

Profile of Youth Gang Members, Causes and Effects of their Activities in Tagbilaran City

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ABSTRACT

The problems of youth in modern society are both international and local concerns. One of the most alarming issues the world is facing today is the existence of youth gangs, and the actions of the gang members once fully indoctrinated. This study delved into the youth gang culture in Tagbilaran City, Bohol, Philippines. It focused on children in-school and out-of-school who were particularly vulnerable to the influence of the gangs. The researchers surveyed 81 respondents who were members of any gang in the city between the ages of 10 to 18 years old. It sought to explore the gang member's reasons why he or she opted to join such gang, the activities of the gang and its effects. This study was essential because it determined the damage caused by the members to victims and its adverse effects on the community. This study utilized the quantitative approach through the distribution of questionnaires to the respondents.

Keywords - Social Science, gangs, quantitative method, gang affiliation, gang involvement, Tagbilaran City, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years, youth gangs have proliferated, though they have displayed lesser violence nowadays compared to the past. The continued presence of such gangs is anchored on the premise of camaraderie, where a child, in this critical age and thinking, needs the most. At this juncture of life, there are many factors one has to ponder in figuring out why children join gangs: parent-child intimacy, insufficient attention given to the child, their environment which may be a harsh, threatening place, and finally, the child's personal decision on what road to take.

The study explored the child's reasons for joining gangs, their activities, and its effects. Lewis (2011) says that it is important to deeply understand the complexities of how gangs work and how the members interact with each other, rather than simply relying on society's belief that a gang is harmful and is almost always associated with violence.

This study is anchored on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory which implies that new patterns of behavior can be acquired through observation or direct instruction. (Bandura & Walters, 1963) In this case, social and environmental contexts play a big role in influencing a child, may it be on a pro-social or in an anti-social scale. For example, families living in tough, disadvantaged communities tend to overwhelm the child, thus, adopting stimuli to delinquent activities. He perceives that he is no less different than the people he's living with, that delinquency is fine and everyone he knows thinks so, too. (Howell & Egley, 2005) Moral values tend to get loose as he grows up, and the same is passed on to generations. He observes and learns that delinquency is the mainstream in his society. This will steer his behavioral patterns and would most likely, be easier for him to adjust because he has lived with it most of his life. He succumbs to the familiarity of the matter. Otherwise, if the child has to reconsider his choices, he would seek refuge from his peers. He feels that his insecurities from his family home would be replaced by the enjoyment whenever he is with his friends. He condones what most of them are doing, good or bad, and maybe, enjoys everything about it. Learning is not purely behavioral but is derived from the cognitive process that takes place in

a social environment, as a child observes, learns, and does (Bandura & Walters, 1963).

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

A. General

- What is the profile of the youth gang members?
- What are the reasons of the respondents for joining youth gangs?
- What are the activities in their gang? How often do they do it?
- What are the effects of their activities? How often do they experience it?

B. Specific

1. What is the profile of the gang members in terms of:
 - 1.1 Age;
 - 1.2 Gender;
 - 1.3 Parent's Occupation;
 - 1.4 Highest Educational Attainment;
 - 1.5 Gang Affiliation;
 - 1.6 Involvement in Gang
2. What are the reasons of the respondents to join in youth gangs?
 - 2.1 How strongly do they agree to that reason?
3. What are the activities in their gang?
 - 3.1 How often do they do those activities?
4. What are the effects of their activities to themselves and the community?
5. How often do they experience those effects?

This study is significant because it looks into a new generation of gang members and finds out that despite gang obscurity in the city, some children still engage in gang activities. They discover the effects of their delinquent activities to themselves and the community. A certain police station, when requested, failed to retrieve related records because such were outdated and lost in a pile of documents—thus, this study. Upon its conclusion, this will hopefully renew societal knowledge to the activities of a new breed of gangs. The family is the primary breeding ground for every child and has the authority and the responsibility to discipline them. This study would enable the concerned parents, siblings,

and relatives, to give their children the proper attention and guidance, as they should be given.

In line with this, the school, through its teachers would understand diverse behaviors of students who are suspected as being gang members. They will be able to teach, instruct and guide this type of student as efficiently and effectively as possible. Through this study, they could create diversions or a series of activities for youths to divert their attention from gangs towards productive and wholesome exercises. The study is limited to children aged between 10 years old and 18 years old, regardless of their sex, parents occupations and gang affiliations.

The Gang. Gangs are composed of a group of friends or peers of any age, race or gender, who share the same line of interests, or those who revel in doing delinquent activities. Mostly, when we hear of the word 'gang', we associate this with negativity — drug use, alcoholism, sex, and other issues that disrupt the standards of modern society (Streicher, 2011). However, according to Lewis (2011), though 'gang' clichés suggest a bad connotation, some principles of gang organizations can have positive effects. He said that it is important to really understand the complexities of how gangs work and how the members interact with each other rather than simply relying on society's opinion that a gang is harmful and is almost always associated with violence.

