



R E S E A R C H

Children and Gangs

Summary report for

Children & Young People Now magazine

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This research has been carried out in compliance with the MRQSA international standard (ISO20:252)

I. Executive Summary

'Children and Gangs' is a targeted study undertaken by Qa Research (Qa) on behalf of Children & Young People Now magazine.

The resulting report examines the experiences of young people who are gang-affiliated or who have witnessed street gang activity. The views of professionals who support young people associated with gangs are also presented.

Methods

In order to identify suitable research participants, Qa secured co-operation from a range of specialist youth organisations and professionals including Youth Point Glasgow, Barton Moss Secure Care Centre (Manchester), and gangs disruption workers located in Southwark (South London).

A flexible and evolving qualitative approach to data collection was adopted for this study, with observation, discussion group moderation and interviewing all being utilised as appropriate.

Key Findings

Southwark (South London)

- Southwark is a dynamic borough in relation to gang activity. Whilst two main gangs operate within the area - Brooklyn and the Peckham Young Guns (PYG), new gangs are regularly emerging due to intimidation and alienation.
- Gang activity is highly territorial. Violence is inflicted on rival gang members who invade an opposing territory. Such violence is often committed in a chaotic manner. However organised revenge assaults are a regular occurrence.
- Reasons provided by participants as to why children and young people join street gangs included protection, fear, street credibility, boredom, money, drugs and the failure of institutions such as families and schools.
- Children typically become gang-affiliated in Southwark when they are 11 or 12 years old, and in some instances younger than this. These young members – the 'Tinies' – follow orders from their elders who expect them to sell drugs, carry weapons, inflict violence and steal from those who are vulnerable. 'Tinies' are rewarded with money and 'gifts' such as bikes and jewellery.
- Findings suggest that gang-affiliated females within Southwark conceal weapons / drugs and sell illegal items on behalf of their boyfriends. Girls may also be subjected to sexual exploitation by their peers.
- Educational ambition is often sacrificed by young gang members in favour of securing 'promotion' to a respectable position within their gang hierarchy. Participants reported that 'Tinies' are often blinded by the perceived glamour and status that seniority entails.

Govan (Glasgow)

- Street gang activity in the Govan area is historical. Active gang membership escalated in the 1970s with rising unemployment due to the closure of many ship building yards.
- Children and young people who are gang-affiliated in Govan often do not regard themselves as being members of a specific gang. Rather, they identify with a particular location and associate with different groups of young people who are striving to defend this geographic 'territory'.
- Gang association primarily occurs as a response to peer pressure and the threat of violence from rival gangs. Inter-generational gang-membership is also common. Gang-affiliation in Govan is fluid and participation does not appear to be the result of overt coercion.
- Those consulted maintained that criminal activity (such as arson, robbery and vandalism) is often undertaken within a gang's own area and is generally stimulated by excessive alcohol consumption.
- Leaving their territory can be an extremely hazardous enterprise for gang-affiliated young people. Gang members in Glasgow are known to carry weapons (predominantly knives) for protection and participants noted that 'tagging' (slashing a person on their cheek or torso) is becoming a widespread phenomenon. The consequence of this is that many young people rarely leave their neighbourhood and are reluctant to embrace education and employment opportunities outside of their area.

Barton Moss Secure Care Centre (Manchester)

- Programme Workers at Barton Moss Secure Care Centre stated that those living in deprived areas and 'broken homes' are likely to be vulnerable to gang recruitment, as are those who have witnessed domestic violence or substance abuse.
- 'Because your mates are doing it' and 'protection for both you and your family' were identified by young offenders as the two primary causes of gang-affiliation. Reputation, money (to buy drugs) and family pressure were also recognised as 'pull-factors'.
- When asked what types of weapons – if any – young gang members may carry, participants maintained that knives, guns, knuckle dusters, hammers and crowbars can easily be obtained.
- One young offender who operated on the fringes of gang activity reported that if a female seeks to end her relationship with a gang-affiliated male she will be 'shamed' on social networking sites and any future partners that she chooses will be threatened or assaulted.

2. Introduction

Background

As recognised by the Centre For Social Justice, British society has witnessed an increase in gang culture and its associated violence over the past decade. Modern gangs have become entrenched within Britain's most deprived cities and their composition and nature is shifting. Geographical territory is transcending drug territory, violence is increasingly chaotic, and gang members are getting younger.¹

'Children and Gangs' is a targeted study undertaken by Qa Research (Qa) on behalf of Children & Young People Now magazine. The resulting report examines the experiences of young people who are gang-affiliated or who have witnessed street gang activity. The views of professionals who support young people associated with gangs are also presented. The final section of this report explores a number of intervention strategies that could be implemented to a) provide support for those wishing to leave gangs and, b) deter future generations of children and young people from becoming gang-affiliated.

Children & Young People Now magazine

Children & Young People Now magazine worked in partnership with Qa to investigate why children and young people join gangs. The research will be used as a platform for debate at a Question Time style event taking place in Westminster in January 2011.

To find out more about Children & Young People magazine please visit:

www.cypnow.co.uk

Qa Research

Qa Research is an award winning social research agency with experts in the field of children and young people. We strive to be a strong, independent voice for those who are seldom heard and seek to influence policy by delivering robust research and actionable recommendations.

Qa believes that studies such as 'Children and Gangs' are essential in improving the lives of the most vulnerable members of British society.

To find out more about Qa please visit:

www.qaresearch.co.uk

¹ 'Breakthrough Britain – Dying to Belong' The Centre For Social Justice (2009)

3. Aims and objectives

The over-arching aim of this study was to investigate why children and young people aged 10 - 14 years join gangs.

Within the aim were the following objectives:

- Examine the roles, attitudes and values of young gang members;
- Identify the types and triggers of violence inflicted and experienced by young gang members;
- Recommend key intervention strategies.

