cities</th>
<th>Suburban Counties</th>
<th>Smaller Cities</th>
<th>Rural Counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Data Reported</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–25%</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–50%</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than 50%</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A large percentage of the agencies involved in the survey could not provide information about female gang membership, suggesting that the issue is of lesser significance to law enforcement (NGC, 2011). The rate of female gang participation has increased since the 2006 National Youth Gang Survey was published.

*Arrest Rates*   Law enforcement keep reports on arrest of females and their involvement in the criminal justice system. Information of the arrest of female gang members however are
usually only recorded in larger cities (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). Moore and Hagedorn (2001) further believe that many of the reports underestimate the involvement of female gang members in the criminal justice system as not all are reported as the various jurisdictions view the offense “gang related” differently. Arrest rates are available through law enforcement agencies as well as the Uniform Crime Report (UCR).

According to the UCR, the number of females arrested rose 11.4% from 2000 for various types of crimes ranging from murder to gambling to liquor laws (FBI, 2011). The number of young males (under the age of 18) arrested decreased 22.9% as well as the young females decreased 13.1% in 2009 when compared to the UCR data in 2000 (FBI, 2011). When comparing violent crime statistics, males arrested for such crime decreased 8.1% while females increased 0.1% (FBI, 2011). This UCR data was over a ten year span from 2000 to 2009.

When comparing 2005 UCR data to 2009 UCR data, the number of females arrested increased 1.4% compared to males who decreased 5.2% (FBI, 2011). Further, both young males and young females (under the age of 18) arrest rates decreased in the five year span. When comparing violent crimes, males arrested decreased 5.1% and females also decreased 0.8% (FBI, 2011).

Arrest rates are useful in determining who is being caught for what crime however they are often times underestimated. Further, the UCR reports do not specifically focus on the female gang members as they include the female population as a whole that was arrested. Law enforcement agencies have not viewed female gang membership a priority so the participation rates are considered to be higher than reported (Moore & Hagedorn, 2011).

**Self Report Data** Self reporting data has been a source of information used to provide information of gang membership. Usually these surveys are conducted in a school or
social service setting. The surveys typically ask individuals about their gang involvement and whether or how often they commit certain offenses (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). The Denver Youth Survey and the Rochester Youth Development Study are examples of self reporting data and will be described herein.

The Denver Youth Survey began in 1987 and was coordinated by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The study followed 1,527 boys and girls ranging in ages 7 to 15 from high risk neighborhoods in Denver, Colorado (Browning & Huizinga, 1999). The goal of the study was to identify social conditions, personal characteristics as well as developmental patterns that connected these youths to delinquency and drug use (Browning & Huizinga, 1999). The following are some highlights of the Denver Youth Survey when compared to a match sample of a National Youth Survey in 1979:

- Little change in the prevalence rates of delinquency
- The levels of injury from violence offenses increased significantly (33% to 58%)
- The prevalence of drugs decreased substantially
- More than half (53%) of the youth ages 11 to 15 were arrested over the next 5 years. The arrest rate was high for both males (64%) and females (41%) (Browning & Huizinga, 1999).

The Rochester Youth Development Study was conducted in 1988 in Rochester, New York. The sample used consisted of 1,000 students (729 males and 271 girls) who were in seventh and eighth grade (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2011). Males were the majority of the sample as they were more likely to engage in serious delinquency (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2011). The sample participant as well as
a parent was interviewed at six months intervals from 1988 to 1992 and also annual interviews from 1994 to 1996. The following were the results of the Rochester Youth Development Study:

- One-third of the Rochester sample, gang members accounted for 86% of serious delinquent acts, 69% of violent delinquent acts, and 70% percent of drugs sales
- Gang members had a higher rate for violent offensive when they were active gang members either before they were in the gang or after they left the gang
- Gang membership had a strong impact on the frequency of violent behavior as well as other risk factors
- Female involvement in gangs was lower than males however, many of the same risk factors and delinquent behaviors were the same and higher than non-gang members (Browning et al., 1999).

The use of self report data has become more frequent. Some researchers say that youth who are answering these types of surveys or questionnaires may exaggerate or conceal certain information (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). Most of the surveys however are anonymous (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). Most of the published self reported surveys do not have a fair sample as the males outnumber the females as it is considered females do not commit as much delinquent crime as males. Therefore, future self report surveys should be directed to a sample of majority female in order to receive a more accurate figure of female involvement in gangs and delinquency.

**Types of Female Gangs and Roles**

According to Meda Chesney-Lind (2001), there are multiple characteristics at risk females face such as problems with school and in community situations as well as in family circumstances. According to a 1990 report by the American Correctional Association (ACA),
over 78 percent of the female juvenile offenders neither completed high school nor obtained the
high school equivalency diploma (Chesney-Lind, 2001). Further, more than 60 percent of youth
females in the juvenile system have been victims of physical abuse and 54 percent have been
victims of sexual abuse (Chesney-Lind, 2001). Risk factors such as abuse and inadequate
education have been associated with why females join in gangs.

