

A former member of the Mara Salvatrucha works in a handicraft workshop as part of a rehabilitation programme run by the government at the Sonsonate Penitentiary, El Salvador, April 2008. © Jose Cabezas/AFP/Getty Images



Getting Past Suppression

STREET GANG INTERVENTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Youth street gangs can be found in communities in the Americas, Europe, Asia, and beyond—along with the criminality and violence that, with important regional variations, tends to characterize gang life (GANG VIOLENCE). Solutions are neither obvious nor easy, however. While street gangs across the world share many features, they differ in important ways (Morales, 2004, pp. 395–96, 399–413). States and municipal authorities typically struggle to apply a growing, but uneven, knowledge base to their ‘gang problem’.

Interventions targeting both the gang and gang behaviour are now widespread. Many find their origin in efforts first promoted in the United States, but as youth street gangs emerge in new settings, earlier models are being modified. This chapter describes some of the driving theories and practices in the prevention, treatment, and suppression of youth gangs. It presents common examples of each type of programme, drawn from different regions, and, where it exists, evidence of programme effectiveness and efficiency.

The main conclusions of this chapter include:

- Youth gang members stand on a continuum of youth that also includes troublesome and delinquent youths who are at risk of joining gangs. The needs of these different populations are distinct and require separate interventions.
- Youth street gang interventions are more often guided by conventional wisdom than by evidence; many large-scale programmes continue despite few or no positive documented outcomes.
- Partly due to cost considerations, and notwithstanding their limitations, short-term suppressive interventions remain more common than preventive or treatment-oriented ones.
- Rigorous evaluations of youth street gang interventions are infrequent and typically measure self-reported change in behaviour and attitudes rather than levels of gang membership or violence.
- A wide range of factors across many domains contributes to youth gang membership and activity; no intervention focusing on one specific factor is likely to show significant overall impacts.
- Interventions that combine suppression with prevention and treatment, are long-term, involve the community, and are tailored to specific contexts (cultural, socio-economic, developmental, gender) are the most promising.

This chapter is composed of five main sections. The first describes the approaches to youth gang interventions presented in the chapter and some important contextual factors for the study of youth gangs. A section on prevention strategies follows, covering both youth-oriented approaches that target individuals at risk for gang affiliation and environment-oriented strategies that focus on group processes and collective and communal change. Treatment-oriented programmes are reviewed in the next section, which distinguishes between youth-oriented and environment-oriented approaches. The penultimate section highlights suppression strategies, including coercive and alternative approaches. The chapter conclusion reviews the main findings and notes areas where further research is needed.

ANALYTIC CONSIDERATIONS

Three approaches: prevention, intervention, and suppression

Historically, in the domain of the criminology and criminal justice community, the study of youth street gangs has expanded significantly in recent years. In part due to the growth of public health-based efforts to address social problems—especially armed violence—youth street gangs are now increasingly studied in terms of risk factors (Sanders and Lankenau, 2006). The race, socio-economic level, employment status, gender, substance abuse, and school performance of gang members, among many other factors, has taken a much more prominent place in efforts to understand and address gangs. Latter sections of this chapter explore the extent to which interventions have correspondingly applied this new wealth of information and analysis.

In the language of criminology, youth gang planning and policies that aim to improve public safety are classified broadly into prevention, intervention, and suppression approaches (Spergel, 1995, pp. 171–296; Klein and Maxson, 2006, pp. 246–63). In this chapter, ‘treatment’ is substituted for ‘intervention’, which is used here in its wider sense as any measure designed to control or reduce the presence of youth gangs. *Prevention* efforts aim at reducing the risk that vulnerable youths will join gangs and increasing the general youth population’s resistance to gang membership. *Treatment* emphasizes changing the attitudes and behaviour of youths already affiliated with gangs and the social conditions and processes that support youth gang organization. Youth gang *suppression* involves activities used to punish, pressure, or divert gangs and their members in order to reduce their anti-social behaviour. Some initiatives may combine two or more of these types of approaches in a broader strategy.

Gang intervention proposals are highly politicized.

A hallmark of the public health approach that has influenced the study of youth gangs is a preference for scientific evidence in the design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions. ‘Evidence’ here includes not only the existing research base but also monitoring of violence trends (health surveillance), locations of violent incidents, weapons use, and evaluations of relevant laws, among other data sources. Nevertheless, in many contexts youth gang intervention proposals—such as the issue of civilian access to firearms—are highly politicized and other factors often override the evidence base.

Attention to the relationships between individuals and community environments, the interplay of foreground and background factors, and the ecological model are also distinctive features of current approaches informed by the public health model (Valdez and Kaplan, 2007; WHO, 1996). The ecological model places importance on the social environment, the modification of group behaviour, and individual change (Klein and Maxson, 2006, pp. 209–27).

Social, political, and cultural dimensions

While there are broad commonalities between youth gangs, they can also diverge in their organization, reach, goals, intensity of the violence employed, economic activity, and hierarchy (OVERVIEW). Ideally, these differences should influence intervention planning. For example, Salvadoran youth gangs have developed their characteristic use of violence due to the specific socio-political background of civil war and circular migration. The civil war provided young Salvadoran gang members the experience of widespread violent conflict, combat at close quarters, and familiarity with a variety of weapons of war. Settling in disadvantaged Latino neighbourhoods in the United States, they found role models for acculturation into society in the existing Mexican-American gangs (Menjívar, 2000, p. 148). But the socio-political factors that shaped their experience were different from those of their Mexican-American counterparts, though they resided in the same neighbourhoods. Traditional Mexican-American *barrio* (neighbourhood)

youth gangs, in existence for generations, have developed distinctive characteristics that are now deeply rooted in their communities (Klein and Maxson, 2006, pp. 176–77).¹

Culture as well as community play a critical role in the lives of gang members. Some aspects of gang culture are now global. US-derived ‘gangsta rap’ culture has become a reference in many regions, fitting well with the identity that the gang offers youths (Hagedorn, 2008, pp. 85–91). Local cultures often interact with the globalized gangsta culture to create a complex system of meanings, with each society generating specific gang cultures and intervention ‘styles’. Far East Asian gangs and interventions typically ritualize conformity to strict norms and values. US gangs and interventions reflect the individualism of the wider society, while European ones appear influenced by the welfare state (Klein and Maxson, 2006, p. 256; Carlsson and Decker, 2005, pp. 262–63).

Gender dynamics can also play an important role. Youth gangs are predominantly male and interventions are likely to assume a male target group (GIRLS). Yet research has indicated that gang-affiliated girls have specific risk factors that are distinct from those of their male counterparts (Klein and Maxson, 2006, pp. 150–52). Female-specific risk factors include risk-seeking behaviours, lower school commitment, fewer prosocial peers, lower involvement in community sports activities, and less attachment to teachers (Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998; Maxson and Whitlock, 2002). Girls who join gangs have been documented to have more severe family problems than their male delinquent counterparts, including a higher prevalence of child abuse and neglect (Miller, 2006, p. 57). Approaches to youth gangs that assume risk factors are the same for boys and girls may therefore miss a significant proportion of the at-risk population. A major, often overlooked problem for girls living in communities with gangs is non-gang girls’ informal association with male gang members that place them at high risk for behaviours such as violence, sexual risks, and drug use (Valdez, 2007, pp. 109–33).

A formidable challenge in designing interventions is developing a definition for youth gangs.

The youth group continuum

One of the most formidable challenges in designing interventions for youth gangs is the development of an appropriate definition of such groups. Youth is a stage in the life course of human development characterized by profound physical and psychosocial changes occurring from early adolescence to young adulthood (Elder, 1998, pp. 954–56; Rindfuss, Swicegood, and Rosenfeld, 1987). An awareness of this is needed when designing interventions for youth gangs, as are sufficiently nuanced definitions of the target groups. This chapter applies the Eurogang definition of youth street gangs as being durable over time, street-oriented, composed of youths, engaged in and oriented towards illegal or criminal behaviour, and with an identity based on street codes and illegal acts (Klein and Maxson, 2006; see Box 9.1). This definition encompasses not only violent drug gangs but also criminal youth gangs that are oriented towards protection rackets/extortion, human trafficking, or other illicit activities.