4. Methods

Securing cooperation from youth organisations who support gang-affiliated young people was an arduous endeavour. Many of the organisations contacted reported that they were 'restructuring' due to reduced funding and hence did not have the resources to assist Qa with the research. Other key organisations appeared to be suffering from 'research fatigue'. Indeed, several organisations expressed their disappointment that, following their engagement in previous studies, no additional financial support had been obtained, nor had any perceptible change occurred in their area.

Despite encountering such difficulties, several organisations were willing to assist Qa with this study. These organisations were based in Glasgow (Govan) London (Southwark) and Manchester.

A list of organisations who were involved in the study is provided below:

- Youth Point Glasgow
- Glasgow Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV)
- Barton Moss Secure Care Centre (Manchester)
- Southwark Youth Offending Service

A flexible and evolving qualitative approach to data collection was adopted when working with these organisations. Various research tools were designed and unstructured techniques were utilised where appropriate.

Table I on the next page details the research methods used to obtain data for this study.

Table 1: Research Methods

Location	Research Methods
Southwark (South London)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Semi-structured interview with a member of the Southwark Youth Offending Team.• Semi-structured interview with a Child, Family and Community professional• Semi-structured interviews with four gang-affiliated young people.
Govan (Glasgow)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Semi-structured interview with Robert Stephenson – Glasgow Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV).• Semi-structured interviews with John Hendry and Michelle McQueer - Relief Young People’s Workers, Youth Point Glasgow.• On-street observation in Govan.• Six unstructured interviews with gang-affiliated and non-gang affiliated young people.• Unstructured interview with a parent of a gang-affiliated child.
Barton Moss Secure Care Centre (Manchester)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Semi-structured interviews with two Programme Workers.• Discussion group with seven young people.

5. Key findings

The section below details the key findings emanating from the study.

5.1. Southwark (South London)

Background

In October 2010, a Qa researcher visited the Borough of Southwark to conduct four in-depth interviews with young people aged 11-15 years who were gang-affiliated or operating on the periphery of gang activity. Interviews with a Child, Family and Community professional and a Youth Offending Team (YOT) worker with extensive knowledge of gang behaviour were also undertaken. The findings from these interviews are summarised below.

Gang Characteristics

Respondents acknowledged that Southwark is a dynamic borough in relation to gang activity. Two main gangs operate within the area – Brooklyn and the Peckham Young Guns (PYG) – the latter of which contains a number of splinter gangs (see below). Moreover, the YOT worker stated that new gangs are regularly emerging in response to young people feeling alienated or threatened by larger gangs.

“I guess [new gangs form] because some young people don’t gel with the bigger gangs ... I have just heard of one recently called the Orange Gang. These boys live up towards the Elephant and Castle ... I have heard their names mentioned a few times now and I think it is just a crowd of guys that have got together and decided that they are going to be a gang and it is as simple as that really” (YOT worker)

With regards to hierarchy, the leaders of the Southwark gangs are called ‘Gens’ (Generals). Although usually visible within their areas, one respondent noted that the ‘Gens’ are currently in hiding due to recent murders within the Borough. The ‘Gens’ are supported by their ‘Olders’ who themselves are considered senior to ‘Youngers’ and ‘Tinies’. As revealed by one respondent, entry to the gangs and subsequent ‘promotion’ is dependent on trust.

“You just stand with them ... you hang around with them. Once you do it a bit they begin to trust you ... it’s basically trust ... they recruit you” (young person, age 14)

Notably, those consulted generally agreed that children are joining gangs at a younger age than ever before. For example, ‘Youngers’ within the PYG are typically 14 – 16 years old, and the ‘Tinies’ are often 11 or 12 years old, and in some instances even younger. The YOT worker highlighted that recruiting gang members has become an effortless task with the rise of broadcasting sites such as YouTube, as gang members are able to upload videos to glamorise their activities.

“You can define [gang members] by their age. The ‘Olders’, thinking about the PYG, would be the SIs [Shoot Instants], they are about 17, 18 up into their early twenties. Then the main PYG are the boys you get floating around at about 14, 15, 16. Then the Tinies are what they call the Peckham Killers who can go right down to 11 or 12, possibly even younger” (YOT worker)

“It would be quite clear to the kids who the top people are, they’ll see them on YouTube” (Child, Family and Community Professional)

“They can go on YouTube and look up ‘gangs’ and they can see that the PYG are constantly uploading videos. A ten year old boy who may not be allowed out to walk the streets at 10 o’clock at night, but he could possibly be on his computer seeing what [a gang member] is doing” (YOT worker)

Gang Activity

Findings suggest that gangs within Southwark are highly territorial and, as described by one young person, ‘at war with one another’. Indeed, defending their territory is paramount to gang members and violence will be inflicted on those from rival gangs who attempt to enter their area, regardless of their motivation. For example, one young person revealed that a gang member had been shot for leaving flowers at the scene where their friend had been killed in a road accident as this was within an opposing territory. Seeking revenge is also an integral part of ‘gang culture’ within this borough; injury and disrespect trigger violence.

“Everyone is defending their own area. You are trying to keep it yours, you want to protect where you live. There’s stabbings and things like that. That’s where the gun and knife crime comes in” (young person, age 14)

“There’s always the frontline, you would know you were coming out of our place into another. It’s not direct. People know when they are in our area. You know what’s not yours, so you just look for something different ...” (young person, age 14)

“We’re not talking the mafia level of skill when it comes to targeted assassination, but there is certainly some level of planning and forethought that goes into it” (YOT worker)

“If someone stabbed him, we have to ride to the other side of Brixton and stab him, kill the person, or hurt the person.” (young person, age 11)

“Sometimes they [gang members] go into someone else’s territory taking photos of certain street names and letting the other gang know that they have invaded their territory” (Child, Family and Community Professional)

Respondents agreed that the victims of gang crime are predominantly those associated with gangs themselves, with the majority of crimes going unreported. However, it was acknowledged that ‘innocent’ people have been randomly attacked for ‘looking at someone the wrong way’ or because of mistaken identity. Children are often also the victims of muggings.

