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Gang Affiliation and Adolescent Violence: A Sociological Exploration of Juvenile Delinquency

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ABSTRACT

Today's societies are increasingly concerned about the emergence of young gang culture and its link to violence. Socialization through peers, family, school, and the community are crucial in forming identity, conduct, and moral perspective during the formative years of adolescence. Teenagers are more inclined to join gangs in search of acceptance and notoriety when these socializing agents are unable to offer proper direction and assistance. Gangs frequently act as substitute social institutions, promoting illegal activity, violent behaviors, and group identity allegiance. Sociological theories like Differential Association, Labeling, and Social Control show how social stigmatization, poor institutional ties, and frequent exposure to delinquent peers all lead to adolescent delinquency. In addition to the individuals engaged, gang-related violence has an impact on families, communities, and society as a whole, feeding cycles of social instability, crime, and fear. Stronger family bonds, inclusive learning and community settings, supportive peer networks, and social integration opportunities are all essential components of successful prevention and intervention programs. Bangladeshi society faces many unusual circumstances that are not part of its normal routine. Some important issues in Bangladesh's temporary stage include an increase in assault, especially of children, the killing of guardians by future generations and vice versa, more conjugal and non-traditional sexual relationships, a fixation on porn, the use of opiates and drugs, especially Yaba, by young men and girls, and so on. This article investigates how the socialization process contributes to the rise of teen gang culture and violence in society using secondary data. This study emphasizes that teen gang culture and violence are less about individual moral failure and more about distorted socialization processes, highlighting the importance of sociologically informed approaches to reduce juvenile delinquency and promote a cohesive society.

Keywords: Teen gang culture; Juvenile delinquency; Socialization; Youth violence, Vulnerable

Introduction

Teen gang culture is one of the most significant social issues that modern societies are dealing with today. Young people who join gangs often get involved in violent activities, criminal actions, and behaviors that go against social norms. From petty crimes to murder, stalking to rape, mugging to drug abuse - teen gangs' violence is increasing day by day. And it becomes a daily headline on the newspaper. These groups are regularly supported by a segment of administering party pioneers, who go about as the persuasive "Elder brother". The greater part of the gangsters' exchange and misuse drugs, while some have illicit guns and neighborhood weapons to hotshot their solidarity (Klein & Maxson, 2006). The gang regularly participates in turf-battle over trifles. Criminologists dread that it will be hard to restore the gangsters to ordinary life. Gang Culture has consistently been nearby. The fundamental driver of this is struggle among individuals. A few parts of wrongdoing exist

normally inside society; some others emerge from destitution and separation (Boerman & Knapp, 2017). These actions not only put their own future at risk but also create danger for the people around them and weaken the sense of safety and unity in their communities. Although many people think that youth crime is caused by personal problems or bad character, studies in sociology show that it's more about the influence of the environment around them. Socialization, which is the process of learning what is acceptable and unacceptable in society, is especially important during the teenage years. This is a time when young people are forming their sense of identity, understanding right and wrong, and building connections with others. Teenagers are naturally influenced by their families, friends, schools, and neighborhoods. When these important parts of their life don't provide support, guidance, or a sense of belonging, teens might look for acceptance in groups that are not accepted by society, like gangs. Gangs can give teenagers a sense of identity, protection, and appreciation, which they might not get elsewhere. However, these groups often encourage violent behavior, illegal activities, and loyalty to harmful rules, making harmful actions seem normal. To understand why teenagers join gangs, we need to look at sociological theories such as Differential Association, Labeling, and Social Control. These theories explain how people pick up behaviors through their interactions with others, how society labels certain people as "bad," and how weak support systems in families and communities can lead to delinquency. The juvenile correctional facilities in Bangladesh, exists in name only. These facilities need to be developed into proper correctional institutions (Haque, 2021). Being the child of a single-parent who is often absent from the home and lacks adequate support, can be considered a risk factor. The negative influence of a friend Footnote or sibling can be another.

- Negative impacts in the adolescent's life
- Limited connection to the local area
- Over-dependence on enemy of social companions
- Poor parental oversight
- Alcohol and chronic drug use
- Poor instructive or business potential
- A requirement for acknowledgment and having a place
- Family disruption, including broken homes and parental medication or potentially liquor misuse
- Social complication, including high neediness and private versatility

The Seattle study found that youngsters and youth are two to multiple times bind to join possess in case they are influenced by these variables (Jualla-Ali& van Oudenhoven, 2009).

