

# Youth at Risk and Gangs in Montreal

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The following is a compilation of the results of studies of criminalized youth gang members.

## 1. Prevalence

- One of the key findings of the project is that the very notion of “gangs” is subject to interpretation. Many of the youth workers and young people we spoke to suggested that there were often groups of young people who were stigmatized with the label even though their main activities and purposes were primarily social (often as a function of limited prospects and social activities) and only occasionally did members get involved in criminal activities. These are in distinct contrast to criminal gangs which are better organized.
- Overall a small percentage of young people belong to criminal “gangs” though many are part of groups.
- SPVM estimates that 99% of Montreal’s young people are not criminals.<sup>1</sup>
- The 2000 Toronto Youth Crime and Victimization Survey used a random survey of approximately 3400 high school students and 400 street youth. The surveyed showed that a majority of high school students reported they have never been in a gang (89%), while 11% of the students reported past or present gang experience. Among street youth, this proportion increased to 26%.
- Long-term consequences of gang involvement have been documented, persisting well into adulthood. At age thirty the participants to a survey of past gang members were much more likely to report being unemployed, receiving welfare, committing crime, or carrying a gun than peers who had never joined a gang. The risk of negative consequences correlates with the length of gang involvement.<sup>2</sup>

### Estimated Number of Youth Gangs and Youth Gang Members, Nationally and by Province, 2002<sup>3</sup>

Area	Number of Youth Gangs	Number of Youth Gang Members	Youth Gang Members per 1,000 pop.
Canada	434	7071	0.24
British Columbia	102	1027	0.26
Alberta	42	668	0.22
Saskatchewan	28	1315	1.34
Manitoba	15	171	0.15
Ontario	216	3320	0.29
Québec *	25	533	0.07
Nova Scotia	6	37	0.04
New Brunswick	0	0	0
Prince Edward Island	0	0	0
Newfoundland and Labrador	0	0	0
Yukon	0	0	0
Northwest Territories	0	0	0
Nunavut	0	0	0

\* Notes: Data was collected on only four police agencies in the Province of Québec. As a result, the percentage of jurisdictions reporting active youth gangs in Québec (i.e., 100%) must not be considered representative of the entire province.

## 2. Age

- Street gangs recruits youth of all ages, including 10-12 years old in primary schools. It is estimated that currently 20% of street gang members in Montreal are 11-16 years old, 60% 17-28 years-old and 20% 29-35 years old.<sup>4</sup>
- A representative from Batshaw Youth and Family Centres claimed that: "Baby-faced boys as young as 12 are being recruited by Montreal street gangs to sell drugs and transport guns (...) Gang leaders believe the younger the recruit, the easier it is for them to "run drugs or even run guns."<sup>5</sup>

## 3. Risk Factors

- There is a lack of consensus in the literature on the definition of gangs, risk factors and the signs of belonging to a gang. Peer pressure and a desire for acceptance may draw young people to get involve in street gangs.<sup>6</sup> According to 2006 RCMP report on youth gangs and guns, US research suggests that youth gangs flourish in areas where resources, opportunities and support are limited. However, no exact set of risk factors can definitely predict gang membership.<sup>7</sup>
- In comparison with other young offenders, gang members come more frequently from unprivileged families, they most often have parents involved in criminal activities. In Montreal's Latino gangs, half of the young gang members already have a family member involved in the gang.<sup>8</sup>
- Half of the young offenders and gang members come from single-parent family.
- If a teenager says that he knows one gang member, there is a 75% chance that he is in a gang.<sup>9</sup>
- Gang members often have emotional, psychological and social problems.
- While behaviour problems (e.g., violence), low self-esteem, need for glorification and rejection of standards are often found in adolescents, they can also be indicators of potential problems.

### Risk factors to youth violence

- Aggression, anti-social behaviour
- Family violence
- Poor parenting: lack of emotional interaction, lack of parental supervision, inconsistent, harsh discipline
- Impulsivity, desire for power, imitative

### Risk factors that may contribute to the emergence and continued existence of youth gangs.<sup>10</sup>

- Socio-economic : poverty and unemployment, actual or perceived disadvantage
- Family-related: dysfunctional, abusive or negligent family
- School: poor academic performance and low attachment to schools
- Community: disorganised, crime-prone and unsafe factors that contribute to marginalization of youth
- Negative individual/biological factors: anti-social attitudes, Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

### Push/Pull Factors contributing to gang involvement<sup>11</sup>

#### Individual/Family factors

- early substance abuse
- antisocial/hostile/aggressive behaviours
- social deprivation or isolation
- family history of gang involvement

- parental neglect/family structure
- low academic achievement/ school drop out or truancy
- unemployed/underemployed/few employment prospects

#### Economic/Societal/Community Factors

- social upheaval
- poverty, income inequality
- racism/xenophobia
- proliferation of gang culture

#### **Common reasons to belong to a street gang<sup>12</sup>**

- Stand-in family- They join a gang to get attention and a sense of belonging.
- Recognition- Some people join gangs to feel important if they are jobless or doing poorly at school. If they don't see themselves as smart, leaders or star athletes, they join groups where they can succeed by different standards.
- Tradition and hero imitation- Some join because people they admire- family members or others- were or are gang members.
- Protection- Some join gangs to feel safe. Fellow gang members help protect them from outsiders or help them get revenge against others.
- Threats- Some feel real or imagined pressure to join a gang. Some are actually threatened by gang members if they refuse to join.
- Lack of choices- Lack of opportunities, poor life choices and heavy peer pressure can result in a young person becoming a gang member.
- Money- The desire or need for money can be hard for a young person to turn down. The money from criminal activity and illegal drug can be highly attractive.