“You can just get killed even just for being in the opposite gang ... yeah you hear about it a lot, that gang members are shooting people, and stabbing people” (young person, aged 11)

“There are murders, stabbings and shootings at least a couple of times every month. They happen more often than is reported to police” (young person, aged 14)

“There will be a lot of innocent children who are robbed, the number that are reported are absolutely minimal, maybe one or two per cent. It happens on a daily basis ... they won’t snitch” (Child, Family and Community Professional)

With regards to weapons, several of the young people consulted stated that all gang members carry guns and knives for protection. They maintained that accessing these weapons is easy, yet finding ammunition for a gun can be a little more difficult. The YOT worker noted that some gang members have become more cautious about carrying weapons as they may be stopped and searched by the police. In response, they will either hide their weapon or their girlfriend will carry it for them.

“All gang members carry weapons for protection. Knives are common in Peckham. There are also a lot of dodgy guns around” (young person, age 15)

“They’re not all carrying weapons, but most of them can go and put their hand on one within about five or ten minutes. They’re hidden below a hedge or maybe a girl’s carrying it” (YOT worker)

The ‘Tinies’

Respondents reported that the Tinies within gangs are ‘send-outs’ – they do what they are told to by older gang members and don’t ask questions. If a Tinie (or indeed a Younger) refuses to do what they are asked they receive verbal abuse and threats from their elders. Should they continue to be uncooperative they will be ostracised, thus leaving them vulnerable and disgraced.

Tinies are involved in a range of gang activity including stealing mobile phones, drug dealing and carrying weapons for senior gang members. One young person noted that taking responsibility for a weapon enhances a Tinie’s reputation. He also noted that by selling drugs a Tinie will be allowed to keep around 10% of their earnings, with the rest of the money moving up the gang ‘chain’. All of those consulted stated that Tinies are valuable gang members as they look innocent and are therefore less likely to be stopped by the police.

“Basically, they’re like ... what’s it called ... they’re send-outs. Send-outs are like little punks. It would be like go and beat that guy up, go and get that guy’s phone, sell some weed for me, and he’ll [an older gang member] only give you like 10% of what you make even if you do sell weed and stuff like that” (young person, age 11)

“I guess they can do a lot of things that an older one can’t do. I can think of one particular young man who is quite a nasty individual but he is tiny and he really has the face of an angel ... if you see him walking down the street you would think what a little cherub. That guy there would quite easily be able to get away with things that an older guy wouldn’t. Like moving gear, moving drugs, moving weapons. Things like that” (YOT worker)

Tinies will engage in organised and chaotic violence to earn respect. The findings indicate that they will begin carrying and using their own knives and guns once they enter secondary school. Respondents reported instances where Tinies have shot rival gang members. When asked if Tinies ever get scared, one young person stated that some children fear their Mum finding out what they are involved in, whilst a different young person spoke of the lack of support available to young gang members.

“Kids, like, my age, and maybe one year younger and a bit older, they’re not bothered about getting caught. Because at the end of the day, you get caught for murder, when you get out, you can be a big boy. No-one’s gonna mess you around, because you’ve been arrested for murder.

You can do anything. But little kids are worried, they're more worried about what their mums are going to think" (young person, age 15)

"If younger gang members are scared, there's no-one for them to talk to, they just need to deal with it" (young person, age 11)

"If they get arrested, they have two options, they can either snitch or say nothing. Snitching is as bad as being with a rival gang. Even snitching on another gang is almost as bad" (young person, age 15)

Gang-affiliated Females

Unlike Govan, there are two female-only gangs operating in Southwark (specifically Peckham). Respondents did not disclose any further information about these gangs, however they did discuss the role of gang-affiliated girls. When asked why girls associate with gang members, the YOT worker maintained that they enjoy the danger and status that it involves.

"There are female-only gangs but there are obviously girls who are going out with boys that are in the gangs. A lot of them just like the kudos of going out with someone who is involved" (YOT worker)

Findings suggest that girls will be expected to carry weapons and conceal / sell drugs. Those consulted were somewhat divided as to whether choice or coercion influences a girl's decision to engage in criminal activity. It was noted that girls are also victims of gang violence – committed either by rival gangs or by boys within their own gang. For example, participants stated that they were aware of girls being forced to perform sexual acts on gang members, and several maintained that they are aware of girls having been drugged and raped or gang-raped.

"We hear a lot of stories of sexual violence and group sex. We are talking about children whose first language is violence ... they can coerce and intimidate people, I don't think it's all negotiated. There will be drinking and drugs involved. Kids as young as 13 are taken down to hotels by 'Olders'" (Child, Family and Community Professional)

"Girls can do all sorts of things. Girls fuck around, number one. Girls hold stuff as well. Sometimes girls are used to go away and sell drugs for them. Loads of stuff" (young person, aged 11)

"A lot of the girls are used to conceal weapons and to hold weapons purely because they naively think that there might be less of a chance that they are going to be stopped which may be the case on some occasions but not very often. Girls are manipulated into that" (YOT worker)

"They give blow jobs to all the boys. Sometimes they're forced" (young person, age 15)

"There is also sexual exploitation that goes on within the gang where girls can be asked to perform all kinds of terrible acts" (YOT worker)

Respondents also noted that gang-affiliated females lure rival gang-members to a particular location so that their gang can attack them. Moreover, one young person maintained that girls will engage in sexual acts with rival gangs members in order to steal their money.

Motivation

Table 2 details the reasons provided by respondents as to why children and young people join gangs.