This study uses these theories to show that teen violence isn't always a personal choice but is often caused by bigger social problems. It also highlights how socialization can both lead to and help prevent delinquency. In addition to this, the article looks at the effects of gang violence on society and explores ways to prevent it. These strategies focus on improving family support, building stronger communities, and making schools more effective at helping students. Understanding these factors is key to creating comprehensive solutions that can reduce crime among young people and help make communities safer and more connected.

Theoretical Framework

To truly understand the dynamics of teen gang culture and juvenile delinquency, it's essential to build a strong theoretical base that connects how young people are shaped by their social environments to their tendency towards violent behavior.

By looking at sociological theories, we gain valuable insights into why teenagers might get involved in gang activities and how the world around them can influence such choices.

1. Differential Association Theory

One important theory is the Differential Association Theory, introduced by Edwin Sutherland in 1947. This theory suggests that criminal behavior isn't something people are born with, but instead something they learn over time through their interactions with others. People pick up behaviors, beliefs, and ways of thinking from the people around them, especially when those people either approve of or actively encourage actions that go against the rules or are illegal.

For teenagers, this means that if they regularly spend time with friends who are involved in delinquent activities, they are more likely to start acting out in similar ways.

Joining a gang can be especially powerful because it gives youth repeated chances to see, understand, and practice violent or illegal behavior. This consistent exposure helps turn deviant actions into something that seems normal and even expected within the gang. Once someone is deeply involved, it becomes really hard for them to break away from this cycle of harmful behavior. Studies that use existing data, like police reports and surveys of young people, back up the ideas from Differential Association Theory.

These studies show that young people who are part of gangs are more likely to commit violent crimes because of the influence and pressure from their peers. For instance, research by (Vitaro, Brendgen, & Tremblay, 2000) found that being connected to groups of delinquent peers strongly predicts that a young person will go on to commit violent crimes. Their work shows how peer relationships shape a person's identity and how being part of a gang can make violent behavior more likely by reinforcing bad norms and offering social approval for such actions. In this way, Sutherland's theory explains how gang culture continues to grow and last over time, passing down from one generation of youth to the next.

Instead of blaming individuals for being morally weak, the theory highlights how behavior is shaped by the social environment. It shows that the influence of friends and the social setting play a major role in why youth violence keeps happening.

2. Labeling Theory

Another important idea in criminology is called "Labeling Theory", which was first introduced by Howard Becker in 1963. This theory helps us understand that deviant behavior isn't just about what someone does but is also deeply connected to how others, especially important groups in society, react to that behavior. When schools, the legal system, or even friends start to give negative labels to young people words like "delinquent," "troublemaker," or "bad", these labels can become part of which that person sees themselves as. Over time, this can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where the person starts acting in ways that match the label they've been given, which makes the original behavior seem even more justified, and the cycle continues.

Studies that look at things over a long period of time, called "longitudinal research", back up this idea. For example, (Bernburg & Krohn 2003) looked at how often negative labels are used and how that affects teenagers. Their research showed that when young people are repeatedly labeled as delinquents, they are more likely to keep getting into trouble and get involved with gangs. Once someone is seen as a delinquent, they often find it harder to get into regular activities like school or jobs. This makes them feel even more out of place in

society and pushes them closer to groups that are involved in deviant or criminal behavior. This process does not just limit their chances to improve their lives, it actually helps keep the problems going and can lead to more crime and violence in the long run.

3. Social Control Theory

The Social Control Theory, introduced by (Hirschi, 1969), stands out as one of the most significant and widely accepted explanations in the field of criminology when it comes to understanding why some individuals engage in delinquent behavior. Unlike other theories that focus on the questions like “why do people commit crimes?” Hirschi chose to look at the opposite question: “why don’t people commit crimes?” His approach was groundbreaking because it shifted the focus from what leads people to commit crimes to what keeps them from doing so. According to his theory, all people are naturally inclined toward deviant behavior, but strong social connections and relationship ties help prevent them from acting on these inclinations. If these social connections weaken or disappear, the chance of someone engaging in criminal or delinquent behavior, including joining gangs, rises significantly.