#### **Sources of satisfaction fulfilled by gangs<sup>13</sup>**

- A place to belong
- A family
- Physical protection
- Social support
- Solidarity
- An opportunity to develop self esteem
- Validation
- Money
- Power
- Status

## **4. Gender**

- A majority of gang members are male.
- In Canada, there are female gangs and there are girls belonging to street gangs.
- Their motivations to join the gangs are similar than those of their boy's counterpart.
- They generally participate in most of the same activities as the male gang members, and may also be sexually exploited through prostitution. "*The female gang members rank themselves and are often invisible to the males- until they're needed for something. Female members take many of the same risks but don't get the same benefits as male members. They often suffer abuse from male gang members.*"<sup>14</sup>
- According to criminologist Chantal Fredette of the Centre jeunesse de Montréal some young girls use violence to earn male gang members' respect.<sup>15</sup>
- Peer relationships appear to be the most significant determinant of female gang membership.<sup>16</sup> Some girls may become involved in gangs because of previous victimization or fear to be victimized in the future. Some gang may find that affiliating themselves with

gangs is the only way to protect themselves. Family relationship is a modest motivator for female involvement. Some girls may feel that gang membership is a way to gain respect.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Risk factors for girl's involvement in street gangs<sup>18</sup>**

- Come from poverty
- Live in inner-city areas and areas of high crime
- Be young, single, unemployed, undereducated
- Have suffered personal abuse- sexual or physical
- Be or have been involved in the child welfare system
- Have been involved in criminal acts

### **5. Ethnicity/Origin**

- Half of the young gang members were born outside of the country, in comparison 8 out of 10 young offenders were born in Quebec.
- Both victims and offenders in gang related incidents are likely to belong to the same racial group. In 2003, 58% of those who were shot in Toronto were the race of the suspect or the accused, 71% of those victims were black. 94% of these shooting incidents were believed to be gang-related.<sup>19</sup>
- Canadian statistics establish that aboriginal youth are more vulnerable to gang recruitment and organized crime than non-Aboriginal youth and they are increasing in numbers and influence in some part of the country (particularly in Western Canada).<sup>20</sup>

#### **Ethnicity/Race of Youth Gang Members, Nationally and by Province, 2002<sup>21</sup>**

Area	African Canadian	Latino/Hispanic	Caucasian/White	E. Indian/Pakistani	Asian	Middle Eastern	First Nations	# of observations
Canada	25%	6%	18%	14%	12%	3%	22\$	39
British Columbia	5	8	22	14	37	5	10	11
Alberta	0	33	8	0	0	0	58	1
Sask.	0	2	2	0	0	0	96	5
Manitoba	9	3	26	3	0	0	58	4
Ontario	36	6	21	21	8	4	4	12
Quebec	51	12	21	2	9	5	0	4
Nova Scotia	48	0	47	0	0	0	9	2
New Brunswick	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0
PEI	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0
Nfld & Labrador	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0
Yukon	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0
NW Territories	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0
Nunavut	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0

### **6. Geographic Distribution**

- According to the SPVM "The street gangs are scattered around the island and constantly moving from one place to another."<sup>22</sup>

- According to Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, street gangs particularly target the neighbourhoods in Notre Dame de Grace, Little Burgundy and St. Henri.

## 7. Crime

- The Centre d'expertise sur la délinquance des jeunes has suggested that 6 to 10% of young offenders that are responsible of more than half of the crimes committed by youth in Montréal. This small group is composed entirely of street gang members.
- The type of offences committed by gang members range from minor to serious, such as: graffiti, burglary, theft, vandalism, motor vehicle theft, arson, assault, drive-by shooting, selling crack, powder cocaine, marijuana and other drugs, home invasion, intimidation, rape, shooting, and homicide. Gang members may also engage in frauds, pirating and selling movies and music, identity theft, witness identification and intimidation.<sup>23</sup>
- Emerging gangs model themselves on major gangs but their activities are less structured and more improvised. The violence of this type of gang is more spontaneous. These gangs includes teenagers with recurring activities including actively recruiting youth of all backgrounds, in many public places such as schools, parks, around metro stations, etc. This situation leads to people frequenting these locations feeling insecurity.
- Most victims of youth gang-related violent crimes are other gang members.<sup>24</sup>

## 8. Firearms

- Gang life focuses on reputation, respect and retaliation. Gang members build their reputation, they demand the respect they feel they deserved and if they fail at obtaining it, they retaliate, often with violent acts. Firearms play a role in all of these stages.<sup>25</sup>
- Studies of the overall use of guns in the United States have come to the conclusion that guns are used to threaten and intimidate far more often than they are used in self defence.<sup>26</sup>
- Access to firearms increases the risks that trivial disputes and minor confrontations be elevated in severity.