Table 2: Reasons why children and young people join gangs

Motive	Quote
Glamour	<i>"They make it look like gang life is good. They show you drugs, cars, girls. For a young person that's what you think you need isn't it? You want to get into that kind of life" (young person, age 11)</i>
Competition	<i>"... there's the general competitiveness of kids wanting to be popular. If you are not great at your school work you can compete using a peer hierarchy instead" (Child, Family and Community Professional)</i>
Boredom	<i>"They've nothing better to do, what do you expect people to do? No-one just sits at home, it's wrong yeah, but the youth clubs are boring" (young person, age 14)</i> <i>"It's just being on the street. It's the people you know, you live in the area. It's the company that you pick. It's not following, it's something to do" (young person, age 14)</i>
Fear	<i>"It's a survival strategy, if you live in an environment dominated by fear and intimidation, you are going to want to attach yourself to people who you believe are able to protect you. It could be seen as a failing of family or other institutions such as schools. The kids now don't believe that the adults in their lives can protect them more than the 'Olders' can" (Child, Family and Community Professional)</i>
Protection	<i>"A lot of the kids we see at school are very skilful manipulators of fear ... " (Child, Family and Community Professional)</i> <i>"Some young people probably feel coerced into joining a gang in the fact that it may keep them safe in their area. Which I do understand because if you are growing up in an area like this, it is a tough neighbourhood and it might be worth having someone watching out for you or have someone to get your back as they call it" (YOT worker)</i>
Money	<i>"Everyone's out to get money ... whatever's the best way to do it, it just gets done" (young person, age 15)</i>
Drugs	<i>"If you smoke [weed] everything starts up, because you get linked to all the different circles ..." (young person, age 15)</i>
Parenting Issues	<i>"... there could be a lack of good parenting at home ... a lot of these young people come from pretty sad family backgrounds where there is no positive male role model in the house. Sometimes parents can have mental health issues or other things going on. A young person is then going to be drawn towards the gang because the gang becomes their family because they don't want to spend any time at home ..." (YOT worker)</i>

Although all of the young people consulted denied that children are compelled to join gangs, one respondent did acknowledge that some young gang members feel such pride in being chosen to serve an 'Older' that they will do almost anything to please them. Respondents also noted that the rewards given to young people can be appealing. For example, in addition to small amounts of money, gang members are often paid with gifts such as jewellery or bikes.

"I would say the 'Olders' give them a name, and they just try to live up to that name" (young person, age 15)

"If the older person says 'yeah, you're my younger', he's gonna be excited, gonna tell all his friends. When he sees him, he's gonna show him too much respect, so basically, the older person's got him by his tongue" (young person, aged 15)

Communication

As briefly referred to above, modern technology is a key instrument within the gang's arsenal. Mobile phones are used to communicate, to share footage of initiation ceremonies and for bullying. For example, a gang member may be recorded committing an offence so that they can later be blackmailed into committing further crimes. Respondents reported that fights are often arranged, and insults are constantly traded, using social networking websites such as Facebook. Some gangs produce videos that they upload onto YouTube in which they rap about their rivals – the consequence of which is that aggression and tension never subside.

"News travels quick. If I stabbed you now, the whole of people would be talking about it. Like when that boy died, that was that, I knew then. The broadcast went out around everyone's Blackberry – everybody knew he died within two minutes" (young person, age 11)

"The YouTube thing is massive down here. Especially when it is being used to 'dis' other gangs. It is like a virtual war going on within YouTube ... Brixton and Peckham are just constantly bombarding each other with online insult" (YOT worker)

"There is also Facebook which can be directly linked to several murders just through insults which have been posted on Facebook" (YOT worker)

Notably, the YOT worker reported that their team and the police regard YouTube as a useful source of information about gang activity in Southwark. However, one young person did disclose that gangs are cautious about what they upload as they are aware that the police may be seeking to identify them.

"... I spend a lot of my time looking at YouTube so I can see what is going on. I know who is talking to who, who is dissing who. I know about any kind of beef going on around here and I can usually figure it out pretty good by logging onto YouTube and doing a few searches. Just as easily as I can, the police can too. The police have a massive library from YouTube and they use it to identify young people ..." (YOT worker)

Community Perceptions

When asked how gangs within Southwark are perceived by their local communities, the young people consulted stated that some adults feel concerned and intimidated by 'groups of kids hanging around'. One young person stated that adults remain indoors at night. In response to a question about if it would be possible for an adult to approach a gang member on the street, two young people provided the following advice:

"When you approach them try being really calm. And you have to really convince them that you're not working with the police. And it's all confidentiality and you're not involved with the police ... and just be calm, and be open to them" (young person, age 11)

"Nothing will happen to you, but just don't confront anybody, or they will kick off. The stupidest things end up happening" (young person, age 14)

Having worked closely with many parents of gang-affiliated young people, the YOT worker reported that whilst adults are fearful of gang activity, they often do not comprehend the complexity and severity of its nature.

"I think a lot of them [adults] just see them as being a bunch of young scallywags hanging out together on bikes ... I mean they are aware of the drug dealing and the murder but I don't know if people put two and two together and realise that there must be some 'coke dog' somewhere that is making a lot of money out of this" (YOT worker)

"I do a lot of parenting work where we go and talk to parents of children who make it into the court system and sometimes I am quite shocked when I talk to them and they can't comprehend what I am telling them about what is going on in the community ... I think that the communities down here are to some degree being held to ransom by these young people as well just through intimidation and fear and them hanging around street corners at night" (YOT worker)

5.2. Govan (Glasgow)

Background

In December 2010 two Qa researchers visited Glasgow to observe street work undertaken by John Hendry and Michelle McQueer; two young people's workers employed by Youth Point Glasgow. The main area observed was Govan. The research was undertaken on a Friday evening between 4pm and 8pm. Throughout the observation period researchers discussed gang activity with the workers whilst observing activity taking place.

Following this initial visit, a Qa researcher returned to Govan in January 2011 to conduct interviews with gang members, non-gang affiliated young people and a parent whose children have taken very different routes – one towards and the other away from gang culture.

A semi-structured interview was also undertaken in November 2010 with Robert Stephenson – a representative from the Glasgow Community Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV).