The role of a female gang member has changed throughout the years. Female gang
members used to be seen as sex object or tomboys (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). They served in
the gang as lower status, treated with little respect, and seen as being weak (Eghigian & Kirby,
2006). Furthermore, females were used for lookouts and luring in rivals. The most frequent types
of females in gangs are auxiliary members of male gangs and/or a female member of a coed gang
(Eghigian & Kirby, 2006). According to Eghigian and Kirby (2006), females in coed gangs may
achieve higher status because males entrust them with matters such as stashing drugs, weapons,
and money. With females serving as auxiliary members to male gangs, they often have the word
“lady” in front of it such as Lady Stones. Some gangs adopt a female version of the gang such as
Latin Queens branched off of the male version of Latin Kings. Often times, the male and female
gangs have a relationship but have their own identities, hierarchies, and goals. There are also
autonomous all female gangs such as PHP. Although all female gangs exist, they are less
frequent than female gang members being associated with a male gang. Females have come a
long way over the years gaining independence and creating strictly female gangs where they
participate in their own activities.

Laidler and Hunt (1997) completed a study and compared an independent female gang
known as PHP, an African American gang and six auxiliary female gangs which were connected
to male gangs. Laidler and Hunt (1997) completed this study by interviewing the subjects which
were African American, Latina, and Samoan female gang members. The authors concluded that all the females involved in the study described extensive violence in their relationships with their boyfriends. They further concluded that those that participated in auxiliary gangs were more prone to violence than those of an independent gang. The Latinas and Samoans females were more prone to violence by encouragement from the male gang members as well as by their own homegirls in the gang. Both the independent female gang as well as the auxiliary female gang members viewed their other members as sisters in which they felt safe. Conflict within the female auxiliary members arose often times due to drinking and “talking shit” according to Laidler & Hunt, (1997). This however was absent in the independent African American gang. The study concluded that there were more similarities than differences however, more research needs to be done on other independent girl gangs, mixed gangs, and girls affiliated with male gangs.

Another study was done by Miller (2002) which included 94 young females in Columbus, Ohio and St. Louis, Missouri. Of the participants interviewed, 48 were gang members and 46 were not. The female participants ranged in age from 12 to 20 and were majority African-American. The female youths were recruited to complete this study by local juvenile detention facilities, shelters, schools and local community agencies as well as a referral from a friend. The youth females were asked a variety of questions in included “what the gang was like, how it was structured, what members did, and how and why they became involved” (Miller, 2002).

Youth typically associate with gangs and gang members for approximately a year before joining (Miller, 2002). The young females in Miller’s (2002) study, joined on average around the age of 12 to 13. In the study, 69% of the girls joined their gangs before the age of 14. The primary reasons in which the youth females joined a gang in this study were due to neighborhood
contexts and exposure to gangs, family problems such as violence and drug abuse, which led to little to no parental supervision (Miller, 2002). The youth females would avoid home and engage in meeting their social and emotional needs elsewhere. Lastly, many of the females described having a strong influence on gangs due to family members also being involved (Miller, 2002). As other research shows, these are the primary reasons why youth females join gangs.

The study further concluded that of the 48 gang members included in the study, 42 described that the gang included both male and female members. The females also indicated they participated in regular drug dealing but most of the delinquent acts they were involved in were not organized or planned (Miller, 2002). The females indicated that their involvement and kind of activities they participated were based on the perceptions of how males and females should behave. An example of the gender differences emerged when discussing serious violence. Most of the serious violence was committed by the men and when females got involved, they reported it to the male members in which the male members then responded. Female on female violence generally involved fists and knives. The females indicated that the males were likely to use guns when involved in violence.

The females in the study indicated that they experienced victimization at some point in their lives. “Two-thirds of the females in gangs had witnessed at least one homicide in their lives, and 79% had seen someone shot” (Miller, 2002, p. 89). More than half of the gang members have been sexually assault and threatened with a weapon. Further, a third of the female gang member participants in this study have been stabbed (Miller, 2002). The female gang members indicated that their confrontations were more likely to be female on female which reduce the risk of victimization. The females in the study did acknowledge that being in a gang posed personal dangers (Miller, 2002). Although some of the females were mistreated and abused by fellow
gang members, they viewed it as being protected and did not want to appear wear or less than a male member (Miller, 2002). This study concluded that females do have a distinct role in gangs and that any programs in which include female gang members should address sexual assault, abuse, and victimization (Miller, 2002).

**Female Gangs in Schools**

Females are also associated with youth gangs in schools. According to the National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XV: Teens and Parents, it was reported that “45% of high schools students indicate there are gangs or student who consider themselves to be part of a gang in their school” (Arciage, Sakamoto, & Jones, 2010). The study was conducted in approximately 1,300 schools. The study further concluded that 7.6% of male participants and 3.8% of female participants reported that they belonged to a gang (Arciage et al., 2010). The presence of gangs in schools creates more problems such as guns and drugs being brought into schools (Howell & Lynch, 2000).

