

Montreal's Gangs, Guns and Crimes

1. Overview

- In 2006, 3% of all crimes committed in Montreal were related to gang's criminal activities.¹
- A 2006 survey by Montreal's SPVM found out that street gangs are the most significant fear of the island's population.²
- Youth crime rate has increased between 1999 and 2003. The rate of youth violent crime (homicide, assault, sexual assault and robbery) has remained relatively stable over the past decade.³ In 2006, Quebec was the only province that reported a decrease in youth crime rate.⁴
- Youths who commit violent crimes are more likely to use a gun than adults.
- Most victims of youth gang crime are other youth gang members.⁵
- 2.8% of youth use a firearm to commit a crime.
- Law enforcement representatives identify youth and guns as an existing and growing problem.⁶
- 15% (120) of all guns recovered by the SPVM as of June 2007 came from street gang members.⁷
- In 2007, 170 guns belonging to street gangs were recovered by the SPVM including pistols, revolvers, shotguns, rifles, submachine guns and semi-automatic pistols. In 2006, the SPVM's gang unit seized 156 guns.⁸
- Of the Montreal Police Service's 746 arrests for the first five months of 2007, 128 were of minors.⁹

2. Montreal Youth Gangs and Guns Data

- 34 % of youth in Montreal High Schools have seen another youth carrying a weapon at school.¹⁰
- An Ontario study estimates that approximately 14 800 students (one in 50) across the province between grade 9 and 12 have carried a handgun to school at least one time during the 12 months leading to the survey. Carrying a handgun is significantly more significant among male (3.8%) than female (<0.5%). At every grade, there is an increase of youth carrying handguns. There were no significant differences between rural and non-rural students.¹¹

In a study of 1400 students between 14 and 17 years old in 8 Montreal High School¹²:

- 2.2% of Montreal's students say they have brought a gun to their school.
- 4.7% of Montreal's teens say they have previously threatened someone with a gun.
- 41.2% of Montreal's students say they have brought a weapon such as a gun, knife, pepper spray, bat on school ground.
- 23.6% of Montreal's students say they have at least one friend that carries a weapon at school.

The same study questioned 14-17 years old drop-out High School kids in Montreal and many believes their parents, friends or acquaintances could help them acquire a gun.

- 38.2% of Montreal's dropout youth interviewed said they would be capable to purchase a gun in one day.
- 12.7% of Montreal's dropout youth interviewed said they could purchase a gun in less than one hour.
- One third of the respondent believed a friend or an acquaintance could sell them a gun.

- One out of five believe they could purchase a gun "in the street", on the black market. 5% of teenagers believe they could legally purchase a gun in a store, even though law forbids the sale of guns to minors.

3. Guns and Gang Culture

Across North America, guns figure prominently in gang-related violence and criminal activity but their usage vary. Gang members use guns for a variety of reasons: self-protection, demonstration, and/or enhancement of status, commission of crimes, intimidation, and/or inflict violence on criminal peers, law enforcement community, general public.¹³ A Montreal community worker said that "*some carry a gun for self-defence, because they are afraid. Others believe that their best defense is to attack.*"(transl.)¹⁴

Among street gangs members, it has value to have the reputation of a shooter. According to Chantal Fredette, a criminologist and gang specialist with the Centre jeunesse de Montréal, reputation and honour are at the foundation of these groups. "*The status of a member is directly linked to his capacity to subject to violence and to be subjected to it.*"¹⁵ In a recent trial where a 20 years-old Toronto resident was charged for shooting a 21 year-old in a public park over a dispute that began with a cigarette, the young man testified that he was carrying a loaded handgun because he felt "cool" when he had the weapon.¹⁶ Researchers have documented, in the United States for example, that guns are valued by youth beyond their usefulness as tools for crime. Guns have value as symbols for social status, self-worth, and personal power, this symbolic value giving guns a central role in the street's violence "scripts".¹⁷ In explaining why he got his first gun at age 16 a young man said: "*cause I wanted to be bad....I wanted to be like I had a reputation to keep so maybe with a gun would have boost it up a little bit more.*"¹⁸