Gang Characteristics

Gang activity in the Govan area is historical. Active gang membership escalated in the 1970s with rising unemployment due to the closure of many ship building yards. Discussions with workers revealed that 'Govan Team' is one of the oldest and largest gangs with over 100 years of history and 'hundreds' of members.

Many of those who are gang-affiliated may not see themselves as being part of a specific gang. Rather, they identify with a particular location and associate with different groups of young people within this geographic 'territory'.

"Simply by living in that area and socialising in that area you cannot miss the gang. They exist from 20 members to 100 members, depending on how many young people there are in that community. They will gravitate towards it ... When you are from a territory you are assumed that you are a member of the gang. Some of these boys will say that they don't necessarily see themselves as part of the gang" (CIRV worker)

"It's entirely territorial ... generally they are not permitted to cross into other territories" (CIRV worker)

As such, it is unusual to see the emergence of new gangs in Govan. However, workers maintained that an influx of economic migrants (namely those from Somalia and Eastern Europe) could potentially cause future gang rivalry.

Findings suggest that gangs in Govan are much less hierarchical than those operating in other areas of the country.

"It's a very loose thing, there's no real membership, no hierarchy, no induction ceremony ... they don't have a leader" (CIRV worker)

Gang-affiliated Females

Respondents reported that the majority of gang members in Govan are male. With regards to female participation, those consulted maintained that many girls who engage in gang activity tend to do so to please their boyfriends. Females may carry weapons for their boyfriends, however manipulation and exploitation are rare. Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol is a habitual activity for gang-affiliated females. However they are much less likely to be involved in violent and criminal behaviour as a consequence than gang-affiliated males (see below).

Younger Gang Members

Throughout this study contradictory opinions were forwarded concerning whether gang members in Glasgow, and in particular Govan, were getting younger. Many participants recognised that those involved in gang activity could be as young as 10 years old, yet several maintained that the extent of their involvement is often exaggerated and misconstrued.

“Those who we deem to be at such a risk that they need our assistance to come out of that violent gang lifestyle start at around 13. But of course there are people aged 8, 9, and 10 running around in groups as well and if someone wants to label them as being in a gang, then they can do that. But, traditionally in Glasgow street gang members have gone from 13 or 14 up to their late teens. They grow out of it to be perfectly honest” (CIRV worker)

“If something isn’t done now, kids will end up killing each other ... they start fighting with their pals, then somebody gets killed, over something stupid like some boy has a hat. It [getting involved with gangs] starts at a very young age, during primary school. They feel they need to be in a gang, or they’ll be picked on by other gangs. We’re just a tiny bit behind the Americans” (Parent)

Generally, respondents agreed that those under the age of 13 years old tend to be ‘in training’ for future gang activity – they watch and listen to older gang members and seek to mirror behaviour. When asked how old young people are when they leave the gang, participants noted that most disengage with gang activity in their late teens / early twenties.

Recruitment

Gang ‘recruitment’ primarily occurs as a response to peer pressure and seeking ‘protection’ from rival gangs. Workers also stated that young people can be ‘born into’ gangs - indeed, inter-generational gang membership appears to be common. Notably however, gang-affiliation in Govan does not appear to be a result of overt coercion. Membership is fluid, some young people will be continuously dedicated to their gang whilst others may leave and then re-join at a later date. This choice to be ‘in or out’ makes gang activity in Govan different from the other areas studied as part of this research.

“A lot of the boys will say it’s just for support, it’s a bunch of friends ... if there was compulsion it would be through peer pressure rather than gang leadership” (CIRV worker)

“[If you’re in a gang] you’re protected, you can fight off other gangs. If you leave that gang, you’re not protected” (young person, age 15)

Respondents noted that young people may receive little attention from their parents / carers and that this often motivates young people to seek support and security from a substitute family.

“There isn’t a lot of parents who get involved” (Parent)

Gang Activity

Given the territorial nature of gang activity in Govan, leaving their area can be extremely hazardous for some young people. The consequence of this is that many young people rarely leave their neighbourhood and remain reluctant to embrace education and employment opportunities outside of their territory:

“Many of them, if they were offered a job in another territory they wouldn’t take it. ... the threat is very, very real, at any time of day. Our clients will say that they are okay walking over the territory at 7 or 8 o’clock in the morning. It’s the return journey that’s the problem. Actually, it’s not imagined, it’s very real, if they are recognised they will be jumped” (CIRV worker)

It was estimated by respondents that approximately six main gangs operate within a three mile radius of Govan. Groups of young people (both male and female) ‘hang around’ in semi-visible locations within their own territory. Participants reported that Govan gangs do not have street ‘rules’ or ‘codes’. Rather, they are simply expected to respect one another.

“We just hang around the streets” (young female, gang member)

“They just respect one another. Respect is a major issue. In terms of rules or purpose they are not like that, they are more chaotic” (CIRV worker)

Criminal Activity

Although gang members in Govan do engage in criminal behaviour, those consulted maintained that such activity is generally stimulated by alcohol consumption. Young people buy alcohol (for example, Buckfast or cider) from local off-licences that are continually opening and closing, using money which is given to them by their parents / carers. Intoxication often leads to petty crime. However workers did reveal that gang members have recently set fire to a local community centre and regularly ‘smash up’ vehicles. Notably, such vandalism was not undertaken in a rival gangs territory, rather it was committed within the gang’s own local area.

Violence

Participants felt that violent behaviour was increasing in Glasgow, partly because gang members receive more respect for inflicting violence. It was also felt that carrying weapons (predominantly knives) was resulting in more serious violent behaviour which was of a random rather than organised nature. Workers expressed concerns that ‘tagging’ rival gang members is becoming a widespread phenomenon.

