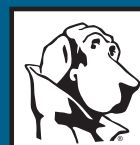


Girls and Gangs



NATIONAL
CRIME
PREVENTION
COUNCIL



The National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) is a private, nonprofit tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization whose primary mission is to be the nation's leader in helping people keep themselves, their families, and their communities safe from crime. NCPC's strategic plan for 2007 through 2011 is centered on four goals: protect children and youth; partner with government and law enforcement to prevent crime; promote crime prevention and personal safety basics; and respond to emerging crime trends. NCPC publishes books, kits of camera-ready program materials, posters, and informational and policy reports on a variety of crime prevention and community-building subjects. NCPC offers training, technical assistance, and a national focus for crime prevention: it acts as secretariat for the Crime Prevention Coalition of America, more than 400 national, federal, state, and local organizations representing thousands of constituents who are committed to preventing crime. NCPC also sponsors the National Crime Prevention Association, an individual membership association to promote resources and career development to crime prevention practitioners. It hosts two websites: www.ncpc.org for adults and www.mcgruff.org for children. It operates demonstration programs in schools, neighborhoods, and entire jurisdictions and takes a major leadership role in youth crime prevention and youth service. NCPC manages the McGruff® "Take A Bite Out Of Crime®" public service advertising campaign. NCPC is funded through a variety of government agencies, corporate and private foundations, and donations from private individuals.



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National Crime Prevention Council
2001 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 901
Arlington, VA 22202
202-466-6272
www.ncpc.org

Overview

Though gangs are primarily male dominated, research indicates that female gang membership is on the rise. In 2006, the National Youth Gang Center stated that “youth gang membership among girls has been more widely reported by law enforcement than in the past.” In May of 2008, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) found that in high risk and high crime neighborhoods 29.4% of girls and 32.4% of boys claimed gang membership when self definition was used as a measure.

While females have previously been dismissed and misrepresented in crime statistics, new evidence is proving that female gang membership is on the rise. According to the National Youth Gang Survey, the number of active gang members in the United States is approximately 800,000. Of this, an estimated 6 percent, or 50,000 members, are female. In Washington, D.C. alone, Bridget T. Miller, coordinator of the District’s Youth Gang Task force says that there are more than 270 girl gangs and crews that operate in the District (“No more sugar and spice: Girl gangs on the rise in

D.C.”) Furthermore, in other cities such as Minneapolis, the police estimate that there are 150 to 200 girls who claim to be in a gang or clique. (“Alisha Neeley’s death leads to girl gang truce.”)

Women who are involved in gangs can occupy a number of roles, including

- Perpetrators: participating in gang violence alongside male gang members
- Victims: partners, sisters and mothers can be targeted by gangs. For example, if a debt is owed to a gang, women who are associated with the debtor may be targeted to pressure the debtor to pay up. Women associated with rival gangs can also be targeted with violence (including rape)
- Associates: partners, sisters and mothers might be involved with hiding drugs and weapons, washing blood-covered clothing, etc. Even where they have no formal involvement, partners can serve to ‘glamorize’ gang members, and to put pressure on them to provide the material wealth associated with criminal behavior.¹

¹ Statutory Guidance: Injunctions to Prevent Gang-Related Violence. <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/other/9780108509599/9780108509599.pdf>

Female gang members are becoming replicas of their male counterparts. They perform a variety of criminal acts, including fighting with dangerous weapons (e.g., knives and guns). They also sell drugs and commit violent crimes against other rival gang members and citizens. Although the number of all-female gangs is fairly low due to high pregnancy rates among female gang members, legitimate membership in traditional male gangs is on the rise.