Analytically, youth gangs lie on a continuum of youth groups (see Figure 9.1). On one end are normal youths who, because of the physical and psychosocial stress of adolescent development, may engage in sporadic deviant behaviour, but who are for the most part well integrated in the institutions of society (family, school, community).² Troublesome youths have become alienated to a noticeable degree from these institutions and have developed a pattern of deviant behaviour. They tend to be loosely organized in cliques much like normal youths, do not engage in serious criminal activity, and are rarely armed (Weerman and Decker, 2005, pp. 288–91). While delinquent youths are also loosely organized, their criminal activity and possession of arms is more common than among troublesome youths. Delinquent youths are likely to come to the attention of juvenile justice authorities and comprise a significant

Box 9.1 The Eurogang Network

It is now generally accepted that youth street gangs are a global phenomenon, yet the global understanding of gang interventions has not kept pace. One of the first projects to explore and document the globalization of gangs was the Eurogang Network. Its overarching goal is to promote multi-method, multi-site research (Gemert, 2005; Klein et al., 2001). Since 1997, Eurogang has been investigating and compiling information on gangs in Europe and has also contributed to the comparative study of gang interventions (Klein et al., 2001). Eurogang teams, consisting of European and US researchers, have distinguished between European and US approaches to gang intervention. The European approach historically relied on inducing structural change and establishing state institutions to respond to gangs (Carlsson and Decker, 2005, pp. 260–61). Eurogang researchers argue that the lack of these structural mechanisms in the United States is the main reason for US reliance on narrower, short-term intervention programmes. Eurogang studies in a dozen countries have also established that although European gang members are far more violent than non-gang youths, they are less violent than their US counterparts (GANG VIOLENCE).

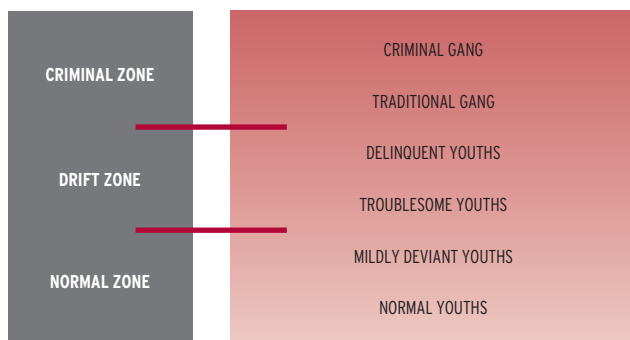
A key accomplishment of the Eurogang project has been the construction of an internationally accepted definition of a street gang as ‘any durable street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity’ (Klein and Maxson, 2006, p. 4). The definition specifies the key attributes that any gang intervention must plan to change: a group street orientation that has developed over a significant length of time; involvement of at least some of the gang members in serious illegal activity; and an identity informed by street codes and illegal acts.

Eurogang has recently focused on the role of migration and ethnicity on the formation, structure, and functions of European gangs (Gemert, Peterson, and Lien, 2008). This emphasis responds to earlier studies of marginalized immigrant Muslim youth gangs that were characterized as a ‘lost generation’ shutting themselves up in ethnic enclaves (Wermölder, 1997, pp. 136–37). The current preoccupations in Europe with Muslim immigrant youths—and politically sensitive events such as riots in the suburbs of Paris and gang rapes in Scandinavia—also accounts for this emphasis. However, the relative effectiveness of youth gang interventions in Europe has not yet been widely investigated by the project.

sub-group at risk for joining the gang population (Thornberry et al., 2003). At the other end of the continuum are various types of street and drug gangs that are highly organized, engage in high levels of crime, and are collectively armed (Klein and Maxson, 2006, pp. 167–88).

While interventions for gang youths may resemble those targeting troublesome or delinquent youths, their design and implementation can be very different. For example, structural variations in the hierarchy of leaders, core members,

Figure 9.1 Spectrum of youth groups



Source: Charles Kaplan, Avelardo Valdez, Alice Cepeda

periphery members, and ‘wannabees’ are important to account for in the planning of gang interventions. For the youth gang member, the primary social bond is the gang organization, which is armed for collective protection and market control. Youth drug gangs are often enmeshed in dynamic drug markets and are forced to interact with adult and prison gangs that have control of this business (Valdez, 2005; PRISON). The gang substitutes a degree of organized social control for deficient or absent families and other

social resources (Venkatesh, 1997; Venkatesh and Levitt, 2000). In contrast, delinquents and troublesome youths may simply ‘drift’ into anti-social behaviour through a relative weakening of informal social control (Matza, 1990).

The flexible form of many gangs complicates the development of simple interventions. Observing the emergence of Turkish street gangs in Berlin, Spergel likens the process of gang formation to a street variation on Newtonian physics. The group process of these gangs was closely related to the protection of Turkish youths from neo-Nazi youth gangs. For every neo-Nazi gang attack, a Turkish street gang would respond in kind (Spergel, 1995, p. 5). This cycle can lead to the youth gang, or similar groups, becoming institutionalized to fill vacuums in public safety and other social services (PRO-GOVERNMENT).

In South Africa, after the fall of apartheid in 1994, gangs became an integral part of broader social processes and were often a source of both social predation and social protection in the same community (Marais, 2001). The youth gang is protean in ‘its ability to shift gears, to grow up from a wild peer group into an illicit business, working for political spoils or acting as thugs for ruling powers’ (Hagedorn, 2008, p. 33). Interventions need to be constantly adjusted to reflect changes that inevitably occur in target populations.

Multi-component, long-term strategies are most likely to achieve sustained impacts.

An expensive recipe: long-term, multi-component, integrated approaches

Much of the modern gang research relevant for intervention planning grows out of the work of the Chicago School.³ This school saw youth gangs as an effect of the ‘social disorganization’ that occurs as cities experience rapid urbanization and growth. The response of the Chicago School to the extensive urbanization of Chicago at the beginning of the 20th century, including sweeping change to its social structures, is applicable to many countries around the world in the 21st century. According to the model, gangs form spontaneously out of child play and street corner interaction in circumstances of social disorganization (Bursik and Grasmick, 2006, pp. 5–6) and as a result of the inability of primary and secondary institutions to exert social control in urban conditions.

The Chicago School posited that, because of community disorganization and the complex interaction between child development and psychosocial conflict, there can be no single strategy or ‘silver bullet’ for gang-related problems. Instead, strategies should apply multiple interventions combined in creative, coherent, and meaningful ways to reach well-defined outcomes—for example, violence reduction, delinquency reduction, job placement, community mobilization, and sports involvement. These outcomes do not entail the complete dissolution of a gang, but involve redirecting and reframing group processes for positive impacts in the community. The literature and policy history bear out that those multi-component, long-term strategies are most likely to achieve sustained impacts (Klein and Maxson, 2006, p. 263).

The costs of sustained, multi-component strategies can be considerable, however. For example, Los Angeles is investing USD 20 million per year for at least four years in its comprehensive gang intervention programme with an additional USD 900,000 per year for an independent evaluation (Klein, 2009, p. 720; see Box 9.4). This will be out of reach for many cities. Partly for this reason—and for political reasons or because of conventional wisdom—short-term interventions tend to be more common. Available research suggests that incarcerating youth gang members to reduce gang-related crime continues to be popular around the world. These policies often proceed without any evidence of positive sustained impact—or even in the face of negative consequences. In some contexts, the removal of gang members from the streets can act as a drain on a community’s human resources; it may also strengthen street–prison linkages. Gangs institutionalized in prison have emerged as new and potent political forces in Africa and Latin America (Amorim, 1993; Arana, 2005; Steinberg, 2004; PRISON).