A report which analyzed the findings of the 1989 and 1995 School Crime Supplements (SCS’s) to the National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS) included a sample of approximately 10,000 students (Howell & Lynch, 2000). In this comparison, the average ages involved were 12 through 19. When analyzing the presence of gangs within the school, ages 14 to 19 indicated the highest presence at 41%. The younger sample indicated a presence of gangs in their school, but not at a rate as high as the older sample. Further, 61% of Hispanic students report gangs, compared to 44% of black students and 33% of white students (Howell & Lynch, 2000). There were no specific differences in the percentages of males and females reporting gangs in schools. The report further concluded that most of the criminally active gangs were reported to be 15 to 17 year olds of either gender (Howell & Lynch, 2000). There is a high presence of gangs in
school which could lead to students being victimized, criminal activity, and gang retaliations in the school environment. Although there is a presence of gangs within the schools, typically the activities are brought from the outside into the school environment (Howell & Lynch, 2000). Females are less likely to engage in gang behaviors in the school environment than males (Howell & Lynch, 2000). Schools are learning different approaches to respond to gangs in the school setting as there is a presence known.

**Female Gangs in Prisons/Jails**

Female gangs can also create commotion in the jail and prison setting. In the U.S., there are approximately 14,000 females held in correctional and residential facilities versus approximately 90,000 males (Hernandez, 2009). There are currently twenty-eight federal institutions that house female inmates (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2011). Many of the local jails also have a female unit. Hernandez (2009) indicates that of the 14,000 females held in the correctional and jail setting, the majority of those females have some gang affiliation but the exact number is unclear. The typical female offender is a poor, undereducated, young, minority (Gray, 2002). Most of the females in prison are serving sentences for nonviolent offenses. If the female is in prison for murder or manslaughter, many of the females had killed their husbands or boyfriends (Gray, 2002). Many of the females who are in the correctional setting had also experienced gang risk factors such as abuse.

If females are involved in gangs in prison or jail, they were usually associated with the gang prior to their confinement. Female gangs are less prevalent in the correctional system than male gangs (Gray, 2002). Females tend to make cliques in which they consider other females their mother, sister, friends, etc. instead of engaging in gang associated behaviors such as violence (Gray, 2002). Typically prison gangs are associated mainly with the male gender.
Females further receive services that are comparable to the male offenders, but also are gender specific. Both males and females are offered educational and recreation programs which include job training and apprenticeship training. Females however are provided with services that relate to pregnancy, birth control, child placement, and abortion (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2011). Gang prevention and intervention programs are available in some correctional settings, although limited to the female population as it is not considered a substantial risk (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2011). Females partake in gangs in a variety of locations from the streets, to school, and in prisons and jails.

**Case Law Regarding Gangs**

Many states have implemented state laws implementing penalties on gang related crimes. The U.S. Department of Justice has a Gang Prosecution Manual available for prosecutors for guidance in their decisions to charge the offender. According to the Gang Prosecution Manual (2009), gang related crimes are more difficult to prosecute than other sorts of crimes due to the “interrelated relationships and complex dynamics between rival gangs” (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2009). The manual further provides what law enforcement can do to assist prosecutors in gathering information on gang members such as having a database where it documents gang affiliations as well as hold records on each gang member (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2009). Prosecuting gang members is a complicated process in which can result in other rivalries and crime.

Congress has been taking action to try and address gang violence by breaking up criminal gang networks. There are two bills under consideration of the Senate at this time. The first is the HR 1279 – Gang Deterrence and Community Protection Act of 2005. This bill defines a criminal street gang as “any formal or informal group of 3 or more individuals that commits 2 or more
gang crimes – 1 of which is a crime of violence- in 2 or more separate criminal episodes” (Farley, 2005, p. 1). This bill would exclude property crimes. This bill would ultimately increase sentences for gang activity. For example, if a firearm is used during the offense in which it is considered gang activity, the penalty would increase from 5 years to 7 years (Farley, 2005). This bill would further create a criminal street enforcement team consisting of agents from various criminal justice agencies such as the FBI, U.S. Marshals Service, The Department of Homeland Security, etc. The bill would also fund more gang tracking devices to help identify gang members more readily.

Another bill which is under consideration is the S 155- Gang Prevention and Effective Deterrence Act of 2005. This bill would make it a federal crime to participate in a criminal street gang which is defined as “a group of 3 or more people who acted together to commit 2 or more gang crimes” (Farley, 2005, p. 3). Gang participation would be punishable by fines or up to 30 years in prison. This bill would also make the recruitment of minors to join a criminal gang an offense punishable by fines or up to 10 years in prison. The bill would also authorize $100 million dollar annually to go towards community base programs, Safe Street program, Project Safe Neighborhoods program and towards the state and local prosecutors in order to upgrade equipment to improve identification and prosecution of violent offenders.