“Generally, in Glasgow, it’s tagging as they call it. It’s very rare the gangs intentionally go out to kill someone. Actually, homicide is fairly rare, but serious assault is very common. The tag that they will attach is normally a slice to their cheek or to their torso or something. The Glasgow surgeons in the hospitals are leading the way in knife trauma treatment, surgeons come from all

over the world to learn here, it's such a common method of inflicting injury on a gang member from another area" (CIRV worker)

"Being a man is carrying a knife and stabbing someone, and proving yourself to your group. This is deeply embedded in Glasgow culture" (CIRV worker)

"You will get fighting within the gang. Like any group of young guys who are alcohol-fuelled ... its alcohol-fuelled nonsense. Because knife carrying is so common it unfortunately gets out of hand. They will resort to using the weapons they have on them" (CIRV worker)

"The difference now is the violence - kids are using their energy in the wrong way. There are kids fighting each other on the same football pitches where they played football together when they were younger, but they reach a certain age, and everything else goes out the window, they just want to be in a gang" (Parent)

Whilst spontaneous violence was described as 'the norm', workers did acknowledge that young people in Govan can mobilise quickly if they are threatened, for example if an opposing gang is approaching and threatening their perimeter. Communication is undertaken by word of mouth and mobile phones (calls and texting). Communication through social media websites such as Facebook appeared to be less common in Govan compared to Southwark.

Respondents felt that more serious incidents of violence against the person are often a consequence of young people 'falling through the net' and not getting the support they need. For example one worker stated:

"We are dealing with those whose community reality is that they are engaging in day to day violence just because the police haven't caught them or because they haven't been through the bureaucratic system to get an offender badge. It doesn't mean that they are not at risk of violence or at risk of committing violence" (CIRV worker)

In addition, and as with other areas of the country, participants stated that violence is often unreported or inaccurately reported to the police.

"...I think there's anything up to seventy percent of street gang violence is reported to the police. It's rare for them to tell us who committed it. It's when we have a variety of other witnesses that we are successful in prosecution as its very much part of that respect thing that you don't grass on anybody, it's about sorting things out for themselves. Those who do report to the police are the tip of the iceberg" (CIRV worker)

Impact

Being a part of a gang – or simply living in a deprived area – means that young people have additional barriers to overcome in relation to their educational attainment. Not attending school is common when young people reach 13 years old and young people who are members of rival gangs do, on occasions, fight during school hours.

"Most of our clients don't really go to school, or certainly not regularly ... they will reach 13 or 14 and will give up on that" (CIRV worker)

“They either don’t go, or will fight during school time, it’s not too common. We have put Campus Cops into some of the schools. They don’t deal with [criminal activity], but they will mediate some of the conflict that is arising within the schools” (CIRV worker)

School is also used as an opportunity to organise fights off school premises:

“If they are at school they will use it as a point at which to arrange meets late at night. They will say ‘we’ll meet at the wasteground on Friday night, and we will fight’. It’s usually either at school or on Facebook where they arrange to fight” (CIRV worker)

5.3. Barton Moss Secure Care Centre (Manchester)

Background

In December 2010, a Qa researcher visited Barton Moss Secure Care Centre in Manchester to interview two Programme Workers and to conduct a discussion group with seven young offenders. Please note that because recording equipment is prohibited within the Centre, and in the interests of accuracy, fewer verbatim quotes are presented below.

Barton Moss Secure Care Centre

Barton Moss Secure Care Centre is a 20-bed facility that accommodates young men aged 12 - 14 years (or up to 17 years if assessed as vulnerable) who have committed offences ranging from anti-social behaviour to robbery and sexual assault. Although the geographic origins of the young men vary, those being housed are predominantly from the North West of England.

The regime within the Centre is constructive and education-focused. The young men engage in lessons from 9.25am - 3.35pm Monday to Friday. Group work, 'full and purposeful' sessions and external visits are also undertaken on weekdays. These activities are designed to inform young people about a plethora of issues including the dangers of drugs, alcohol and knife crime. On a Saturday an enrichment programme is delivered at the Centre which involves improving the young men's cooking, football and vocational skills (e.g. construction). On Sunday the young men pursue leisure activities such as sports or crafts.

Gang Activity

The Programme Workers reported that, although they have engaged with gang-affiliated offenders in the past, they mainly undertake preventative work with those on the fringes of gang-activity. Whilst cautious about identifying any solid trends in relation to the demographic profiles of gang members, the Programme Workers noted that those living in deprived areas and 'broken homes' are likely to be vulnerable to gang recruitment, as are those who have witnessed domestic violence or substance abuse. Echoing the findings from Govan, the Programme Workers also noted that a large proportion of gang members will have little knowledge of the 'world' outside of their local neighbourhood.

A pairwise activity was undertaken with seven young offenders to explore the reasons why they believe children and young people join gangs. The outcome of this exercise is illustrated in Figure 1. Participants maintained that 'because your mates are doing it' and 'protection for both you and your family' are the two primary causes of gang-affiliation. Reputation, money (to buy drugs) and family pressure were also identified as 'pull-factors'.

The young people reported that gang members will identify with – and defend – a defined territory (e.g. a postcode or a group of postcodes). They argued that such defence involves inflicting violence and / or robbing rival gang members who enter their area. Both the young offenders and the Programme Workers acknowledged that gang members will often be under the influence of alcohol or cannabis whilst 'on the street'.