An important aspect of gang policy development is the need for scientific evaluation. Evaluations provide a scientific basis for describing the process of implementation of a programme, its fidelity to the programme protocol, as well as an assessment of its outcomes and wider impacts on the society. Evaluations routinely measure a wide range of outcomes and impacts—including self-reported and collaterally observed behavioural change, perceptions of safety in the community, levels of violence, crime rates, and employment levels of at-risk youth—but are ideally tied directly to the programme objectives and assumptions. Without scientific evaluations of specific programmes, there is no way of judging their benefits (or any unintended harm they may be doing) and conventional wisdom remains the guide. The costs involved can be prohibitive, however, and some gang researchers remain sceptical about the utility of evaluations. Thorough evaluations are still the exception rather than the rule.

The prevention of gang involvement must be placed in the context of youth troubles.

In the long term, the lack of science-based evaluations of gang policy will hinder the development of a more nuanced understanding of both the process and the impact of the many well-intentioned interventions launched every year. Yet there is evidence that this may be changing. In the United States, funding for new intervention programmes is typically contingent on the inclusion of an evaluation component that provides objective indicators of programme outcomes and wider impacts (OJJDP, 2008a, pp. 6–8). An important challenge for the future is to integrate culturally relevant evaluative components into all youth gang policy and programming interventions.

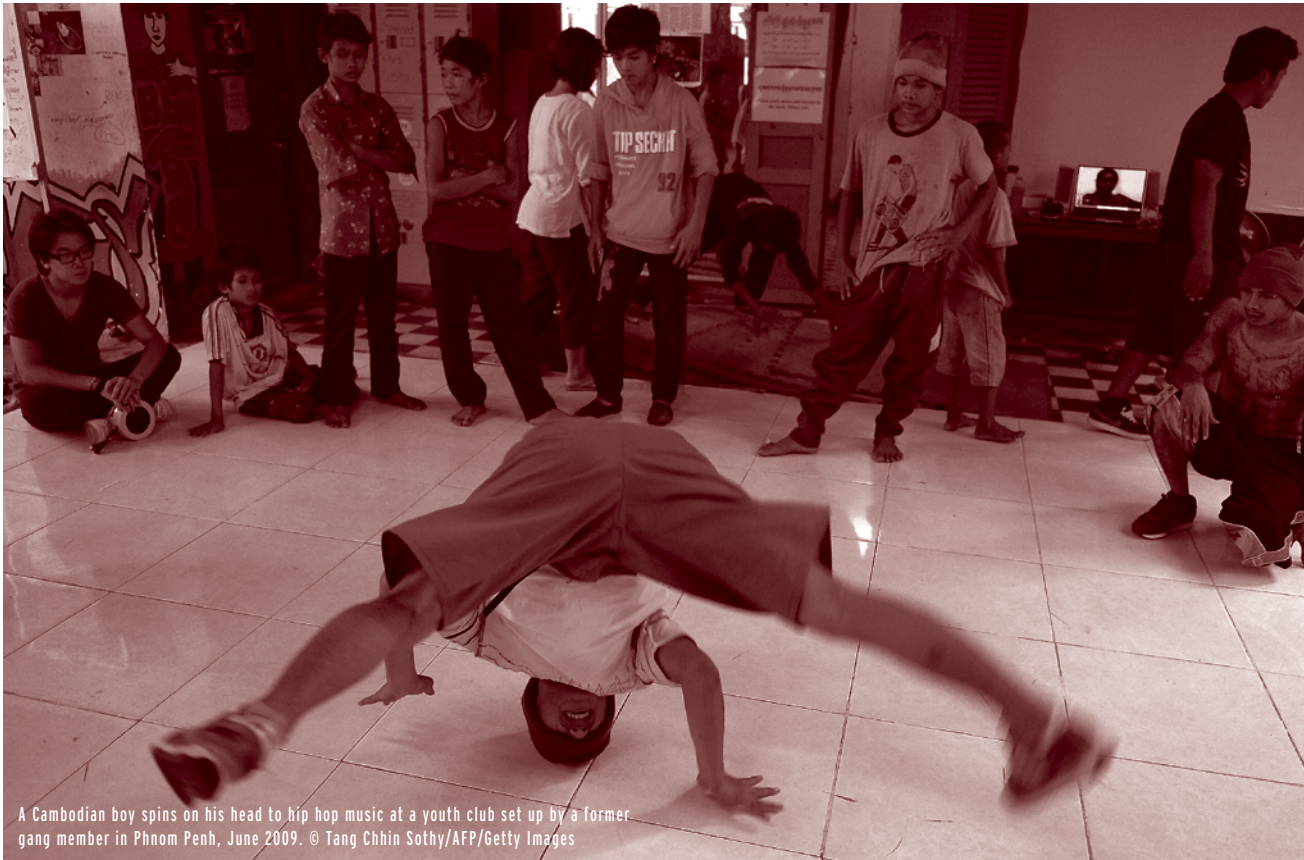
GANG PREVENTION STRATEGIES

The process by which a young person becomes a gang member is a gradual one. Youths typically hang out with gang members for up to one year before making a commitment to join (Miller, 2006, p. 43). Prevention strategies recognize the importance of this acclimation period, targeting both the general population of youths and at-risk (delinquent) youths at this stage. Approaches applicable to the general population involve information dissemination, education, and skills training to build resistance to cultural and peer-group pressure to join a gang. Programmes specifically targeting at-risk youths often involve the provision of educational and other alternatives to joining a street gang.

Most gang members were already involved in delinquent activities prior to joining; the prevention of gang involvement therefore needs to be placed in the broader context of youth troubles (Battin et al., 1998; Esbensen, 2000; Thornberry et al., 2003). Gang prevention is driven by the theory that it is more cost-effective and less difficult to prevent youths from joining a gang than it is to try to extricate them from gang structures later. Numerous scientific, political, and religious–spiritual theories have guided and supported the design and implementation of prevention strategies. They can be divided into youth-oriented and environment-oriented efforts, although projected outcomes often include both individual and environmental changes.

Youth-oriented prevention

Youth-oriented prevention strategies target individual youths and typically build on risk and resiliency theory (Hawkins, Catalano, and Arthur, 2002; Hazen et al., 2008, pp. 229–30). Specific combinations and interactions of risk and resilience factors are believed to influence the likelihood that an individual will join a gang. Risk factors, defined as ‘individual or environmental hazards that increase an individual’s vulnerability to negative developmental outcomes’ (Small and Luster, 1994, p. 182; Wyrick and Howell, 2004), can be contrasted with protective factors that



A Cambodian boy spins on his head to hip hop music at a youth club set up by a former gang member in Phnom Penh, June 2009. © Tang Chhin Sothy/AFP/Getty Images

decrease the likelihood that the individual will opt for gang membership, notwithstanding the presence of one or more risk factors (Klein and Maxson, 2006, pp. 154–56).

Multiple risk and protective factors appear to be involved in the developmental process associated with youth involvement with gangs (Wyrick and Howell, 2004, pp. 22–25). The likelihood of gang membership increases in proportion to the accumulation of risk factors as it does with other problem behaviours (Hill et al., 1999). Analytically, these risk factors encompass individual characteristics, family structures and processes, peer group influences, school commitments and performance, and the wider community context (Howell, 1998). Assessing such risk factors helps identify the youths who would benefit from a particular intervention (Klein and Maxson, 2006).