## 9. Possible Indicators of Gang Memberships

These indicators must be considered together to be deemed meaningful. Some of these behaviours may just be the usual signs of teenagehood.<sup>27</sup>

- Seems to dress according to a specific dress code (specific clothing)
- Wears clothing or owns items that he or she could not normally afford to buy
- Has less and less interest in school
- Has lost interest in former friends and activities
- Has new, older friends identified by nicknames, whom the parent has never met
- Consumes alcohol and drugs
- Goes to street gang Internet chat sites
- Uses hateful or racist language
- Has been the victim of crime or fears being victimized
- Has had problems with the police
- Owns a weapon

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- <sup>1</sup> SPVM. Phenomenon. Available on-line at: [http://www.spvm.qc.ca/EN/service/1\\_4\\_3\\_1\\_phenomene.asp](http://www.spvm.qc.ca/EN/service/1_4_3_1_phenomene.asp)
- <sup>2</sup> Judith Greene and Kevin Pranis. "Gang Wars: The Failure of Enforcement Tactics and the Need for Effective Public Safety Strategies." Justice Policy Institute Report. July 2007 [http://justicepolicy.tempwebpage.com/reports\\_jl/7-10-07\\_gangs/GangsFullReport2.pdf](http://justicepolicy.tempwebpage.com/reports_jl/7-10-07_gangs/GangsFullReport2.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> Astwood Strategy Corporation. 2002 Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs. 2003.
- <sup>4</sup> SPVM, op. cit.
- <sup>5</sup> Katherine Wilton, "Street gangs hooking boys as young as 12", Montreal Gazette, June 12, 2007.
- <sup>6</sup> Manitoba Justice. Project Gang-proof a Handbook for Communities and Families. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.
- <sup>7</sup> Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Environmental Scan: Features: Focus on Youth Gangs. Ottawa: Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2006.
- <sup>8</sup> Caroline Touzin "MS-13, MS-18: une haine irrationnelle" La Presse, 8 juin 2007.
- <sup>9</sup> Jonathan Fowle. "Most of Toronto's gun deaths involve gangs, black victims" Globe and Mail, January 7, 2004.
- <sup>10</sup> RCMP. A Research Report on Youth Gangs: Problems, Perspective and Priorities available at: [http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ccaps/youth\\_gangs\\_e.htm](http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ccaps/youth_gangs_e.htm)
- <sup>11</sup> Taken from RCMP. 2006. Op. Cit
- <sup>12</sup> Taken from Manitoba Justice. Op. Cit
- <sup>13</sup> SPVM, op. cit.
- <sup>14</sup> Manitoba Justice. Op. cit.
- <sup>15</sup> Martin Bisailon, "Gang de rues Obligées de déménager", Journal de Montréal, June 25, 2007.
- <sup>16</sup> Chaney J. Walker-Barnes, Rafael M. Arrue, & Craig A. Mason. "Girls and Gangs: Identifying Risk Factors for Female Gang Involvement" presented at the meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence, San Diego, California (February 1998) <http://www.csgv.ca/counselor/assets/GirlsGangsandRisks.pdf>
- <sup>17</sup> Walker-Barnes, Arrue & Mason, 1998. Op. Cit.
- <sup>18</sup> Manitoba Justice. Op. cit.
- <sup>19</sup> Jonathan Fowle. "Most of Toronto's gun deaths involve gangs, black victims" Globe and Mail, January 7, 2004.
- <sup>20</sup> Richter-White, Holly. Direct and Indirect Impacts of Organized Crime on Youth, as Offenders and Victims. Ottawa: Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Research and Evaluation Branch, Community Contract and Aboriginal Policing Service, 2003; RCMP, 2006.
- <sup>21</sup> Astwood Strategy Corporation, op. cit. 2003.
- <sup>22</sup> <sup>22</sup> SPVM. Phenomenon. Available on-line at: [http://www.spvm.qc.ca/EN/service/1\\_4\\_3\\_1\\_phenomene.asp](http://www.spvm.qc.ca/EN/service/1_4_3_1_phenomene.asp)
- <sup>23</sup> RCMP, A Research Report on Youth Gangs: Problems, Perspective and Priorities [http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ccaps/youth\\_gangs\\_e.htm](http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ccaps/youth_gangs_e.htm)
- <sup>24</sup> Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Environmental Scan: Features: Focus on Youth Gangs. Ottawa: Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2006.
- <sup>25</sup> 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.
- <sup>26</sup> D Hemenway, D Azrael, M Miller "Gun use in the United States: results from two national surveys" *Injury Prevention* 2000;6:263-267
- <sup>27</sup> SPVM. Profile of a street gang member. Available on-line at: [http://www.spvm.qc.ca/EN/service/1\\_4\\_3\\_2\\_profil-membre-gang-de-rue.asp](http://www.spvm.qc.ca/EN/service/1_4_3_2_profil-membre-gang-de-rue.asp)