Reasons Why Girls May Join Gangs

- High rates of physical and sexual abuse
- Self affirmation
- Sense of power
- Have family members, friends, or boyfriends that are involved with the gang
- Protection
- Aggressive nature and prone to fighting
- Chronic delinquent and criminal experiences or records

- Sense of belonging
- Money and respect
- Have needs that have been neglected or unmet
- Desire for a family-structured environment
- Forced by local gang members to join

OJJDP's Girls Study Group examined the available literature on girls and identified factors that may predict delinquency. Many of these factors apply equally to both boys and girls; others seem particularly influential for girls. Those identified as equally influential for both sexes included family dynamics, involvement in school, the level of neighborhood disadvantage, and the availability of community-based programs. Factors that seem more to affect girls' delinquent behaviors include early puberty (which can lead to increased conflict with parents and associations with older boys or men), sexual abuse or maltreatment, depression and anxiety, and romantic partners.²

The Reality of Girl Gangs

Although female gang members come from all socio-economic and racial backgrounds, research has shown that the majority of girls that join gangs come from abusive backgrounds or broken homes. Many of these girls have parents in jail or only one parent present in the home. Many girls use the gang as a replacement family and often find love and support within the gang.

Many people believe that a female's role in a gang is limited to the nonviolent portion of the criminal activities of the gang. This is often not true. Along with taking part in the nonviolent aspects of gang activity, they participate in the same criminal acts as their male counterparts. According to an online survey, 78 percent of female members reported being involved in gang fights, 65 percent reported carrying a weapon, and 38 percent reported attacking someone with a weapon. ("Gangs - Bullying" Health Information for Girls, 2009)

Girls who are interested in joining a gang usually have to go through an initiation process, which varies from gang to gang. While there are a variety of ways in which a gang member is initiated into a gang, females who are truly interested in joining a gang will do anything in order to be initiated, even if it is a violent or a criminal act. They will participate in and commit brutal

Gang violence in America is not a sudden problem. It has been a part of urban life for years, offering an aggressive definition and identity to those seeking a place to belong in the chaos of large metropolitan areas.

—Dave Reichert, Congressman, Washington's 8th Congressional District

² Gender-Specific Programming - OJJDP Model Programs Guide. <http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/programTypesDescriptions.aspx?type=1,107>

Myth and Fact

Myth: Female gang members are just associates and girlfriends of male gang members.

Fact: Females today are legitimate gang members, not just associates and girlfriends.

Myth: Female gang members are tomboys, they dress in baggy clothing and oversized t-shirts, similar to male gang members.

Fact: This is a stereotype that is often given to girls who join gangs. While some may choose to dress like their male counterparts, others may wear dresses, skirts, and make up. There is no set dress code that identifies all female gang members.

Myth: Female gang members are not as violent as male gang members.

Fact: Female gang members are just as violent as their male counterparts. They have been known to commit crimes, such as robbery, assault, kidnapping, extortion, murder, drug trafficking, and prostitution.

Myth: Female gang membership should not be considered a threat to society.

Fact: Female gang members are often overlooked and underestimated by authorities, and they are just as much of a threat as male gang members.

Myth: Females do not participate in physical violence.

Fact: A small portion of females may participate in physical violence; however, females are the leaders in verbal and emotional violence, using name-calling, threats, and intimidation. Depending on the victim, this can be as hurtful and damaging as physical violence.

Myth: Females are dragged or forced into gangs.

Fact: That is not necessarily true. Females join gangs for many of the same reasons as men: protection and belonging. The females that are taken into gangs by males are those who are involved with males in the gang, either sexually through a romantic relationship, or by a family relation. In many instances, females form and join gangs to prove that they are "as tough as the boys."

Myth: Female gangs do not stay together as long as male gangs.

Fact: Because females are often viewed as emotional, open-minded, and nurturing, many believe it is difficult for female gang members to stay in a gang with males. However, in the initiative stage of gang membership, emotions, doubts, and worries are erased through a strategy of extreme desensitization, allowing females to stay in gangs as long as males.

Myth: Females must have sexual relations with all male gang members in order to join a gang.

Fact: This used to be a ritual many years ago when women did not have the confidence nor the power to do what they wanted when they joined a gang. However, many females today form their own gangs and have their own initiation rituals.

Myth: When females join gangs, gang life is the only life they have.

Fact: Females often live two different lives. Many females who are in gangs also have jobs, children, and a life outside of their gang activity. Even when they are in a gang with males, they are often sent out as spies to gather information and to plan for the next attack.

Myth: It is easier for females to break free from gangs.