The European experience suggests that community protective factors can hamper the long-term sustainability of street gangs (Weerman and Decker, 2005, pp. 290–92; Klein and Maxson, 2006, pp. 47–48). These factors include the relatively recent emergence of gangs (compared to the United States), a significant social safety net, and low levels of civilian access to firearms.⁴ Strong family involvement and open family communication may also contribute to resistance to gang membership (Li et al., 2002). In fact, consistent family discipline inhibits gang membership even when parental monitoring is low (Klein and Maxson, 1987). An understanding of risk and protective factors remains incomplete, however, without knowledge of how these factors interact. Future research on the family dynamics of high-risk youths should provide further insight into why youths join gangs or not; additional analysis of the community

Table 9.1 Domain-specific risk factors and key protective factors for youth gang membership

Domain	Risk factors	Protective factors
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social disorganization, including poverty and residential mobility • Organized lower-class communities • Underclass communities • Presence of gangs in the neighbourhood • Availability of drugs in the neighbourhood • Availability of firearms • Barriers to and lack of social and economic opportunities • Lack of social capital • Cultural norms supporting gang behaviour • Feeling unsafe in neighbourhood; high crime • Conflict with social control institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short or no history of gang presence • Strict formal and informal control of firearms • Limited neighbourhood congregation sites of unsupervised youth • Absence of drug markets
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family disorganization, including broken homes and parental drug or alcohol abuse • Troubled families, including incest, family violence, and drug addiction • Family members in a gang • Lack of adult male role models • Lack of parental role models • Low socio-economic status • Extreme economic deprivation, family management problems, parents with violent attitudes, sibling anti-social behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family involvement • Consistent parental discipline • Open family communication
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic failure • Low educational aspirations, especially among females • Negative labelling by teachers • Trouble at school • Few teacher role models • Educational frustration • Low commitment to school, low school attachment, high levels of anti-social behaviour in school, low achievement test scores, identification as being learning-disabled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychosocial support for teachers • Parental involvement with schools
Peer group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High commitment to delinquent peers • Low commitment to positive peers • Street socialization • Gang members in class • Friends who use drugs or who are gang members • Friends who are drug distributors • Interaction with delinquent peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed peer networks of gang and non-gang members • Intimate partner attachment to non-gang affiliate



<p>Individual</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior delinquency • Deviant attitudes • Street smartness; toughness • Defiant and individualistic character • Fatalistic view of the world • Aggression • Proclivity for excitement and trouble • <i>Locura</i> (acting in a daring, courageous, and especially crazy fashion in the face of adversity) • Higher level of normlessness in the context of family, peer group, and school • Social disabilities • Illegal gun ownership • Early or precocious sexual activity, especially among females • Alcohol and drug use • Drug trafficking • Desire for group rewards such as status, identity, self-esteem, companionship, and protection • Problem behaviours, hyperactivity, externalizing behaviours, drinking, and lack of refusal skills • Victimization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of personal resources • Sense of coherence • Positive, culturally relevant identity
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Source: adapted from Howell (1998, pp. 6-7)

context and the processes that prevent gangs from growing and having access to firearms can enhance efforts to reduce the propensity of individual gang members to use firearms.

Table 9.1 summarizes risk and protective factors that appear especially relevant for youth-oriented prevention strategies that focus on gangs. The risk factors far outnumber the protective factors, reflecting current research; our understanding of protective factors is less well developed.

Youth-oriented prevention programmes can encompass classroom instruction, summer programmes, after-school programmes, parenting classes, substance abuse treatment, and youth mentoring. Schools have become a fertile ground for gang prevention in many places in the world. In the United States, the average middle school (covering roughly ages 11–14) has 14 different drug, violence, and other social problem programmes (Esbensen, 2000, p. 7). The national Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) programme exposes US middle-school students to an integrated curriculum delivered by specially trained police officers (Esbensen, 2006, p. 369). Modelled on the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) programme, also implemented in US schools, GREAT is primarily a nine-week course incorporated into the general school curriculum. It introduces students to conflict resolution skills, cultural sensitivity, and the negative consequences of gang involvement. Individual school counselling is also provided to students. The course thus seeks to address individual, peer, and community (culture) risk factors.

A comprehensive five-year (1995–99) longitudinal evaluation of the initial phase of the programme looked at several specific indicators of implementation; the study placed emphasis on parent, teacher, and law enforcement officer satisfaction and perceptions of programme effectiveness as well as measurable changes in youth attitudes and

behaviour. After four years of programme exposure, researchers found that participating youths reported lower rates of delinquency and gang affiliation, more positive attitudes towards police, more negative attitudes about gangs, higher levels of perceived guilt at committing deviant acts, and more communication with parents about their activities (Esbensen and Osgood, 1999).

These outcomes did not last, however. In follow-up surveys one and two years after completing the curriculum, there were no significant statistical differences in attitudes and behaviours between the GREAT experimental group and the student control group.⁵ This discouraging result for school-based prevention had been foreshadowed in earlier reviews (Sherman et al., 1997, ch. 10). While the self-reported components of the GREAT study showed mixed results, there was no evidence that the programme had led to actual decreases in gang affiliation or delinquency (Sherman et al., 1997, ch. 10).

The widespread commitment in the United States to school-based prevention is such that state officials and advocates responded to these disappointing results by expanding and redesigning the programme. The traditional (lecture-based) eight-lesson curriculum was replaced with 13 interactive facilitation-style lessons specifically designed for 10–13-year-olds. Six facilitator-guided family–child relationship-building sessions were included to add a protective factor in the family domain. An elementary school component was also added, then expanded. By 2005, 3.9 million children had gone through GREAT (BJA, 2006, p. 2). A preliminary pre-test/post-test evaluation showed positive results in a number of areas—including lower self-reported gang membership—but the programme’s long-term effects remain unclear.⁶

**US officials
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programme.**

Community-based gang prevention curricula have also been widely implemented in the United States. These curricula, typically designed to be culturally relevant, target individual risk factors such as street toughness, a fatalistic view of the world, and *locura* (crazy, wild behaviour) through the presentation of culturally inspired, prosocial alternatives. A good example is the El Joven Noble (The Noble Young Man) Male Responsibility Project delivered to high-risk youths in East Los Angeles by the National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute. The programme aims at enhancing the capability of Hispanic males to act in a responsible and respectful way in all their relationships and to confront behaviours that are leading them to gang violence. The programme, like many others, does not necessarily have the primary goal of reducing gang violence; rather, it targets related behaviours such as high-risk sexual behaviour that affects reproductive health (teenage pregnancy) and HIV infection. The strategy involves the mobilization of an adult male *compadre* to provide a positive role model, extended kinship support, and positive youth development ‘rites of passage’. The rationale is that changing the underlying adolescent, culturally specific causes of high-risk sexual behaviour and substance abuse will also affect gang-related activities. Evaluations have shown significant reductions in sexual activity in general and sexual activity under the influence of drugs or alcohol in post-tests using the El Joven Noble curriculum (Lopez et al., 2006). This suggests that youth-oriented gang prevention strategies can successfully target problem behaviours that are antecedents and correlates of gang membership in at-risk groups.

Environment-oriented prevention

Environment-oriented prevention approaches typically seek to change gang structure and processes by influencing key social (environmental) factors such as the gang itself, peer groups, families, churches, schools, youth groups, and neighbourhood resident organizations. This approach derives from the Chicago Area Project (see below); founded in 1934, the Project emphasizes community mobilization and organization as the primary means of preventing gang problems (Shaw and McKay, 1942; Sorrentino and Whittaker, 1994).

Researchers have identified four community conditions that often precede a transition from normal adolescent groups to established youth gangs and around which many environment-oriented strategies are structured (Moore, 1978; 1998, p. 67):

- conventional socializing institutions such as families and schools are largely ineffective and alienating, resulting in the absence of conventional adult supervision and informal social control;
- adolescents have a large amount of free time that is not taken up with prosocial roles;
- gang members have limited access to appealing conventional career opportunities; and
- youths have an unsupervised area to congregate in the neighbourhood space.