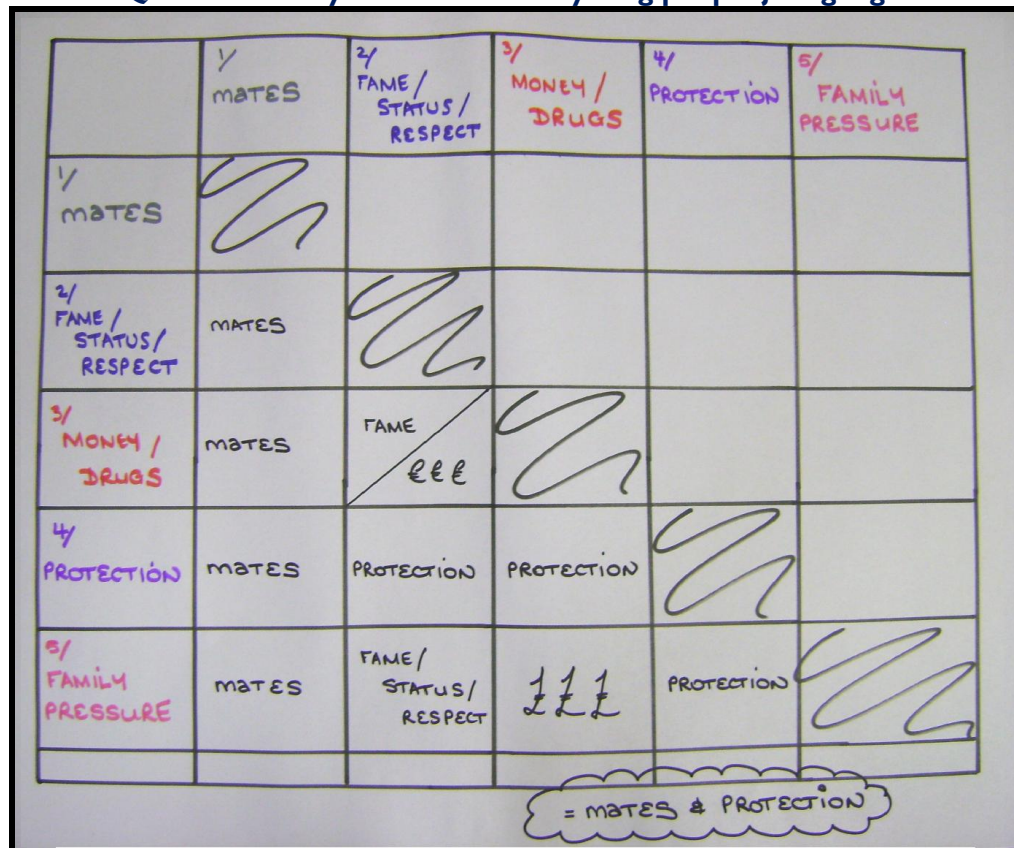
Discussion group participants stated that the role of younger gang members aged 10 - 14 years will involve committing petty crimes and acting as 'runners' – i.e. stashing, transporting and selling

drugs. Nevertheless, it was understood that some younger members will engage in violence to increase their status within the gang. When asked what types of weapons – if any – young people may carry, participants maintained that the following weapons could be borrowed from a friend or an older relative:

- Knife
- Gun
- Knuckle duster
- Machete
- Hammer
- Crowbar
- Axe
- Samurai sword

Although the young offenders agreed that female street gangs are rare, they were somewhat divided about the extent to which the girlfriends of gang-affiliated males are involved in negative behaviour. Indeed, several participants maintained that girlfriends just ‘hang around’ with their boyfriends and remain on the periphery of dangerous or illegal gang-activity. By contrast, others argued that ‘girls are worse than the boys’ as they behave in a highly aggressive manner and often exacerbate the conflict between rival gangs. One young offender who operated on the fringes of gang activity reported that if a female seeks to end her relationship with a gang-affiliated male, she will be ‘shamed’ on social networking sites such as Facebook or Bebo and any subsequent partners will be threatened or assaulted.

Figure 1: Pairwise Activity
Question – ‘why do children and young people join gangs?’



Education Programmes

In order to support those at risk of joining gangs, the Centre invites the Manchester Multi Agency Gangs Service (MMAGS) to visit the Centre on a twice yearly basis. As part of these visits, two ex-gang members detail their experiences and act as mentors (frequently on a one-to-one basis) with those identified as susceptible to gang involvement.

The Programme Workers stressed that offenders who have witnessed crimes committed by street gangs are often extremely reluctant to discuss such incidents. They noted that young men may:

- a) seek to distance themselves from painful memories (such as seeing their friends being assaulted or killed)
- b) refuse to disclose even basic information about their experiences as they fear that they will be blamed for 'grassing' on key gang members.

As a consequence, the Centre has purchased and is currently delivering the 'Streetwise'² education programme to selected individuals as recommended by the Youth Justice Board. Presented in an attractive glossy folder, this programme seeks to explore the concept of gang culture and aims to develop skills in conflict resolution and self-control. The Programme Workers felt that Streetwise was a useful toolkit that enabled them to approach the topic of street gangs in an accessible and non-confrontational manner. However, in acknowledging that 'Streetwise' was the Centre's only gang-related resource, the Programme Workers advocated the dissemination of further educational materials that could be harnessed by practitioners working with vulnerable young people.

Resettlement

Once offenders are released they often return to the community that they grew up in. The Programme Workers noted that each young person will be visited by a Resettlement Worker once or twice and those who are entitled to education will receive one hour of teaching per day. Monitoring of the young person will also be undertaken by the Youth Offending Team (YOT). However, given that frontline practitioners located within the YOT are often regarded by young people as those who 'locked them up in the first place', such relationships are unlikely to be founded on trust or respect. Thus, a young person's transition back into society is often a turbulent and rather isolated journey.

The Programme Workers consulted reported that due to a lack of positive role models and appropriate family support, many young people resort to socialising with those they associated with before they were sentenced. The outcome of this situation is that progress made whilst in the Centre is abandoned as the young person adopts an unhealthy and dangerous lifestyle.

"The good things they do in here are not mirrored in society" (Programme Worker, Barton Moss Secure Care Centre).

² <http://www.streetwiseeducation.co.uk>

6. Intervention strategies

All of those consulted were asked to recommend intervention strategies that could a) be adopted to deter children and young people from joining gangs, and b) provide support for those who would like to leave a gang.

Young People

Significantly, the young people consulted were extremely sceptical about the prospect of helping those who are gang-affiliated. Many stated that young people would have little incentive not to join a gang or leave their gang as they thrive on the excitement and the increased street credibility that membership entails. They also stressed that pressure from peers / siblings plus the threat of violence act as motivational obstructions.