Both these bills are examples of current legislation trying to decrease gang membership by creating strict penalties. The ultimate goal of many states is that if the law enacts strict penalties to gang activity, it will deter gang members from committing crimes.

**Program Review**

There are currently numerous programs in which provide gang prevention or intervention techniques. Gang prevention/intervention programs are provided though schools, law
enforcement agencies, as well as in the community. Many of the current programs are not gender specific and do not distinguish the separate needs of males and females. Evaluations on the programs also do not distinguish the results for females. In reviewing the current programs available, there is limited focus on the needs of females.

In this section, there will be five gang prevention and intervention programs reviewed. The first program is the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.). The second program being reviewed is the Targeted Outreach program which is promoted and sponsored by the Boy’s and Girl’s Club of America. The third program reviewed will be the Department of Justice’s Youth Gang Prevention Initiative. The last two programs have a gender specific focus towards female. The Family and Youth Services Bureau Programs for Female Gang Members will be reviewed herein. Lastly, the Phoenix Gang Intervention and Prevention – Female Program will be reviewed.

_Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.)_ The G.R.E.A.T. Program is a nationwide school based gang prevention program that is taught by uniformed law enforcement officers. The target for this program is elementary and middle school students. The program is presented in a classroom setting and is directed towards all students whether in a gang or not. The goals for the G.R.E.A.T. program are to reduce involvement in gangs or delinquent behavior, teach consequences of gang involvement and help develop positive relations with law enforcement (Esbensen, 2004). There are four components to this program which is designed to target different audiences. G.R.E.A.T. acknowledges that age setting goals and skills are important. The components include middle school, elementary school, summer, and families. The elementary and middle school component is included in the basic curriculum in the classroom. If a student wants to enroll in the summer component, a parent or guardian must sign
an agreement and waiver to allow participation. The family component is open for all families to participate in and has no intake requirements. The goal of each component it to strength the individual and families to communicate better and have essential life skills while preventing crime violence and gang involvement (G.R.E.A.T., 2011).

An annual evaluation study was done with the youths who participated in the G.R.E.A.T. Program from when they were in seventh grade until eleventh grade (Esbensen, 2004). This evaluation found that the G.R.E.A.T. Program met two of their three goals. First, there were more favorable attitudes towards the police and second, there was more awareness about gangs (Esbensen, 2004). The goal of reducing gang membership was not met.

There was also a comparison done between participants of the G.R.E.A.T. Program and non-participants four years after the program delivery. The following were results of the program participants:

- 7% lower level of victimization
- 5% difference in negative views about gangs
- 5% difference in favorable attitudes towards the police
- 5% difference in engaging in risk seeking behaviors
- 4% difference in association with peers involved in pro-social activities (Esbensen, 2004).

The G.R.E.A.T. Program has been effective in meeting the majority of its goals. However, the program is not gender specific and directed equally towards both genders. When contacting the G.R.E.A.T. Program, Kim Lake of the G.R.E.A.T. National Program Office advised that the program is intended for both male and female young students and further
directed to go to the G.R.E.A.T. website for review. Upon reviewing the website and contacting G.R.E.A.T., there was no specific aspect of the program directed towards the needs of females.

**Targeted Outreach – Boy’s and Girl’s Club of America**

Targeted Outreach is sponsored by the Boy’s and Girl’s Club of America (BGCA). With the funding of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the BGCA developed two initiatives to help youths deter away from gang associated behaviors and values. The first initiative was a prevention approach called Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach (GPTTO) (Arbreton & McClanahan, 2002). The second initiative was an intervention approach called Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach (GITTO) (Arbreton & McClanahan, 2002). Both GPTTO and GITTO made an effort to recruit youths although most program participants were referred by school personnel, social service agencies, and police and probation departments (Arbreton & McClanahan, 2002). The intake requirement was through referral and recruitment through the Boy’s and Girl’s Club directly. Neither GPTTO nor GITTO had gender specific goals or aspects to their programs. There focus was on four components: community mobilization, recruitment, mainstreaming and programming, and case management (BGCA, 2011). The programs further involved positive activities which included sports, promotion of positive relationships and sense of identity. The goal of the Targeted Outreach program was to keep youth busy to deter them from gang activity.

An evaluation was done which included 21 Boys and Girls Clubs, 932 prevention youth and 104 intervention youth over a 10 month period (Arbreton & McClanahan, 2002). The evaluation showed that the majority of youth participated for 12 months and over half were still attending the club after they were initially recruited (Arbreton & McClanahan, 2002). Some
members of the program would go to the clubs several times per week. There have been many positive outcomes by both GPTTO and GITTO which are as follows:

**GPTTO:**

- Delayed onset of gang behavior
- Less contact with the juvenile justice system
- Fewer delinquent behaviors
- Improved school outcomes
- More positive social relationships and product use of out of school time

**GITTO**

- Disengagement from gang associated behaviors and peers
- Less contact with the juvenile justice system
- More positive school engagement (Arbreton & McClanahan, 2002).