Midnight basketball programmes have been initiated in some US cities to increase the opportunities for exercise in areas with a high concentration of at-risk youths and, at the same time, to provide a positive structured and adult-supervised activity. ‘Strengthening of family’ programmes seek to teach parents of at-risk youths skills that improve family interaction and increase parental capacity for supervision and informal social control. Multisystemic Therapy has been proposed as a promising parenting skills programme and has been applied, both in the United States and in Norway, to the parents of gang members; meanwhile, fathers’ groups have emerged in Denmark to increase the capacity of informal social control in immigrant families with at-risk children (Howell, 1998; Carlsson and Decker, 2005, pp. 275–77).

Box 9.2 CASE: trauma support rooms in South Africa

Community and gang violence have deeply affected many South African schools. It has been estimated that 40 to 60 per cent of serious crime in the Western Cape region is directly related to gangs. In the Western Cape alone there are 100,000 gang members in 137 gangs (Reckson and Becker, 2005, p. 107). The influence of gangs—especially in marginalized urban areas and townships—is pervasive and affects all social institutions. Violent rivalries between competing gangs routinely spill over into the schools, contributing to physical as well as psychological trauma for students, including nightmares, social withdrawal, and other psychopathological symptoms.

Enhanced attention to public safety in South Africa has stimulated creative environment-oriented gang interventions to address this problem. One innovative programme is Community Action towards a Safer Environment (CASE), which originated with the Ministry of Education’s ‘Tirasano’ strategy of school management and safety improvement. Fifteen women volunteers, originally trained as counsellors through the Safer Schools Programme in 2001 and 2003, formed the core of the CASE team. Together with teachers, the CASE counsellors established nine trauma support rooms in schools in Hanover Park, a suburb 20 km north of Cape Town that was especially hard hit by gang and youth violence. The rooms were designed to be social spaces set aside in the school for healing of both the students and the teachers.

Some positive effects were reported. Following the establishment of the trauma support rooms, teachers developed mechanisms to help children cope with violence-related trauma and to keep the school environment functioning. The rooms also provided a base for reaching out to the community through counselling services in hopes of creating a ripple effect in the wider environment. In periods when gang revenge killings intensified, the presence of the CASE counsellors facilitated instant psychological care and referrals for teachers, students, and community members. The counsellors performed other prosocial roles in the school and community, such as sports coaching.

CASE also organized a Youth-in-Action programme to prevent children from leaving school as a result of pressure from gang members, and to provide mentoring for younger children. The programme provided a way for youths to build self-esteem and define themselves in contrast to gang life. The mentoring programme was a protected space where parents knew their children would be safe and that would feed back positively to the home environment.

Environment-oriented strategies typically focus on security promotion and preventing gang influences from entering or taking root in the school, as exemplified in South Africa (see Box 9.2). The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative funded by the US Department of Education follows a similar line, linking public health and safety issues together to promote environments where children can learn and grow without the disturbances of gang violence and substance abuse.

As part of the initiative, school districts develop strategic plans to help schools resist gangs. These plans usually involve multiple components. Substance abuse prevention is a critical part of the planning since the level of violence in gangs is associated with the level of individual drug use and selling (Howell and Decker, 1999; Martinez, 1992; Valdez, Kaplan, and Cepeda, 2006). Prior substance abuse is an individual risk factor for joining a gang and drug dealing is often one of the primary ways gangs get a foothold in schools. Training in life skills, expanding the screening and diagnosis of students for mental health problems, and increasing treatment resources to students are common components of these programmes. Multi-disciplinary teams of professionals are deployed in the school to support students, teachers, and parents.

The need for prevention strategies that change the environment of schools is highlighted by the problem of school drop-outs. Dropping out of school may stem from the student's lack of commitment, but its deeper cause often lies in the conflicts that vulnerable students experience in a traumatized school environment. Students who are weakly affiliated with youth gangs may be exposed to extreme internal (psychological) conflict arising from the differences between the norms of the school and those of the street.

**Gang membership
can provide a
sense of protection
and identity.**

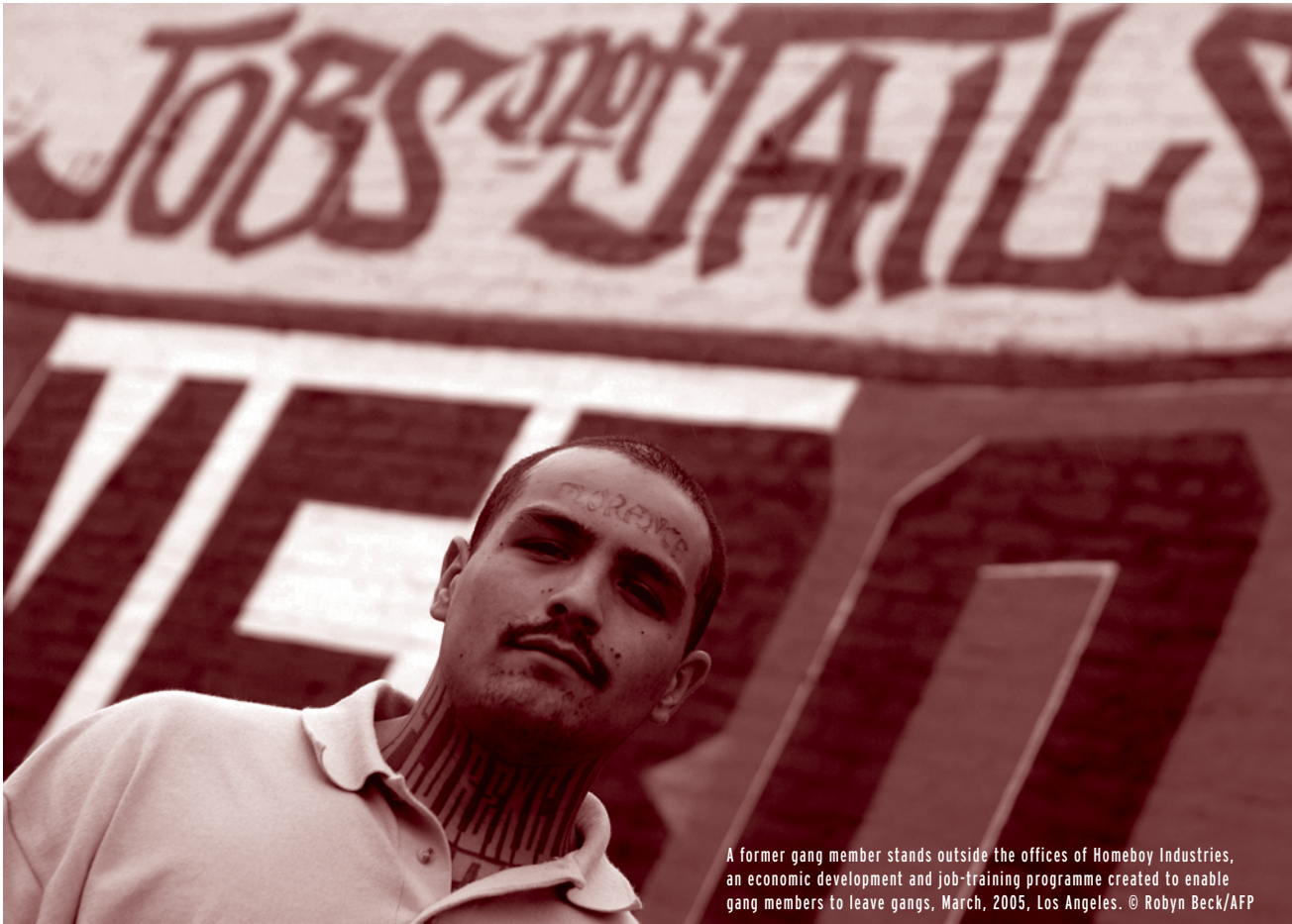
The resulting 'normlessness' of the individual has been documented as a significant risk factor both for joining gangs and for decreased school safety. A student who drops out as a result of this type of internal conflict is likely to have excessive time during the day in unsupervised environments that encourage gang membership (Fagan, 1990, pp. 188–89, 212–13).