Fact: Females may be treated differently when it comes to the activities of the gang and the level of hierarchy within the gang, but when it comes to leaving the gang, everyone faces the same difficulties, including punishment, for trying to leave the gang.

violent crimes to prove themselves, to be taken seriously, and to build a reputation among the other gang members. Female gang members have been known to commit such crimes as robbery, kidnapping, assault, and even murder.

The more familiar initiation process or ritual of the more popular gangs is getting “jumped in,” which is when you have to fight your way in to the gang by fighting several members at once. Other rituals include killing someone or getting “sexed in.” Getting sexed in is having group sex with male members of the gang. Although many believe that this is the most common way for girls to join gangs, girls that join this way are often not officially recognized as legitimate members. Females who decide to be initiated by getting sexed into a gang usually are shunned and not respected by both female and male members. Getting jumped in or killing someone gains the respect of fellow gang members. A former gang member states, “the more violent the crime a girl commits, the more she earns the respect of her gang, and ultimately that is the overall goal.”

While girls often join traditional male gangs, some develop all-girl gangs. These types of gangs have not been thoroughly researched, but they appear to be on the rise. Over a period of several days in May 2010 in Las Vegas, Nevada, female gang members burglarized and robbed several retail stores and injured sev-

eral sales clerks, including an 8-month pregnant woman. The females’ ages ranged from 15 to 21 years old. They were all part of the female gang Lady Maccz, which, according to Las Vegas Metro police, is just as organized as a male gang. They have their own gang color (pink), gang sign, and have even created monikers (www.8NewsNow.com, August 25, 2010).

Girls are beginning to feel powerful and no longer feel the need to stand in the shadows of their male counterparts.

Exit Strategies

It is important to note that for those seeking to sever gang ties or those helping someone to sever ties, there are several considerations to take into account:

- Anyone seeking to leave must sincerely want to leave—no one can force her to quit.
- Girls should seek help from a trusted adult or network of trusted adults such as social workers, school officials, law enforcement officers, religious leaders and nongang-affiliated family members, etc.
- No gang is an individual and, as

an organization, they have their own rules of conduct—one must clearly understand these rules when developing a strategy for a girl to exit the gang life or her life or well-being could be seriously jeopardized.

- A girl leaving must understand that her former enemies will still be enemies and that she will no longer have the protection of the gang.
- As the gang may be concerned about the girl’s ability to share gang intelligence, careful planning must take place so that the gang is not able to permanently “silence” her.
- The entire family of a female gang member must be committed to the exit strategy or they also may be in extreme danger when left behind.
- Once the decision is made to exit the gang, the former gang member cannot return to the gang neighborhood.
- If a former gang member does not move far away, there is always a chance she may run into gang members who will recognize her.

Although it may appear to a girl gang member that the gang provides her with protection, the reality is that when the exit is handled well, it is always safer to be out of a gang.³

If you do nothing, that just empowers the gangs.

—Curtis Sliwa, founder, Guardian Angels

³ Understanding the Culture of Youth Violence - Gang Prevention. [http://gangs.umd.edu/Downloads/Prevention/Gangs 101 - Understanding the Culture of Youth Violence.pdf](http://gangs.umd.edu/Downloads/Prevention/Gangs%20101%20-%20Understanding%20the%20Culture%20of%20Youth%20Violence.pdf)

Tips for Parents

As a parent, it may be difficult to believe that your daughter could be recruited or involved in gang life. It is important to remember that young girls join gangs for many different reasons. As a parent or guardian, educate yourself and your daughter about the dangers of gang life. Be sure to make your child aware of the short- and long-term effects that joining a gang can have on her life. In addition, parents should try to follow the below recommendations to minimize the chances of their daughters resorting to gang life:

- **Spend quality time with your daughter.** By spending time with and giving attention to your daughter, you will keep the lines of communication open between the two of you. This will make for an honest relationship.
- **Spot the warning signs early.** If you notice any of the following behaviors, your daughter may be involved with a gang. These signs include
 - Changes in your daughter's friends or spending time with people who are known gang members
 - Interest in wearing clothes of a particular color or refusing to wear clothes based on the color
 - Symbols drawn on your daughter's backpack, notebooks, or clothing. Roman numerals and other shapes are often used by gangs to communicate and identify themselves

Girls in the past were more likely to be auxiliary members of gangs through their boyfriends or brothers. Now they are increasingly independent, and their violence is escalating as they fight other girls with mace, padlocks, and knives.