Targeted Outreach programs have shown to be effective but could use some improvement. Based on this evaluation alone, the sample was mainly prevention youth. There were no indications of the sexes of any of these participants either. There is no evaluative research on this program with regard to female participation and their outcomes.

**Department of Justice’s Youth Gang Prevention Initiative** The Department of Justice’s Youth Gang Prevention Initiative was conducted by the Office of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The Gang Reduction Program (GRP) was a comprehensive program in which they target four pilot locations to reduce and prevent gang activity (Cahill & Hayeslip, 2010). The sites used were Boyle Heights in Los Angeles, Metcalf Park in Milwaukee, the entire city of North Miami Beach and the Southside community in Richmond (Cahill & Hayeslip, 2010). The gang prevention tactics includes the community, families, and schools.
Although it took a while for the program to develop and start, eventually the program was successful.

An evaluation of the Gang Prevention Initiative was done with direct observations, collected documents from each site including progress reports, strategic plans, and budgets as well as one-on-one interviews and small group interviews (Cahill & Hayeslip, 2010). Some findings showed that violent and gang related crimes decreased in some areas and stayed the same in some (Cahill & Hayeslip, 2010). The Los Angeles and Richmond sits showed the most positive effects of the GRP (Cahill & Hayeslip, 2010). With this program, communities also became more aware of gang issues and communicating with various organizations and law enforcement officials.

This program did not address any gender specific details when being evaluated nor was there statistics on numbers within each site. It focused on area sites as a whole and not specifically genders.

*Family and Youth Services Bureau Programs for Female Gang Members*  The Federal Government sponsored seven female gang prevention programs by the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) This paper will address three of the evaluated programs. The program selection was based on geographic location, ethnicity of the population, differences in program focus, and the availability within each program of adolescent females who were never involved in gang activity or females who are currently or previously in gang activity (Reed & Decker, 2002).

The programs were located in Boston, Massachusetts, Pueblo, Colorado, and Seattle, Washington. The program in Boston was called FORCE (Females Obtaining Resources and Cultural Enrichment) (Reed & Decker, 2002). The program was directed to older girls and was
directed to provide personal growth and leadership skills. This program’s target population was mainly black females (Reed & Decker, 2002). The program in Pueblo called Movimiento Ascendencia (Upward Movement) was directed towards the Mexican-American population. It was designed to provide positive alternatives to substance abuse and gang involvement (Reed & Decker, 2002). The last program in Seattle called the Adolescent Female Gang Prevention and Intervention Project was directed towards females of different ethnic backgrounds. The program’s activities included education about substance abuse, mentoring, self-esteem building, social skills training as well as issues addressing teen pregnancy, housing and parenting (Reed & Decker, 2002).

An evaluation of the three programs was done through interviews with the staff and some of the participants. Overall, the most effective program was the Upward Movement in Pueblo. The programs lacked financial support and parental participation as well as they incurred problems with the activities and recruitment (Reed & Decker, 2002). The program’s goals were to reduce delinquency, increase educational attainment, and improve self-esteem (Reed & Decker, 2002). All of those goals were met however; it had a very minimal impact. Future programming should be planned specifically, have more recruitment as well as find an alternative way to evaluate the effectiveness.

**Phoenix Gang Intervention and Prevention – Female Program**

The Phoenix Gang Intervention and Prevention provides treatment using cognitive behavioral treatment as well as motivational interviewing (Phoenix Gang Intervention & Prevention, 2011). They provide numerous resources to various types of gang involvement from teaching life skills, to
community-based corrections. In their program and treatment, they have female gang prevention and intervention based programs.

The program model is in six phases. The first phase is orientation and preparation for treatment. This is where a female can introduce herself and ask why is she here and where is she going in life. The second phase is self discovery. This is where a female can identify changes she wants to make in herself. The third phase is self awareness and women’s issues. This phase will address female needs specifically. The fourth phase is the individual treatment program which focuses on issues one has with herself. The fifth phase is a relapse prevention phase where female are taught various coping skills as well as reducing risk for future problems. The last and final phase is returning home. This will put the program to the test and see if the female can be a productive citizen without gang involvement or negative behaviors.

The Phoenix Gang Female Programs focus specifically on the needs of females. They recognize there is a gender difference and females have different issues that need to be addressed. Some of the issues addressed in the Phoenix Gang Female Program are drug abuse, healthy relationship, control, self esteem and identity, self image and body image, eating issues, prostitution, and pregnancy and other health issues (Phoenix Gang Intervention & Prevention, 2011). The Phoenix Gang Intervention and Prevention Programs recognize that females have different needs and provide sufficient resources for females. Programs such as these meeting the needs of females should set examples for other programs.