Hirschi outlined four essential components that make up the social bond, which help to keep individuals connected to society and away from criminal activities:

1. **Attachment:** It refers to the emotional connection a person has with important people in their life, such as family members, friends, and teachers. When a young person has strong emotional bonds with others, they are more likely to care about what those people think and what they expect. For instance, if a teenager has a close, supportive relationship with their parents, they are more inclined to avoid delinquent behavior because they want to make their parents proud and not let them down.
2. **Commitment:** It is about how much a person invests in positive, conventional goals like education, a career, and their personal reputation. Teenagers who are deeply committed to achieving success in school or their future job are less likely to take risks that could harm these goals. A good example would be a student who dreams of going to university and, therefore, avoids involvement with gangs or other illegal activities that could interfere with their academic progress.
3. **Involvement:** It means being actively engaged in regular, healthy activities, such as sports, religious groups, or school clubs. When youth are occupied with these kinds of activities, they have less free time and fewer chances to get involved in delinquent behavior. This idea is often summarized by the old saying: “idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” It suggests that when people are not busy with constructive activities, they are more likely to find themselves in trouble.
4. **Belief:** This is the acceptance of social norms, laws, and moral standards. If a person strongly believes in what society considers right and wrong, they are less likely to break the rules. On the other hand, when young people do not believe in these values, they may start to accept delinquent behavior as normal or even acceptable. For example, a youth who has grown up in an environment where crime is common might see it as a way to solve problems without facing consequences.

Hirschi argued that if any of these four bonds weaken, the risk of a young person slipping into delinquency and gang involvement becomes much higher. Situations like broken families, a lack of parental supervision, poor academic performance, or living in a chaotic

community can all lead to weaker social bonds. These weakened ties can, in turn, make it easier for youth to associate with delinquent peers and take part in risky behaviors.

Research has also shown that the Social Control Theory holds up well in real-world situations. For example, (Thornberry, 1994) found that teenagers who had weak connections with their families and schools were more prone to join gangs and participate in violent acts. Similarly, (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993) demonstrated that young people who lacked strong family and community ties, especially in low-income areas, were more likely to engage in delinquent behavior. These studies support Hirschi's idea that strong social bonds act as a protective factor against crime, while the absence of these bonds creates a greater opportunity for criminal behavior to take hold.

Teen Gang Culture in Bangladesh

Teen gang culture in Bangladesh has increasingly become a social concern, particularly in urban centers like Dhaka and Chittagong. Gangs are generally formed by marginalized or disaffected youths who come together to seek identity, protection, power, or economic gain. This culture often manifests in violent behavior, territorial disputes, extortion, and involvement in drug use and trafficking. Though not as institutionalized as in Western societies, gang culture in Bangladesh is deeply tied to political patronage, socioeconomic inequality, and urbanization.

Socioeconomic Inequality

Poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education are key drivers. Many urban youths from slums and low-income families see gang affiliation as a way to survive or gain respect. According to Hossain (2017), the socioeconomic disparity in Dhaka's urban slums fuels youth involvement in gangs as they seek alternative livelihoods and social belonging.

Political Patronage and Student Politics

Political parties often recruit young people, even teenagers, to establish local dominance. These groups sometimes evolve into criminal gangs, providing muscle power during elections or disputes. Suykens and Islam (2015) note that local-level political competition often employs "mastans" (musclemen) and teenagers as enforcers, reinforcing gang activity.

Urbanization and Migration

Rapid urbanization and rural-to-urban migration have disrupted traditional family and community structures. Detached from rural social control, migrant youths in cities become more vulnerable to delinquency.

Media Influence and Globalization

Exposure to international hip-hop culture, violent movies, and social media has influenced Bangladeshi teens in developing identities aligned with gang lifestyle.

Characteristics of Teen Gangs in Bangladesh

Territorial Control: Many gangs dominate neighborhoods, especially in Dhaka's Mirpur, Mohammadpur, and Old Dhaka areas.

Violence and Extortion: Gangs often engage in violent clashes over territory, drugs, or extortion money.