The Southwark participants argued that in order to disengage from gang activity, a young person would have only two options; be killed or leave the country. One young person rejected the option of seeking police protection as they maintained that a gang member was more likely to be arrested than assisted. Moreover, a different participant discarded the prospect of transferring schools as they felt that this would jeopardise a young person's education.

"If you're in a gang, I'd say you're in a gang for your whole life ... you'd probably need to get a plastic surgeon to leave a gang, there's no way of hiding yourself ..." (young person, age 15, Southwark)

"It's easier to become involved with a gang than get out of it" (young person, age 14, Southwark)

"I've never heard of anyone who's left a gang, 'cos people, most people try and get into gangs. I wouldn't say they'd be happy to get out of it" (young person, age 15, Southwark)

The young offenders being held at Barton Moss Secure Care Centre were also equally as cynical, with several stating that an individual would be shot or stabbed if they attempted to exit their gang.

"If you tried to leave the gang you would be turned on and stabbed" (young person, Barton Moss Secure Care Centre)

"You can't get out, no one will help you, you are on your own" (young person, Barton Moss Secure Care Centre)

Nevertheless, discussion group participants did engage in an activity designed to stimulate ideas about ways in which young people could be helped to leave gangs. The outcome of this exercise is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Spider Activity
Question – ‘how can young people be helped to leave gangs?’



Participants identified a number of key barriers to gang departure and forwarded a series of suggestions as to how these barriers could be overcome.

Barriers	Suggested Interventions
Fear Protection from violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the number of police officers on patrol. - Help young people to leave the area and provide them with temporary accommodation or place them into social care. - Encourage young people to report incidents to the police so that gang members can be arrested and sentenced. - Increase awareness of the witness protection program.
The thrill of carrying and using weapons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide positive activities within communities (e.g. boxing or music sessions). - Teach young people to handle conflict without resorting to using weapons.
Street Credibility Money Drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve the educational attainment of those in deprived areas so that they can enter an apprenticeship / employment and thus earn money to buy a house, car and nice clothes. - Decrease dependency on drugs via rehabilitation programs.

Professionals

The professionals consulted were somewhat more optimistic about the possibility of undertaking preventative and remedial work in relation to gang membership. Participants forwarded a number of recommendations as to how gang-affiliation and its associated violence could be reduced. These recommendations are detailed below.

Targeted Programs / Positive Activities

Participants suggested behavioural change programs that are designed to support those who are gang-affiliated or who are operating on the periphery of gang activity have proven to be effective in their areas. Such programs have involved engaging young people in positive activities, providing them with guidance and opportunities with regards to education / careers and offering counselling if appropriate. A key element of such programs entails 'mixing' young people from rival gangs, with the intention of allowing them to see that they share more similarities than differences.

"We put them in full-time courses and sports activities. It's never on a gang by gang basis. We always mix gangs who fight with each other. On the Monday we put them in a room together and it's quite an experience I tell you. But by the end of the four weeks they have formed friendships with each other" (CIRV worker)

"Some of the boys have formed football teams with each other" (Young People's Worker, Glasgow)

It was acknowledged that attracting young people to such programs can be an extremely difficult task. However, professionals did report that if a program is introduced to a young person by somebody that they trust – such as a youth worker or a fellow gang member – attendance on the programs can be surprisingly high.

Role Models / Broadening Horizons

The professionals consulted maintained that alienation from society, the effects of unemployment and lack of positive role models are significant drivers in relation to gang endurance. As such, they recommended recruiting ex-gang members or ex-offenders to work as mentors to guide young people towards more constructive lifestyles. Crucial to the success of this intervention would be employing those who a) can relate to the experiences of the young person, and, b) are committed to building relationships founded on respect and honesty. Moreover, given the chaotic lifestyles and inadequate parenting of many of those involved in gang activity, it was felt that mentors must be trained to recognise the importance of being a consistent and dependable adult in a young person's life. Participants suggested that the role of mentors should not only involve steering the young person towards education, training or employment, but should also involve subtly broadening their horizons by taking them out of their local area to visit other parts of their city / the country.

"There's no doubt that many of them are absolutely desperate to get a job and become part of the society that you and I recognise, but they are just so intimidated by it. I call it the 'Starbucks World' - they've probably never even had coffee. That world is a million miles away from them ... a lot of them aspire, as they put it, to be normal. They see normality on the TV and in the modern media, it surrounds them, but they feel completely powerless to become a part of it" (CIRV worker)

Education

Educating young people about the dangers and consequences of gang-association was also a key suggestion forwarded by professionals. Participants recommended inviting specialist organisations into schools, youth clubs, and young offender's institutions to inform young people about the immediate and long-term effects of gang-affiliation in a manner that is age-appropriate, yet ultimately candid. Specialist advice regarding how to identify possible signs of gang involvement was also deemed to be essential for those working with children in deprived areas.

Police Presence / Enforcement

Participants were divided as to whether increased police presence could have an impact on gang membership. On-street young people's workers in Govan reported that young people do fear the police and that violence is curtailed when police patrol the district. By contrast, a CIRV representative argued that traditional enforcement is ineffective as the police simply react to outbursts of violence as opposed to addressing the psychology of 'gang culture'.

"The gang members say 'you can lock us up as often as you can but you are only locking us up for a fraction of the crimes we've been involved in. We don't really change, we don't stop fighting because the police are around'" (CIRV worker)

The YOT worker in Southwark also maintained that if young people approach the police with information or evidence, they are likely to be identified, 'hunted down' and attacked by gang members. They also stated that in some instances the only way to protect a young person from gang violence is to relocate them to a different area, along with their family if necessary.

"I can think of a case recently down here where somebody gave evidence against their former gang mates and wound up dead" (YOT worker)

"Realistically, the only way to protect young people if they are at risk is sadly to move them from the area" (YOT worker)