The above programs mentioned vary in direction but overall have the same goal to reduce gang participation rates. Many of the programs available are not gender specific as seen above unless they have a subprogram in which they address the needs of females. Addressing all genders is critical in the success rate of the gang prevention and intervention programs. Future
evaluations could have a higher success rating if female needs were properly addressed and effective.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

There are many theories to explain why a youth behaves the way they do. Many researchers have spent time studying the behaviors of young individuals and their involvement in crime. The social learning theory, social bonding theory, and the strain theory are known theories that can be associated with why youth, especially young females join gangs. With the application of the theories, gang prevention and intervention programs should use the theories as guides to help reduce female gang membership.

Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory can be associated with why female join gangs. The theory is based off of Sutherland’s differential association theory. The differential association theory was based on nine principles which are the following:

- Criminal behavior is learned
- Criminal behavior is learned with interactions with others through communication
- Learning criminal behavior occurs within intimate personal groups
- When criminal behavior is learned it includes how to commit a crime as well as direction such as motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes
- Motives and drives are learned from definitions of legal codes as favorable or unfavorable
- Delinquency occurs when definitions in favor of crime outweigh those unfavorable to the violation of law
- Differential associations vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity
- Learning criminal behavior through associations involved all of the mechanisms that are involved in any other learning
• Criminal behavior is an expression of needs and values (Sutherland & Cressey, 2003). Based on the principles listed above, the differential association theory concludes that criminal behavior can be learned from other associations who participate in criminal behavior.

The social learning theory was originally created by Robert Burgess and Ronald Akers in 1966 (Akers, 1994). In 1973, Akers continued the theory in which he focused on delinquency and deviant behavior. In short, the theory states that criminal behavior is learned through others who view the behavior as favorable (Akers, 1994). The social learning theory focused on the concepts of differential association, definitions, differential reinforcement, and imitation (Akers, 1994).

Application of Social Learning Theory

The association with others is the main concept of the social learning theory. The interaction with others has a large impact on gang membership and participation rates as well. The thought process of a youth who is interested in joining a gang could have a positive or negative reinforcement from another individual. If there are more positive reinforcements than negative reinforcements, the youth will more likely join the gang.

Further, the social learning theory also focuses on the motivations and control of behaviors. Youths looking to join a gang may only see the positive reinforcements such as monetary rewards, a family-like atmosphere, as well a protection. These positive reinforcements could be the ultimate reasoning why a youth may choose to join a gang.

The social learning theory has a large impact on why youths choose to get involved in gangs. Whether youths learn such behavior through friends or family, it has an impact on their thinking. If they see the benefit out of gang participation over the negative aspects, youths are learning that criminal behavior is acceptable.
The social learning theory is strongly supported by research evidence (Akers, 1994). It is an explanation supported by individual differences in delinquent and criminal behavior (Akers, 1994). This theory can be associated with why youths get involved with gangs.

**Social Bonding Theory**

The social bonding theory was developed by Travis Hirschi in 1969 (Hirschi, 2003). The theory was based off the concepts that delinquency and social bonds are inversely related as well as the social bonds had four elements – attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Hirschi, 2003). This theory is often times associated with the connections with family, peers, and society and that these individuals have a significant impact on the way an individual thinks and delinquent behavior.

Attachment refers to the level of attachments with others. Typically, attachment is associated with family, peers, and society. The lack of attachment is associated with delinquent behaviors where individuals committing crimes and engaging in delinquent behavior have little to no attachments to others.

Commitment refers to the responsibility in which they feel towards people they are attached to. Commitment is associated with decision making and outweighing the pros and cons of a situation. An individual shows a level of commitment in many circumstances such as attachments, school, jobs, etc. The level of commitment varies person to person.

Involvement refers to the time associated in conventional activities (Hirschi, 2003). These conventional activities could be appointments, after school activities, work, etc. Involvement is also related to the elements of attachment and commitment. The more conventional activities a person is associated with, the less time he or she has for delinquency behavior (Hirschi, 2003).
Lastly, belief refers to the belief in conventional norms and values. An individual may believe acts are right or wrong but the belief is contingent to the beliefs and strengths of conventional order (Hirschi, 2003). Common beliefs by society are considered acceptable and should be obeyed and if not, the individual is more suspect to criminal acts.

The social bonding theory overall is the belief that strong social bonds deter an individual from committing criminal and delinquent acts. If the bonds are weakened however, the individual is more likely to commit criminal and delinquent acts. The four elements of the social bonding theory are important to an individual.

**Application of Social Bonding Theory**

The social bonding theory explains the specifics on why females join gangs. In reviewing the research available, it shows that a high proportion of female gang members have suffered and experienced sexual abuse at home (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). A study found that approximately two-thirds of female gang members in Hawaii were sexually abused at home (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). Many females who come from abusive homes will run away and join a gang for protection. They lack the necessary social bonds. Further, females join gangs for the family like atmosphere in which they can replace their actual family. A female gang member can look to another gang member as a mother and/or a sister. Families have a huge impact on why many females join gangs.