Brotherhood and Identity: Teens view gangs as families, offering them identity and belonging absent in their real lives.

Drug Involvement: Yaba (methamphetamine) and cannabis trade are significant sources of income.

Causes and Socialization Factors

Family Influence: Weak parental supervision, inconsistent discipline, and familial conflict contribute significantly to adolescent gang involvement. Children from broken homes often seek a sense of belonging within peer groups that engage in criminal or violent behavior (Thornberry et al., 1994). Additionally, studies suggest that parental incarceration or substance abuse significantly increases the probability of youth joining gangs, as children internalize antisocial behaviors (Farrington, 2005).

Peer Influence: Adolescents are highly susceptible to peer pressure. Associations with delinquent peers reinforce norms of aggression and criminality. Research shows that peer influence is strongest when adolescents experience social isolation in school or community settings (Hirschi, 1969). Secondary analyses of urban youth highlight that the social networks of adolescents determine the type and frequency of violent behaviors, with gang-affiliated peers providing reinforcement for illegal activities (Miller, 2001).

Community Environment: High-crime neighborhoods, lack of recreational facilities, and social disorganization increase the likelihood of gang formation. Social disorganization theory suggests that the absence of community cohesion and collective efficacy allows criminal subcultures to flourish (Sampson & Groves, 1989). Youth in these environments perceive gangs as protective and empowering structures, offering identity and resources unavailable elsewhere.

Educational and Cultural Factors: School failure, lack of engagement, and exposure to violent media further exacerbates delinquent tendencies. Research indicates that students with poor academic performance or limited educational support are more likely to join gangs as a means of achieving recognition and status (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993). Cultural representations of violence in media and social platforms can also normalize aggressive behavior, influencing adolescents' perception of acceptable conduct (Anderson et al., 2003).

Impact of Teen Gang Violence on Society

Gang violence is not just a local issue. It has wide-ranging effects that extend beyond those directly involved. Its impacts ripple through families, schools, neighborhoods, and broader social systems. These effects go beyond physical harm, undermining safety, trust, and opportunities for community members.

1. Increased Crime Rates and Community Insecurity

One of the most visible consequences of gang activity is the rise in crime rates. Gang presence in a neighborhood often results in higher levels of violent crimes (e.g., shootings, assaults), property crimes (e.g., theft, vandalism), and drug-related offenses. Communities with high gang activity frequently experience an environment of chronic insecurity. Howell (2000) notes that in such neighborhoods, everyday activities like walking at night or attending community events are overshadowed by the fear of violence. This environment discourages social participation and economic engagement, lowering the overall quality of life. Moreover, secondary data analyses reveal that these areas report disproportionately high

levels of youth arrests and violent crimes, which hampers community development and long-term economic growth (Maxson & Klein, 1990).

2. Family Disruption and Intergenerational Effects

Families of gang members face emotional, social, and financial challenges. Parents often live-in constant fear for their children's safety, leading to high levels of emotional distress. Siblings may feel guilt, pressure to join gangs, or alienation from peers. Financial burdens are also common, including legal costs, medical bills, or income loss due to incarceration. These strains can weaken family bonds and foster cycles of disadvantage. Over time, children from such families are more likely to be drawn into delinquent subcultures, reinforcing patterns of intergenerational crime and violence (Farrington, 2005).

3. Educational Disruption and Academic Decline

Schools in gang-affected communities face challenges such as poor student attendance, higher dropout rates, and unsafe learning environments. Students often disengage due to peer influence, fear of gang retaliation, or lack of belief in future opportunities. This disengagement undermines not only individual educational achievement but also the overall learning environment, affecting teachers and other students. Long-term consequences include reduced social mobility and the perpetuation of cycles of poverty and crime (Howell, 2000).

4. Weakening of Law and Social Order

Gang influence can undermine trust in institutions. In some cases, gangs gain power by exploiting weak or corrupt law enforcement or by forming alliances with local political actors. This erodes confidence in the justice system and creates perceptions of unfairness or ineffectiveness. As trust in institutions declines, residents become less willing to cooperate with authorities, who strengthen gang control and fuels further cycles of instability (Maxson & Klein, 1990).

