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## Causes And Effects Of Gang Violence In Toronto

The City of Toronto claims it's safety and security, ensuring those who live there how little they need to worry. But, for those who have lived through the shocking violence that isn't shown on TV, Toronto is not the city it claims to be. Toronto is a dangerous place for so many people, but it doesn't have to be. Gun related gang violence is devastatingly common, in a way that flies under the radar of most people who don't see or hear of it first hand. As the homicide rates in the city are increasing, so is gang violence and gang affiliations. But, the ideology behind it is more complicated than what is depicted on television. Although there are some measures being taken to prevent gang violence in North America, not enough is being done to understand the perpetrators of such crimes. In this day and age of gun related crimes increasing at a shocking rate, it is crucial to focus on resources for youth gang members, the future of the safety of this country, or more accurately, how safe it should be. This topic is very important to talk about, as it has been previously ignored by the media. The purpose of this report is to highlight proper prevention, and where to implement such precautionary resources, subgroups ignored by researchers in the past, important things that aren't being given enough thought that need to be given the same amount of attention as anything else and to learn that the world we live in today has changed. Overall, the purpose of this report is to learn what leads to gang violence and what has caused gang violence to spike in the first place.

### RESULTS OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Gun violence in general has become the crime epidemic of our time. With staggering rates that go above and beyond most other cities. In 2018, as compared to previous years, the homicide rate skyrocketed with 91 reported homicides by november (Figure 1), these numbers higher than any in the past decade. So many factors contribute to the violence of gang mentality, especially amongst youth, who are now influenced by so much more than their past counterparts when taking into account social media. Aproximately 50 million dollars is going into the prevention of gang culture in Toronto, and the country still implements the same methods of prevention from previous years, as they have been known to work in past circumstances (Brillinger, 2018). In the estimated 430 active gangs in Canada, youth aged 12 - 24 are responsible for a third of gun related gang activity, and 94% of youth gang members are male. These young gang members account for 80% of all violent crimes committed by adolescents. Upon further research, it was discovered that although indiginous people take up 20% of gangs in Canada, there are no programs that focus solely on preventing gang affiliation amongst aboriginal peoples, as well as there are little to no programs for youth women or immigrants in gangs (Northcott 2018). Figure 2 shows the rate of crimes amongst youth in canada by province, Nunavut being the highest, followed closely by the Northwest Territories. However, this does not change the high rates that remain in all other provinces. Violence is unquestionably a major part of gang culture. 91% of criminal gang members have reported being involved in fights, and 51% report regularly carrying a gun or knife on their person at all times. For the most part, people who were former gang members, or those part of gangs who do not participate in deviant acts showed much lower rates of fights or carrying weapons. Furthermore, those who are in currently active criminal gangs, have reported being alienated and victimized by others. 79% of them report being assaulted in the past, and 45% of which were assaults using a weapon. All of the people that were surveyed were all highschool

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students. Within these students (male and female; 14-17) statistics proved that once in a gang, gun-violence and possession of a weapon increased and the likelihood of selling drugs did not. After a study on the geography in major cities, research showed that gangs were much more common in neighborhoods alienated by low economic status, and having a high proportion of visible minorities. (Bania, 2009, 90-97) Figure 3 is a depiction of the concentration of violent crimes based in different areas of the city, red being high in crime, and blue being low. All these results tell something in themselves, and such facts are undeniable. What happens in further analysis is what will lead to real results.

## DISCUSSION

All of the statistics and facts found above are important tools to not only understanding the mentality of gang-members, as well as the proper way to go when it comes to preventing involvement in gangs from the get-go. The youth are so important when it comes to preventing gang violence. Most of the people in gangs joined long before adulthood. As they are more vulnerable and susceptible to influences of those around them. Living in a certain neighborhood that is high in gang culture, would make those surrounded by crime and violence from a young age so much more accustomed to that lifestyle. Furthermore, when one's entire social circle is armed, peer-pressure would play a huge role in making that person want to arm themselves. When living in a violent world, one feels safer fighting violence with violence. Jose Vivar was a former gang member in Toronto who tells his story, about what lured him into the life of a criminal gang, and more specifically what lured him into the world of guns. In his article, Vivar states: "As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a gangster. I wanted to be a man's man, like the fearless cowboy in a movie with a cigarette dangling from his lips, and I wanted to own a gun... (Films) portrayed men in gangs as a family. This family would demand respect, would make money in unison and eat at a dinner table together. I wanted, more than anything, to be a part of that kind of family... Growing up, I experienced trauma. I did not witness violence at home but experienced it in the world with my friends... I had to survive – so I joined a gang." (Vivar 2019). To begin with, Vivar explains the idealistic aspect of gang life. That type of ride or die bond shared amongst powerful and protective brotherly figures is undeniably appealing to those who don't have or see that kind of relationship anywhere other than on television. Figure 4 shows a gang from a hollywood film, one that glorifies the sense of community in gangs. Adding on to that, when surrounded - like I previously stated - by a certain way of living, it is human nature to 'follow the leader' and do the same in your own life. Also, gangs and violence are in many ways a means of safety for kids and adults who have witnessed or lived through acts of violence. To carry a gun gives those people a sense of security in a world that dreams so to be necessary. On another note, something that often comes up in statistics is the large amount of Indigenous and African-Canadian youth in gangs. With a lowered economic standpoint lowered already by being in a gang, it is only lowered further when taking into account that young people aged 16 - 29 have a much lower economic status than any other age in today's economy. Furthermore, gang activity and violent crime can often be traced back to neighborhoods of lower-income and high populations of visible minorities. (Bania, 2009, 90-97) This all seems to come down to one common denominator. Alienation -in many ways- has become the cause of joining gangs and committing violent crimes in, and even outside of gangs. It causes people to search for the community they aren't given any opportunity to have, particularly young people, who need that resource more than most. Alienation is known to greatly affect people's mental health and leads to immense vulnerability. Also, once in the gang members are further alienated by society at large, through their

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differentiating values and beliefs compared to that of the westernized world. Criminologists, psychologists and sociologists have studied and enforced many ways to attempt ending gangs and gang violence. However, there are little to no people having been through the gang world and come out on the other side in the works to try and change the paths of youth heading in that direction. (Vivar 2019) In order to help them, it is important to exchange what they think they need for something else with equal gain. It is so important that they have outreach opportunities early on in life, and that maybe things can be changed for the better (Totten 2009).

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

To summarize, the rates in gang violence have certainly increased in the past decade, and the proper measures aren't being taken to understand youth in gangs, and the role they play in the state of gang violence in this country. There Are so many factors and people being left out such as indigenous peoples, African Canadians, and all youth in general, as they are the key to ending gang violence. However, the world has undeniably changed, with so much more to take into account than has been accounted for, like social media and segregation. But, with the help of those who have been in the same place as the young kids coming after them, genuine change can be made for those who have been alienated by the world they want to leave behind.