All of the reasons females join gangs can be associated with social bonds. With the lack of social bonds, females are more likely to create the bonds elsewhere and engage in delinquent and criminal behavior. Without surrounding themselves with positive influence and are experiencing strains, females see the only option as involving themselves in gangs so they can make up for the lack of social bonds.
**Strain Theory**

Merton’s strain theory believed that crime resulted from the inability to achieve monetary success or other goals through legitimate channels (Agnew, 2006). Since goals were not reached, it created strain and frustration which ultimately increased the likelihood of crime being committed. Merton’s strain theory focused on five types of modes of adaptation. The first mode is conformity which occurs when individuals accepts the goals and the legitimate ways of reaching them (Merton, 1938). The second mode is innovation which occurs when an individual accepts the goals of society but rejects the legitimate ways of reaching them (Merton, 1938). This adaption is associated with most criminal behavior. The third mode is ritualism in which individuals accept hard work but rejects the goal of monetary rewards (Merton, 1938). An individual gets an education but is not committed to achieving high wealth. The fourth mode is retreatism which rejects to goals of success as well as the means to achieve it (Merton, 1938). This adaptation is often times associated with drug addicts or alcoholics. Lastly, is rebellion in which an individual rejects culture goals and creates new goals and means (Merton, 1938). Merton based his strain theory on these adaptations to describe where individuals fit in their society and socialization process.

Robert Agnew expanded off of Merton’s strain theory. Agnew’s general strain theory went beyond the monetary success, but also defined strains. He proposed that the general strain theory should be measured in three types of strain. This included the actual or anticipated failure to achieve positively valued goals, the actual of anticipated removal of positively valued stimuli as well as the actual or anticipated presentation of negative stimuli (Conklin, 2010). Agnew further believed strain could be cognitive, emotional, and behavioral in which the strain can either lead to delinquent acts or non-delinquent acts (Conklin, 2010).
Agnew’s general strain theory looks into the characteristics of the types of strain to cause crime. Some of which include rejection, abuse, neglect, abusive peer relations, marital problems, unemployment, homelessness, discrimination, economic problems, etc. (Agnew, 2006). With high amounts of strain, an individual is more likely to commit crime.

**Application of Strain Theory**

The application of the social learning theory, social bonding theory, and the strain theory should all be considered when reviewing why youths, specifically females join gangs. The most predominant reasons why females join gangs are due to economic and ethnic forces, family pressures and unstable homes.

The social learning theory and participating in gangs is a clear link because some females are exposed to gangs from family, friends, and peers. Whether in school, home, or in the media, the knowledge of gang surrounds them. Further, family and peers might talk them into joining a gang by promoting only the positive attributes of gang membership. Youth females learn from others about gang membership which ultimately is the reason why youth females join gangs.

The strain theory can also contribute to why youth females join gangs. The strain can be emotional, cognitive, as well as behavioral. Some females join due to the economic status in which they do not fit within the goal of society. With the poverty rate rising and more jobs being lost, more people are inclined to participate in illegal activities such as drug dealing and prostitution (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). In the early 1900s, when thousands of jobs were lost due to the economy, many females were pushed to do illegal activities and join a gang for the comfort (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). The gang is a support system in their financial instability and gang members make income together by doing illegal activities.
Also, the strain of the welfare system decreasing is also a reason females involve themselves in gang activity. The welfare system was relied on by many females until shifts were made and there were no longer welfare payments. Females had a difficult time finding or maintaining employment during periods of economic hardship and with no substantial welfare payments, there was no income for themselves or their families. This often pushed females to gang involvement.

A further strain is the conflict between cultures and ethnic forces. In the 1920’s, most gang members were children of European immigrants (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). In the 1980’s, most female gang members were African American and Latino (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). Today, many gang members are Latino and Asian (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). With the nation becoming more diverse, more females are joining gangs to make a name for themselves and their culture.
Chapter 4: Program Recommendations, Summary, and Conclusion

Program recommendations and improvements need to be made to current gang prevention and intervention programs as well as gang related programs that are developed in the future. The programs need to incorporate intake requirements, age specifics for the program, as well as gender specifics for the program. In order for the gang prevention and intervention program to be successful, it must include all aspects.

Intake Requirement

Intake requirements are important for any gang program. With pre-requisites for entering a program could set guidance for the program. Further, school personnel, social service agencies, and police and probation departments can refer an individual into the program. With setting requirements for the program, it should better serve the individuals who are participating in the program. The ideal candidate for a intake requirement would lack social bonds, experience strain, and are referred by someone into the program who are at risk for gang involvement.