—Mike Martin, Fourth Precinct Inspector in Minneapolis, Minnesota

- Secretiveness about her daily activities
 - Carrying a weapon, such as a firearm or pocket knife
 - Declining interest in school, family, and activities that your daughter used to enjoy
- **Get your daughter involved.** If your daughter is busy with extracurricular activities, chances are that she will not have the time or the desire to be involved in gang life. You should encourage her to play sports, volunteer with an organization that she may be interested in, get a part-time job, join clubs at school, take music lessons, take part in church or faith groups, or take up a hobby of interest.
 - **Be involved in your daughter's academic life.** Become involved in your daughter's school and show her that you care about her education. This will increase the likelihood that she will stay in school and be successful. You could volunteer at the school to chaperone functions and dances, be involved in the PTA (Parent Teacher Association), or assist the teacher in the classroom.
 - **Know your daughter's friends**

and her friends' parents. If you know who your daughter is socializing with and their parents, this can decrease the possibility of gang recruitment through socialization.

- **Know your daughter's love interest.** You should insist on meeting this person before you allow your daughter to spend time with him or her. Girls commonly join gangs because their love interest is in one.
- **Encourage your daughter and commend her.** Encourage your daughter and let her know that you support her. By commending your daughter in school, sports, and hobbies, you are showing that you care for her and are proud of her accomplishments.

Gang Prevention Resources for Parents

Having the essential information to educate yourself about why young women join gangs and identifying the signs that your daughter might be involved in or thinking of joining a gang will prepare you to protect your daughter from possible gang recruitment and involvement. Below are links to some available literature.

- Find Youth Info: www.findyouthinfo.gov

- Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.): www.great-online.org
- National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC): www.ncpc.org
- National Crime Prevention Council's Circle of Respect Initiative: www.circleofrespect.org
- National Gang Crime Research Center: www.ngcrc.com
- National Gang Center: www.nationalgangcenter.gov
- Parent Resource Guide: www.gangwar.com
- PBS Parent's Guide to Raising Girls: www.pbs.org/parents/raisinggirls
- Striving To Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere (STRYVE): www.safeyouth.org

Gang Prevention Resources for Girls

It is important that girls are taught at an early age about the dangers that gang culture presents. Education is the key in order to prevent gang involvement of any kind. There are several biographies available by ex-gang members that illustrate the life of a gang member. Parents and advisors should encourage girls to check them out.

Getting involved in sports, an organization, extracurricular activities, pursuing a hobby, or volunteering time may minimize a girl's risk and desire for gang involvement and increase the likelihood of graduation from high school. Young girls need

positive reinforcement and daily encouragement in order to increase their chances of success. When a young woman is surrounded by people who care for her and want to see her succeed, it helps build her self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence; the likelihood of becoming a gang member is greatly dimmed, and the chances for success are heightened. Below are a few programs to help young girls get involved.

- AmeriCorps and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA): www.americorps.gov/about/programs/vista.asp
- Boys and Girls Clubs of America: www.bgca.org
- Girl Scouts: www.girlscouts.org
- Girls Quest: www.girlsquest.org
- National Crime Prevention Council's children's website: www.mcgruff.org
- Peace Corps: www.peacecorps.gov
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health's Office for Women's Health's web site for girls: www.girlshealth.gov
- YMCA: www.ymca.net

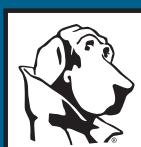
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Someone just ripped her away from us. She was right there in our grasp. She was on the right track and she was speaking up against this clique stuff. If that can happen to somebody like Alisha who was really on a mission, where did we all go wrong?

—Sarah Klouda, Teen Coordinator at Oak Park Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota



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2001 Jefferson Davis Highway
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Arlington, VA 22202
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www.ncpc.org