GANG TREATMENT STRATEGIES

Treatment strategies, directed at active gang members, aim to change their behaviour and divert them from crime to alternatives such as after-school programmes, sports, and job training. They also aim to influence gang processes, including patterns of interaction and leadership. Like prevention strategies, treatment can be youth- or environment-oriented.

Youth-oriented treatment

Youth-oriented strategies tend to recruit individual gang members into specially designed counselling or individual, group, or family therapy programmes. Youth gang membership is thought to derive from a rational choice among available opportunities in a specific community that is often reinforced by emotional (longing for prestige and status) and deep-seated individual traits (Baccaglini, 1993; Pennell et al., 1994; Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991). One of the reasons to choose gang membership is that it will provide a sense of protection and identity.⁷ At the same time, emotional reinforcement for joining a gang often resides in anger and unresolved aggression. The attractiveness of the acquisition, possession, and use of firearms and other weapons can be one expression of these feelings (Lizotte et al., 2000; Stretesky and Pogrebin, 2007).



A former gang member stands outside the offices of Homeboy Industries, an economic development and job-training programme created to enable gang members to leave gangs, March, 2005, Los Angeles. © Robyn Beck/AFP

Treatment interventions deliver therapeutic rehabilitative services to gang-affiliated individuals, families, and communities, such as psychotherapy, job training, recreational services, and arts and culture, along with re-entry, relocation, and transition services. Individual and family therapy interventions attempt to mould individual gang member personality and character traits and relieve emotional and cognitive distress. Many of these therapies are provided in specialized criminal justice institutions following screening for the degree of gang affiliation as well as the psychosocial need for services. This type of screening has also been introduced in community settings as an integral part of a comprehensive gang intervention strategy (Casey, 2009; Hoag, 2009; Los Angeles News, 2009).

Treatment strategies can include medication and behavioural therapies to tackle underlying psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Family therapeutic approaches attempt to change the perception parents have of children and improve family communication (see Box 9.3). Many such programmes provide educational support to re-establish connection to schools, emergency housing (since many gang members have periods of residential instability), spiritual and moral guidance by clergy and ex-gang members, and employment and leadership skills training. Recreational opportunities are also included, as well as re-entry services for leaving gang and prison. Tattoo removal has also become an important component, since tattoos are physical signs of gang bonds (Valentine, 2000, pp. vii–viii, 20, 26, 112).

Box 9.3 Proyecto SAFE, San Antonio

In the Hispanic population in the United States, acculturation to mainstream values and behaviours is associated with lower family engagement and decreased *familismo*, a cultural norm that emphasizes respect for and primacy of the family (Vega et al., 1995). A parallel force has been identified for gang members indicating that youths who are less acculturated and oriented to Mexico are more prone to adopt street values (a process known as choloization); correspondingly, they are likely to be less receptive to the protective influence of *familismo* (Lopez and O'Donnell Brummett, 2003). Proyecto SAFE (San Antonio Family Enhancement) is a culturally relevant gang treatment intervention that focuses on problems in the Mexican-American family that are related to the street cholo culture associated with gang affiliation.

Implemented over a ten-year period, Proyecto SAFE comprised two distinct programmes with different add-ons and evaluation components targeting gang members and their families in San Antonio, Texas. An enhanced Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT) Model was coupled with an active outreach strategy that saw street workers recruit families and mobilize communities in disadvantaged Mexican-American neighbourhoods that suffered from high concentrations of gang activity. BSFT is short-term, problem-focused, intensive, and designed for children and adolescents 8 to 17 and their families (Santisteban et al., 2003; Szapocznik and Williams, 2000). BSFT clinicians work with all family members to identify and restructure patterns of family interaction that allow or encourage problematic adolescent behaviour. At the core of the BSFT are two basic assumptions: (a) each family has its own unique characteristics and properties that are apparent only when family members interact; (b) the position of different members in the family defines its structure (Szapocznik and Williams, 2000).

The hypothesis for the intervention was that by improving family communication and interaction, there would be a reduction in substance abuse, diminished gang identification, and decreased gang attachment. Through the outreach programme, 200 adolescents, together with at least one family caregiver, were recruited and randomly assigned to BSFT treatment or a more modest counselling or self-help intervention. Families chosen for BSFT were engaged in 16 weekly sessions lasting 60 to 90 minutes. Among the outcomes, parents improved their gang awareness skills (including their ability to identify signs of gang participation) and their ability to communicate with their gang-affiliated children about gang issues. After finishing the programme, gang members reported a (statistically significant) reduction in marijuana and other illicit drug use, and reduced identification with gangs and use of gang signs. However, there has been no indication of the persistence of these changes because long-term follow-up data has not been collected. This highlights a widespread limitation of even the best-designed programme evaluations; the follow-up periods are often too short to conclusively determine persistent change.

Source: Valdez (2004)



A former gang member undergoes laser treatment to remove her Latin Queen gang emblem tattoo as part of the youth development programme, Operation Fresh Start, United States. © John Zich/Time Life/Getty



Environment-oriented treatment

Environment-oriented treatment strategies identify specific gangs in a given neighbourhood and employ 'detached workers' who develop gang member contacts. Simultaneously, community residents and organizations are mobilized. Detached street work was a hallmark of the Chicago Area Project and involved problem-oriented group or community work that was tailored to the social structure of the community (Decker and Van Winkle, 2006, p. 17; Klein, 1971).

Detached street gang workers create bridges for gang members to schools, youth clubs, and jobs. They were the pivotal element in the comprehensive integrated community approach that came to be called the 'Spergel Model' after its University of Chicago developer (Spergel, 1995). Significantly, the model broadened the perspective on youth gangs, considering social disorganization as only one element of an underlying set of forces in the community (Spergel, 2007, pp. 27–29). The model was based on a set of five interrelated strategies: community mobilization; social intervention; provision of social opportunities; suppression or socialized control; and organizational change and development (Spergel and Curry, 1993). Variations of the model have been actively promoted by the US Department of Justice's Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and widely implemented in cities such as Miami, with extensive immigrant Haitian drug youth gangs, and Los Angeles, with third-generation Mexican-American street youth gangs (OJJDP, 2008b).

In parallel with the Spergel Model, European strategies developed largely in Scandinavia emphasized not the comprehensiveness of services, but rather the coordination of existing welfare state institutions responsible for services (Carlsson and Decker, 2005, p 265). For example, the Social Services, School, and Police Model of gang intervention in Denmark and Norway delivers many services similar to those of the Spergel Model, but from within the existing welfare state institutional system (Carlsson and Decker, 2005). A Spergel Model initiative has also been utilized in Guatemala, among other places.⁸

GANG SUPPRESSION STRATEGIES

Gang suppression strategies use the police, courts, and prisons to identify, isolate, divert, and punish gang members engaging



A boxing trainer teaches a pupil at Keely's Boxing Gym as part of a programme to keep children out of gangs, August 2004. © Marvin Joseph/The Washington Post/Getty Images

in overt criminal behaviour. Vigilante armed groups, with varying degrees of state authorization, have also sought to suppress or control gangs (Oruwari and Owei, 2006; PRO-GOVERNMENT). A survey of 58 well-known gang programmes in the United States has shown that gang suppression represents 39 per cent of the total, followed by gang prevention (34 per cent), and gang intervention or treatment (27 per cent) (Klein and Maxson, 2006, pp. 254–55). A similar distribution has been observed in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, where the police, schools, and social services provide the institutional base for gang control (Carlsson and Decker, 2005, pp. 279–82). Other institutions and organizations—such as churches, charities, and schools—also cooperate with the police in gang suppression. For example, in Cambodia, a consortium of ten gender-focused non-governmental organizations initiated a survey of youths that included questions on gang attitudes and involvement (GDC, 2003). The consortium launched the initiative because their gender-oriented intervention programmes were being compromised by Cambodian street drug gangs with links to the prostitution of young girls. The report, *Paupers and Princlings*, helped to document the attitudes and behaviours towards gangs among Cambodia's general youth population and provided an invaluable information

resource for gang suppression as well as other strategies. As the title of the report indicates, gang members were drawn from both the highest and the lowest strata of society, providing novel problems for gang suppression. Youth 'princeling' gang members received protection for their activities because of their high social status and gang suppression involved this added complication (GDC, 2003).