Risk factors such as economic status, family involvement or lack of involvement, academic status, as well as other social bond should be taken into consideration for intake requirements. Such risk factors are indicators of gang involvement so properly addressing the risk factors could determine the success of the program. When addressing risk factors, the social bonding theory should be used in which can help the female tighten the bonds which could be weakened. Overall, the intake requirements are essential for determining that the program is successful.

Age Specific

Age specific programs are also important in gang prevention and intervention programs. The program must be appropriate for the specific age group it is targeting. A female who is 10
years old versus a female who is 18 years old has a different approach of thinking, maturity level as well as interests. This must be taken into consideration when developing or improving a gang program. Most of the gang prevention and intervention programs listed herein (G.R.E.A.T., Targeted Outreach, etc.) cater to the age group 12 to 18.

According to Chesney-Lind (2001), prevention programs for females need to begin at an earlier age. The program can get them involved in many activities whereas if the young female has a lot of spare time, she is more likely to engage in delinquent and gang related behavior. A gang prevention program should begin at approximately 7 to 8 years old. This age is typically when females become curious about their surroundings such as boys, their bodies, and activities. The programs should also include ages up to 18. However, with the wide range of ages 8 to 18, there should be different programs where the two are not grouped together as their maturity levels and interests are different. Having age specific programs is essential for a success program so the target age can be properly addressed.

**Gender Based**

Gender based gang prevention and intervention programs critical when determining the success. Many of the current programs in place are not targeting the female population. Further, females have different needs than males and in order for the program to be effective, it must address these needs such as self esteem, pregnancy, positive relationships, eating issues, and other at risk factors.

Self esteem building lacks in the current programs. This is an issue that females struggle with on a daily basis as society has instilled an image females must hold. A gang program should include self esteem building in its curriculum as it affects the daily lives of others. Having a strong confidence as well as independence can prevent future participation in gang membership.
Further, pregnancy issues must be addressed. If more information is readily available and program instructors serve as counselors, unwanted pregnancies can be avoided. Further, if programs address positive and healthy relationships as well as friendships, this can deter some young females into joining a gang. Overall, the needs of females need to be addressed in gang programs in which they are currently lacking.

Current gang prevention and intervention programs that are not gender specific can improve their programs by creating separate time and space for girls in which they are separated from the boys and can focus on their specific needs (Chesney-Lind, 2001). Young females will be more comfortable in this type of setting in which they do not have to be embarrassed or deal with the boys disruptive behavior on personal topics. Separating the two sexes will give each the opportunity to speak about their private lives with an instructor and other program participants.

Some other program recommendations are to involve the community. Both the denial of gang problems as well as overreactions to gang problems is an issue the community faces when responding to gangs (OJJDP, 2000). Responding to gangs take an effort from the community, law enforcement, as well as the courts and community agencies. In developing future gang programs as well as improving the current programs, all should be allowed for comment and suggestions. Providing alternatives such as other programs and activities could result in reduction of gang membership.

**Summary**

The literature review shows that female gangs are prevalent although not as much as male gangs. As the literature review showed and stated, female gang membership lacks studies and data as it has often gone ignored. Due to the lack of data, programming has been effected and not meeting the needs of females.
The majority of female gang members are a part of an auxiliary gang based off of a male gang as well as co-ed gangs. Females have become more independent and self efficient over the years creating all female member gangs. Youth gang statistics are determined by national youth gang surveys, arrest rates, and self reported data. Females are not properly accounted in these data methods.

Females join gangs for many reasons. In particular, females join a gang due to unstable homes, abuse, as well as lack of attachments. Other reasons include poor academics, low self esteem, and pressure. The social learning theory, social bonding theory, and the strain theory can provide an explanation of why females join in gangs.

A review of the current programs show that the well known gang prevention and intervention programs do not have gender specific programs in which the programs are not meeting the needs of females. Smaller programs such as the Phoenix Gang Prevention and Intervention Program has been developed to meet the needs to all participants including females. By the literature review herein, many gang prevention and intervention programs lack gender specific programming.

**Conclusions**

The literature review on youth female gang membership presented that female gang membership has remained steady over the past ten years. Many researchers who studied female gang membership mention the lack of research and data supporting the statistics on membership. It is believed that there are more female gang members than accounted for. Further, the roles of females in gangs have changed over the years. Females used to play a tomboy or sexual role in the gang, whereas now they are more dominant and independent.
In reviewing the programs currently available for youth female gang members or youth females in general, the programs are not meeting their specific needs. In order for the programs to be effective, they need to have intake requirements, gender based programming, as well as age appropriate. Some specific topics that should be included in programming should be self esteem building, body image, promotion of healthy relationships, as well as other positive activities. The programs listed herein have been shown to be successful; however there was no generated data about males versus females in the results. Programs in the future need to be evaluated on gender specific programming as it is important to the youth female population. Marian Daniels once said, “For years, people have assumed that all you have to do to make a program designed for boys work for girls is to paint the walls pink and take out the urinals” (Chesney-Lind, 2001).
References


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