5. Psychological and Social Consequences

Gang violence also imposes severe psychological effects on both individuals and communities. Residents often experience fear, anxiety, and trauma, which reduce social cohesion and erode trust among neighbors. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable, as exposure to violence can result in mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and substance abuse. Farrington (2005) emphasizes that early exposure to violence increases the likelihood of long-term psychological harm and delinquent behavior. In many cases, children growing up in violent neighborhoods internalize aggressive behaviors as normal, perpetuating cycles of crime across generations.

Gang violence destabilizes communities through crime, fear, and weakened institutions. Families suffer emotional and financial strain, schools face academic decline, and neighborhoods lose social trust. These cumulative effects not only perpetuate cycles of violence but also discourage community participation, economic development, and intergenerational stability. Addressing gang violence therefore requires holistic strategies that strengthen families, promote education, and restore trust in social institutions.

Recommendation

Addressing rising teen gang culture and associated violence requires an integrated approach combining policy reform, community engagement, education, and law enforcement**. From a sociological perspective, the following recommendations can help reduce juvenile delinquency and reshape youth pathways:

Family-Oriented Interventions: Parenting programs, family counseling, and home visits can strengthen familial bonds and reduce adolescent delinquency. Studies show that interventions enhancing parental monitoring and communication reduce the likelihood of youth joining gangs (Henggeler et al., 1998).

School-Based Programs: Mentorship, engagement initiatives, and after-school activities provide positive alternatives to gang involvement. Programs focusing on academic support, leadership development, and conflict resolution significantly reduce delinquent behavior (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Gottfredson et al., 2004).

Community Initiatives: Safe recreational spaces, youth clubs, and community policing foster social cohesion and reduce youth exposure to crime. Evidence indicates that neighborhood-based programs that build social capital and collective efficacy can mitigate gang activity and associated violence (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Policy and Rehabilitation: Focused rehabilitation programs for delinquent youth, rather than solely punitive measures, help integrate them back into society and break cycles of violence. Diversion programs, restorative justice practices, and vocational training have proven effective in reducing recidivism among adolescent offenders (Lipsey, 2009).

Policy and Political Accountability

Political exploitation of youth gangs for local power struggles exacerbates violence. Strict monitoring of political patronage, along with policies that criminalize the use of teenagers in violent mobilizations, are crucial (Suykens & Islam, 2015).

Mental Health and Rehabilitation Programs

Many juvenile offenders suffer from trauma, addiction, or social marginalization. Offering mental health support, counseling, and structured rehabilitation programs can help reintegrate them into society (World Health Organization, 2018).

Conclusion

Curbing teen gang culture and violence requires shifting focus from punishment to prevention and rehabilitation. A sociological approach highlights the importance of social institutions family, schools, community, and political structures in shaping youth behavior. By addressing structural inequalities and fostering positive youth development, societies can break the cycle of juvenile delinquency and build safer communities. Teen gang culture and associated violence are not merely outcomes of individual moral failure but are deeply rooted in processes of socialization, family dynamics, peer influence, and community structures. Understanding these sociological factors is essential for developing effective interventions that prioritize prevention, rehabilitation, and social integration. Strengthening social institutions, providing positive opportunities, and addressing systemic inequalities can reduce juvenile delinquency and promote a safer, more cohesive society. Comprehensive strategies that combine family, school, and community interventions are the most effective in preventing youth from joining gangs and breaking the cycle of violence. Future research should continue to explore the nuanced social, cultural, and psychological mechanisms that drive adolescent delinquency to inform policy and practice. Understanding why some youngsters join gangs while others don't is critical to compelling avoidance efforts. In expansion to keeping youth from joining gang, decrease enrollment term for teen who have a place with a group and to offer fitting types of assistance (drug treatment, work and instructive freedoms) when they leave the gang (Becker, 1963). Strengthening defensive

variables assumes a significant part in diminishing youth posse contribution. Defensive variables are positive impacts that relieve the effect of hazard factors and diminishing the probability of issue conduct. Drawing on proof in regards to posse counteraction, the Community Solutions to Gang Violence project in Edmonton helps increment defensive elements among youth by:

- Building positive connections and examples of cooperation with tutors and supportive of social friends.
- Creating positive social conditions through local area, family and administration associations.
- Promoting social and monetary arrangements that help positive youth improvement.

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