Gang suppression strategies can be classified as coercive or alternative, though many programmes incorporate elements of both. Coercive strategies emphasize arrest, punishment, and incarceration to isolate and reduce gangs and gang members in the community. The conceptual foundation for this approach is deterrence theory, with its principles of the swiftness, severity, and certainty of punishment (Edmund and Thomas, 1996). Alternative youth gang suppression strategies include community policing, as well as peacemaking negotiations and voluntary disarmament. The theoretical base of these strategies can be traced to the gang transformation concepts that advocate close collaboration with the police and the detached social worker (Klein and Maxson, 2006, pp. 91–92).



Coercive gang suppression strategies

Coercive gang suppression strategies include a wide range of activities organized not only by the police and the criminal justice systems, but also by spontaneous, informal armed community members. Coercive gang suppression strategies intensify conventional coercive police tactics. They are often accompanied by government media campaigns highlighting the negative social impacts of gangs. A good example of coercive gang suppression is the series of *Mano Dura* (Hard Hand) campaigns initiated by successive presidents of El Salvador in response to escalating 'immigrant gang' violence (Holland, 2009). A major campaign launched in July 2003 led to 8,000 arrests, but most suspects were released because of lack of evidence. Despite prosecution difficulties, the next Salvadoran president continued with this policy. The police were given broad new arrest powers under Plan Super *Mano Dura* (Operation Super Hard Hand). The incarceration of 70 gang leaders was deemed a success despite the unintended long-term consequence of strengthening prison gangs in the country (Borden, 2005; PRISON).

In many large US cities the police have special units of varying size and degree of specialization to implement coercive gang suppression strategies. For instance, Los Angeles has had a highly specialized police gang unit since 1977. The Los Angeles gang suppression strategy combines street surveillance with investigation and follow-through arrests (Klein, 1995). Periodically, as in many cities throughout the world, the Los Angeles gang unit carries out elaborate campaigns, such as Operation Hammer, in which large numbers of police sweep an area and make numerous arrests for even minor offences (Klein and Maxson, 2006, p. 94).

The police were given broad new arrest powers under Plan Super *Mano Dura*.

Sometimes these tactics are supplemented by civil gang injunctions and legal instruments that prohibit the association and congregation of gang members in a given community (Allan, 2004). The injunction provides legal grounds for police to detain and arrest suspected gang members not known to have committed any crime. Injunctions include curfews, a ban on mobile phones, and the use of other measures to control gang suspects in a targeted neighbourhood. These efforts have proven modestly effective in the short term, but not in the longer term. It has been argued that coupling civil gang injunction with efforts to improve neighbourhood social organization and provide positive alternatives for gang members may lead to longer-term effectiveness (Maxson, Hennigan, and Sloane, 2005).

Indeed, a growing consensus among advocates of coercive gang suppression is that, in order to be effective, programmes need to integrate some broader community-level participation (Howell, 2000, pp. 45–46, 53–55; Spergel, 2007, pp. 113–31). The Boston Gun Project is one gang suppression programme to do so (Braga, Kennedy, and Tita, 2006, pp. 338–40). The project began in 1995 and quickly transformed into Operation Ceasefire. A working group of police, youth workers, and researchers first analysed the nature of youth homicides in Boston as a prelude to a joint undertaking. Their gang suppression strategy began with a message to gangs that gun violence would no longer be tolerated. At formal meetings gang members were told that any violence would meet with a swift, severe, and certain response from the police. Simultaneously, youth workers and parole and probation officers offered services to the gang members, with churches and community-based organizations subsequently contributing to this effort. The formal evaluation of the Boston Gun Project found the programme was associated with a 63 per cent decrease in the number of youth homicides, a 32 per cent decrease in monthly 'shots-fired' calls, and a monthly 25 per cent decrease in the number of youth gun assaults. These trends were only conclusively observed in Boston, not elsewhere in the United States where similar gun violence prevention projects were implemented. In the context of other gang suppression efforts, these are among the most significant successes documented. For this reason, the programme has been widely emulated and adapted. Nevertheless, none of these other programmes has been fully

evaluated, nor, apparently, has any achieved the level of success witnessed in Boston (Braga, Kennedy, and Tita, 2006, pp. 338–40).

Alternative gang suppression strategies

The positive outcomes of some suppression strategies that have integrated community-based participation have stimulated further interest in alternative techniques. These include community policing strategies that are multidimensional, pragmatic, and encourage citizen participation. Community policing emphasizes intensive analysis of gang activity to create innovative control strategies (Goldstein, 1990). Gang suppression then involves not only the criminal justice system, but also other governmental and non-governmental organizations and community residents. Typically, community gatekeepers provide outreach and community-based organizations provide treatment to individual gang members. Simultaneously, the threat of arrest and incarceration is selectively applied to gang leaders and to especially violent cliques in a targeted gang. In many ways, these alternative strategies resemble Operation Ceasefire-style programmes, although they are not based on deterrence, but rather on gang transformation through the mobilization of change agents, peacemaking, mediation, and negotiation (ECUADOR).

In alternative strategies, gang police units are to help bring peace to troubled neighbourhoods.

In these alternative strategies, gang police units are mandated not only to enforce the law, but also to help bring peace to troubled neighbourhoods. Such units include peacekeeping ‘mediator’ teams, which are composed of ex-gang members, social workers, street workers, and gang unit police. An example of this strategy is the Aasha Gang Conflict Mediation Project in London, part of an innovative community policing initiative, London Against Gun and Knife Crime. The Aasha project works to reduce violence associated with gangs through partnerships with schools, police, and community-based organizations. The project aims to ‘de-glamorize the gang culture and prevent gang conflict by using an extensive community network’ in which the police play a key role (LAGKC, n.d.).

Similarly, in Scandinavia, the ‘Night Owls’—civilian night-time security patrols—work closely with the police, projecting a form of community control in neighbourhoods with a significant gang presence. Night Owl interventions in Norway have had demonstrable success in moving neo-Nazi youth gangs out of a neighbourhood in an Oslo suburb and controlling immigrant youths using parent patrols in Kristiansand (Carlsson and Decker, 2005, pp. 273–74).

The court system is another source of alternative or innovative gang suppression strategies. Vertical prosecution has become widespread among district (state) attorneys in the United States to manage gang cases (Reiner, 1992). Prosecutors with special expertise in gangs take cases forward from start to finish, through all hearings, trials, and sentencing steps, in contrast with normal practice, where this process can involve multiple prosecutors. This strategy allows for continuity and the retention of detailed information useful in current and future gang-related cases. The prosecutor gets to know the accused, the community context, and the witnesses in a much deeper way than if gang cases were managed using a standard prosecution rotation (Carlie, 2002, ch. 15).

Another innovation in gang prosecution is alternative sentencing. Taking cues from guidelines implemented in the so-called ‘drug courts’ for youth drug offences, alternative sentencing allows the district attorney to argue for education, job training, or a specialized therapeutic clinic instead of a prison sentence. The National Youth Offender Demonstration Project, a collaboration between the US Departments of Labour and Justice, has supported a large-scale alternative sentencing intervention. This programme includes job training and placement for gang members who are not receiving alternative sentencing and who have already been incarcerated (Miller and MacGillivray, 2002).