Youth who have witnessed drive-by shootings, untimely deaths of friends and family members, and killings over personal slights may be likely to have the perception that gun violence is one of the few options available for resolving disputes.¹⁹

Access to firearms increases the risks that trivial disputes and minor confrontations be elevated in severity. "*When we ask 'Why did you shoot this guy?' It's 'He bumped in to me,' 'He looked at my girl the wrong way'. It's not like they're riding around doing drive-by shootings. It's arguments-stupid arguments over stupid things.*"²⁰

In Montreal as in other cities, the type of guns used by gangs varies. Pistols would be the preferred guns of Montreal's street gang members as they contain more bullets and can be recharged more easily than revolvers. Some gang members carry larger pistols while others opt for smaller models, as a SPVM police officers said, they can be easily dissimulated in handbags of girls of the entourage.²¹

Pop culture and media significantly impact public perception of youth gangs and gun violence²²

- Glorifies gang lifestyle
- Contributes to the adoption of linguistic codes and dress style associated with American gangs
- Heightens public perception of gang activity in their community
- All gang members presented in the same light, without recognizing diversity in membership and activities
- Focus on violent actions of gang members

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- ¹Tristan Pélouquin. "Gangs de rues: la police se fait rassurante" La Presse, June 14 2007.
- ² Jacques Nadeau. "Bleus, Blancs, Rouges, Noires", Le Devoir, April 1 and 2 2006.
- ³ RCMP, 2006, op. cit.
- ⁴ Warren Silver "Crime Statistics in Canada, 2006." Statistics Canada. Juristat vol. 27, no. 5. 2007
- ⁵ RCMP. Feature Focus: Youth, Gangs and Guns. 2006.
- ⁶ RCMP, 2006, op. cit.
- ⁷ Mélanie Brisson. "Des voyous armés jusqu'aux dents" Journal de Montréal, July 25 2007.
- ⁸ Mélanie Brisson. "Possession d'armes à feu L'ardeur des voyous" Journal de Montréal, July 25 2007.
- ⁹ Service de police de la ville de Montréal. Actualités GDR. June 13, 2007.
- ¹⁰ http://www.iforum.umontreal.ca/Forum/2006-2007/20070205/R_3.html
- ¹¹ Center for Addiction and Mental Health, "Population Studies ebulletin" January/February 2006, Vol. 7, no. 1. http://www.camh.net/Research/Areas_of_research/Population_Life_Course_Studies/eBulletins/ebv7n1_GunCarrying_2005OSDUS.pdf
- ¹² Marco Fortier, "Des armes dans nos écoles" Journal de Montréal, August 25, 2006.
- ¹³ RCMP. 2006. Op. cit.
- ¹⁴ Marco Fortier, "Une arme à feu en moins d'une heure", Journal de Montréal, August 15, 2006.
- ¹⁵ Mélanie Brisson. "100 meurtres reliés aux gangs" Journal de Montréal, January 9, 2003.
- ¹⁶ Shannon Kari "One killer in Toronto's 'summer of the gun' sentenced" National Post, June 29, 2007.
- ¹⁷ Wilkinson, D. L., & Fagan, J. (1996). Role of firearms in violence "scripts": The dynamics of gun events among adolescent males. *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 59, 55-66. Pp. 66-89.
- ¹⁸ Wilkinson and Fagan, 1996 op.cit.
- ¹⁹ Wilkinson and Fagan, 1996 op.cit.
- ²⁰ Police Commissioner Sylvester M. Johnson (Philadelphia) quoted in "New York Time", "Violent Crime Rising Sharply in Some Cities", February 12, 2006.
- ²¹ Mélanie Brisson. "Des voyous armés jusqu'aux dents" Journal de Montréal, July 25 2007.
- ²² Taken from RCMP. 2006. Op. Cit