

Protective Factors for Gang Involvement among At-Risk Youth

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Abstract

It was estimated that there were 30,700 gangs in the United States in 2012, which is the highest amount since 1996. When youth are involved in delinquent behaviors, they are more likely to join a gang than youth who do not engage in delinquent activities. And an early pattern of delinquency puts youth at greater risk for delinquency throughout the life course. The current study aimed to examine the impact of parental involvement/parental monitoring and peer support as protective factors against gang involvement. A cross-sectional secondary data analysis was conducted using the baseline data from the original study, Pathways to Desistance (N=1,354) to analyze parental monitoring, parental warmth, friendship quality, resistance to peer influence, and whether youth were involved in a gang six months prior to entering the juvenile justice system. Youth who reported no gang involvement had higher parental knowledge and monitoring, received higher parental warmth from their mother and/or father, and had higher resistance to peer influence than those who had reported having gang involvement six months prior to entering the juvenile justice system. Therefore, it is critical to examine preventative research on at-risk youth’s social interactions to combat continued delinquency.

Introduction

Significance of Study

- ❖ To shift the focus from research focused on risk factors of gang involvement toward preventative measures to deter gang involvement among at-risk youth.
- ❖ An early pattern of delinquency puts youth at greater risk for delinquency throughout the life course.
- ❖ Gang activity contributes to crime rates and violent offenses in the communities where youth reside.

Purpose of Research

- ❖ To understand how the specific social interactions parental involvement/parental monitoring and peer support can serve as protective factors for gang involvement among at-risk youth.

Literature Review

- ❖ There is limited research examining how the relationship between specific social interactions can serve as protective factors for gang involvement among at-risk youth.
- ❖ Gang involvement can cause adverse developmental effects for youth throughout adolescence and as they transition into adulthood such as difficulty completing school or never receiving a high school diploma, resulting in job insecurity in early adulthood, difficulty leading a conventional lifestyle, and struggling to obtain income by legal means.
- ❖ Parents and peers can model and promote prosocial behaviors that have the potential to be a protective factor for gang involvement among at-risk youth. The presence of at least one protective factor in a youth’s life could reduce gang involvement.
- ❖ One of the main reasons gang-involved youth reported they became interested in gang involvement was a lack of belonging and a sense of protection from their primary caregivers.
- ❖ Resistance to peer influence could be a mediating factor against gang involvement.

Research Questions

- 1) What is the relationship between parental bonding and gang involvement among at-risk youth?
- 2) What is the relationship between quality peer connections and gang involvement among at-risk youth?

Methods

Research Design

- ❖ Cross-sectional secondary data analysis utilizing the baseline data from the original study, Pathways to Desistance.
- ❖ Participants were identified through the juvenile and adult courts system in Maricopa County in Phoenix, Arizona, and Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, who were youth found guilty of a serious offense.
- ❖ The youth provided self-reported information addressing demographics, parental monitoring, parental warmth, friendship quality, resistance to peer influence, and whether they were involved in a gang six months prior to entering the juvenile justice system.
- ❖ **Statistical analysis:** Mann-Whitney U-Test & Logistic Regression

Results

Table 3
Mann-Whitney U-Test for Relationship between Social Relationships and Gang Involvement Six Months Prior to Entering the Juvenile Justice System

Variables	Gang Involvement	No Gang Involvement	U	p-value
	Mean rank	Mean rank		
Parental knowledge	513.38	666.74	87,158.00	< 0.001
Parental Monitoring	516.88	613.62	81,037.50	< 0.001
Parental warmth (mother)	567.26	670.67	101,522.50	< 0.001
Parental warmth (father)	378.17	428.95	46,748.00	< 0.001
Friendship quality	631.10	654.47	114,942.00	0.398
Resistance to peer influence	567.38	649.33	102,577.50	< 0.001

Table 4
Logistic Regression Analysis for Gang Involvement Six Months Prior to Entering the Juvenile Justice System (N = 720)

	B	SE	OR
Parental knowledge	-0.30*	0.13	0.74
Parental monitoring	-0.22	0.13	0.80
Parental warmth (mother)	-0.005	0.17	1.00
Parental warmth (father)	-0.18	0.13	0.83
Resistance to peer influence	-0.60**	0.18	0.55
Gender (ref = male)			
Female	-0.97*	0.42	0.38
Age at baseline	-0.03	0.10	0.97
Constant	3.57	1.83	35.56
-2 Log likelihood	625.095		
χ^2 (8)	36.43***		
Nagelkerke R ²	0.08		

Note. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Discussion

- ❖ Higher parental knowledge and higher resistance to peer influence can decrease the likelihood of gang involvement six months prior to entering the juvenile justice system.
- ❖ Even though the current study could not provide significant data to indicate friendship quality as a protective factor, it is essential to continue researching the impacts of positive peer relationships.
- ❖ **Conclusion:** continuing research and identifying protective factors can guide policy changes and develop educational resources and programs to support youth at risk for gang involvement.