Box 9.4 Los Angeles gang reduction and youth development

The City of Los Angeles has an exceptionally large number of alleged gangs and gang members—some 400 gangs and 41,000 active gang members by one estimate (City of Los Angeles, 2009, p. 2). The city has identified 12 neighbourhoods where rates of violent gang-related crime are at least five times higher than elsewhere. These so-called Gang Reduction and Youth Development Zones are the focus of the Action Plans for the City. A needs assessment of each of these zones determines which components of the plan to implement (City of Los Angeles, 2009, p. 5).

The Action Plans provide gang prevention programmes and integrated human services tailored to needs of the 12 specific neighbourhoods. They consider the complex interplay between individuals, families, gangs, the community, and the societal factors that promote gang violence. Eight specific Gang Reduction and Youth Development Action Plans are being implemented. These include: getting neighbourhood councils involved; expanding school-based programmes; boosting programmes run by community and faith-based organizations; establishing a Gang Intervention Academy; implementing a juvenile innovative re-entry programme; and tailoring recreation and parks programmes to diverse needs (such as extending city park opening times through early evenings during summers).

The director of Gang Reduction coordinates the Action Plans in the mayoral office, in conjunction with city and county government departments, community and faith-based groups, educational institutions, philanthropists, businesses, and individual donors and volunteers. The Action Plans consist of four neighbourhood-based strategies:

- **gang prevention** focuses on the community as a whole, youths at the greatest risk of joining gangs, and youths who are tempted by, but still ambivalent about, gang life;
- **gang intervention** has a dual approach: a) work with youths through trained 'peacemakers', whose primary functions are violence interruption, proactive peace-making, and outreach with incarcerated gang members immediately before and after their release; b) giving gang-involved youths and their families access to a range of rehabilitative services;
- **uniform crisis response** establishes a crisis response protocol that ensures that every neighbourhood receives equal treatment in a crisis situation (such as gang homicides);
- **gang suppression** focuses on problem-solving community policing that targets violent offenders and gang leaders. This includes developing more accurate gang data through enhanced coordination between the Los Angeles Police Department and regional enforcement agencies as well as improving witness protection programmes.



Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announces the 2007 Gang Enforcement Initiatives, a city-wide suppression plan, to reporters, 8 February 2007.
© David McNew/Getty Images

Historically, suppression efforts have outweighed all others in Los Angeles. As the action plans are being implemented, there are indications that suppression is again becoming the primary focus, despite the range of other strategies being developed. On 22 September 2009 Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and the Los Angeles Police Department announced a sweeping crackdown on violent street gangs. The multi-agency effort resulted in 45 arrests of members and associates of the Avenues criminal street gang, and the seizure of firearms and cash. Mayor Villaraigosa declared:

Today we took a big step towards clearing a community from the threat of random violence once and for all [...]. When it comes to taking down our worst offenders, there is no resource we will not utilize, no code of law we will not use, and no agency—local, state, or federal—who will not join us to put them behind bars (Los Angeles Mayor's Office, 2009).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has surveyed youth gang interventions from a variety of settings. While much of the research base comes from the United States, knowledge from other contexts is growing. Still, there are large gaps in our understanding of the factors that contribute to youths joining gangs and the likely pressure points for prevention. Although gangs are a global phenomenon and in many cases appear to be influenced by a US-style gang ('gangsta') culture, they are ultimately context-specific, a fact that gang interventions need to reflect.

According to the available evidence, suppressive approaches, including incarceration and police actions, remain the dominant means of dealing with gangs. Mass arrests may temporarily lower violence, but they generally fail to address the underlying motivations for gangs and gang membership. They may also generate unintended consequences, such as sparking new competition from ambitious gang members for control, or firming up links between street gangs and prison gangs. Suppressive tactics often provide only short-term solutions.

More promising are efforts that have combined classical law enforcement approaches with community outreach, social services, and other treatment and prevention components. These programmes have demonstrated that the threat of suppression can be as effective—and longer-lasting—than its actual application, if accompanied by the offer of help. Such hybrid strategies deserve to be tested in other settings, with careful consideration of the cultural and social differences that may require some degree of programme adjustment.

While gang intervention strategies are increasingly evidence-based, it appears that factors other than evidence often determine which programmes are implemented. Rising gang violence may spark a highly politicized and emotional debate that touches on other broader, sensitive issues that influence policy-making, such as immigration, gun control, or civil liberties. Yet in many contexts basic economic factors are the ultimate determinant of the kinds of programmes implemented. Long-term programmes—especially those that are institutionalized and state-run—are costly and out of reach for many communities.

The same can be said for the evaluation of interventions. Though it is a core component of evidence-based programming, evaluation can add considerably to overall programme cost. Furthermore, preferences for certain types of interventions—school-based curricula in the United States, *Mano Dura* in Central America—appear to be culturally entrenched, regardless of the evidence. Yet evaluations only make sense if they influence gang intervention programming.

Ultimately, states and communities need to understand that the gang phenomenon is the product of a wide range of individual, family, and societal risk and protective factors. The available evidence suggests that the most effective gang interventions touch many bases in a coordinated way, drawing upon both state and community resources. It also appears that long-term success requires long-term commitment. There are no short-cut solutions to the world's gang problems. ■

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSFT	Brief Strategic Family Therapy
DARE	Drug Abuse Resistance Education
GREAT	Gang Resistance Education and Training

ENDNOTES

- 1 Beginning in 1993, coercive gang suppression interventions resulted in large-scale deportations from the United States, leading to a profusion of gangs with distinctive US features in El Salvador (DeCesare, 1998, p. 23).
- 2 What constitutes 'normal' is contextual, socially constructed, and somewhat flexible but can usually be determined with some degree of specificity for a given society.
- 3 The Chicago School was a group of social scientists and social workers who were associated with the University of Chicago in the 1920s (Bursik, 2003; Park, 1967; Smith, 1988; Thomas, 1983). Its influence is still strong in social science throughout the world. The Chicago School developed a unique mixture of methods emphasizing ecological research for social problem solving. Its seminal studies of gangs and juvenile delinquency still have theoretical and practical relevance in innovations such as the notion of social disorganization and approaches emphasizing outreach by street gang social workers (Shaw and McKay, 1942; Thrasher, 1963).
- 4 The European approach to the suppression of firearms includes normative constraints, vigorous governmental efforts such as European-wide gun 'tracking and tracing' databases (e.g. IBIS), and coordinated voluntary, administrative, and legal removal activities (Klein et al., 2001, pp. 3–4, 11; Weitekamp, 2001, p. 314; IOOV, 2008, pp. 25, 31).
- 5 The DARE programme, on which GREAT drew, was not proven to be effective in national follow-up evaluation either; nevertheless, it continues to be implemented with modifications and enhancements. This is yet another illustration of how well-meaning interventions are often sustained even if the scientific data is negative or mixed. Carlsson and Decker (2005, p. 280) observe that it is often more difficult to dismantle state-administered gang interventions in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden because of political reasons than it is to start new ones; this argument may also apply to government-funded programmes administered by universities and non-governmental organizations in the United States.
- 6 For a preliminary evaluation, see Esbensen (2008).
- 7 Decker and Van Winkle (1996); Hagedorn (1988); Moore (1978); Vigil (1988).
- 8 In 2001, Creative Associates International, Inc. (CAII) obtained a cooperative agreement contract to implement a civil society programme in Guatemala; funded by the US Agency for International Development, the programme was designed to tackle accelerating gang growth and related adverse effects. Creative Associates International partnered with the Alliance for Crime Prevention (Asociación para la Prevención del Delito, APREDE), a Guatemalan non-governmental organization that has sought to prevent crime and violence associated with vulnerable youths in Guatemalan neighbourhoods. Implemented by the Alliance, the project involves an environment-oriented treatment strategy. More information is available in CAII (n.d.).

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