The home. The home is the primary factor that molds the child into a good or bad citizen. Growing up, the child encounters diverse personalities from the different people he meets. Harsh or threatening environments of any kind poison the child's growth morally, and psychologically—aspects that play a big role in forming the child's personality which reflects his behavior. Without proper guidance from home, he may stray away from the social norms and divert his attention towards social groups like gangs (Pawlak, Ghosh, El-Horr, Smith, & Correia, 2014). In the parent's point of view, finding a job and working for it has always been the routine in most homes. But sometimes, demands rise, and the need to work harder has fallen upon the shoulders of parents. Stress levels escalate and time spent at home is diverted upon relaxation. They would not have enough time to respond to the needs of the child which results in separation from the family bonds (Ruangkanchanasetr, Plitponkarnpim, Hetrakul, & Kongsakon, 2005). Thus, it is not a surprise that children who lack supervision from

their parents, or those who have loose familial and moral bonds at home, are susceptible to gang influence; compared to children who were brought up to his/her best interests (Craig, Vitaro, Gagnon, & Tremblay, 2002).

The society. Social bonding is a sustainable factor in explaining the relationship between age and delinquent behavior (Akers & Lee, 1999). The pressure in the social hierarchy has pushed children away from their homes towards their peers. Their hours spent in school, which is mainly the source of friends or acquaintances, is relatively longer than that of the time spent with their families (Ruangkanchanasetr et al., 2005). Fragile familial bonds tend to disrupt the psychological makeup of the child. He would seek comfort from gangs and perform irrational activities that harm himself or others. Being with the wrong company exposes a child to offenses such as vandalism, theft, burglary, or grave crimes such as murder, rape, or drug trafficking (Akers & Lee, 1999). Hence, if a child frequently hangs out with cliques who engage in antisocial behaviors, he will do the same (Craig et al., 2002). Furthermore, there is a radical change in the child's social preference and cliques as he grows up; such changes are intimately connected with the age pattern and the changes of crime (Akers & Lee, 1999).

Violence and Drugs. Studies in America, Australia, and Europe have revealed that youth gang members are more likely to engage in drug-related activities and can possess weapons of violence compared to non-gang members. Specifically, established youth gang members display more delinquent behavior than of transient members, and even more so than children who are not engaged in any antisocial activity at all (Chu, Daffern, Thomas, & Lim, 2012). Regular gang members show a higher predilection for antisocial activities like fighting with his/her classmates, disrespecting school authorities, negligence in attending classes, truancy or skipping of classes, and other serious delinquencies such as alcoholism, smoking, vandalism, stealing and use of prohibited drugs (Craig et al., 2002). Transient gang members who do not engage in delinquent activities, tend to show fewer antisocial behaviors than that of stable or active ones. But with the coming of age, the gang members, both stable and not, have developed more varied delinquencies. As they mature, these delinquencies decrease (Craig et al., 2002).

Crime statistics show that rioting is one of the most common youth gang crimes recorded, which comprises about 13% of youthful offenders (Singapore Police Force, 2008). Rioting has been defined as a violent public disturbance wherein physical force is used by an unlawful assembly (of five or more people), on another person or group (Singapore Penal Code, 1985). Research says that social gangs are engaged in illegal drug use and drug trafficking. There is a great chance that some gangs are organized with an aim to distribute illegal drugs in their immediate locale (Joe, 1994).

In the Philippines, Section 6 of Republic Act 9344 or the “Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006” exempts a minor from criminal liability. That is, if at the commission of the crime, the child is under fifteen (15) years of age, he shall be subject to an exemption of criminal liability. But, if the child commits a crime and he is above fifteen (15) years of age, but below eighteen (18) years old, he shall likewise be exempt from criminal liability, unless he acted with knowledge of the offense, then he shall be subjected with the proceedings of such Act. Armed with this knowledge, gangs, specifically the ones organized with specific aims, tend to use the law in their favor. The drug trade has been prevalent not only in the Philippines but also worldwide. Drug traffickers target these youth gangs as a medium to deliver prohibited drugs, for they cannot be prosecuted if proven that they acted without knowledge of such violation.

Fear of Gangs. Research has shown that the fear of misdemeanor or crimes in school has threatened the safety of the students pushing them to avoid attendance, by skipping classes or in worse cases, carrying weapons, to protect themselves. Because of the leniency of some school security officers, threats of violence in the school community rise. People fear gangs because they are aware of the activities they engage in — (Brown and Benedict, 2009) that being in a close environment with gang members stirs anxiety since innocent children who do not have any involvement in gang activities do not feel safe in their vicinity (Dos Reis, 2007). They fear that they are vulnerable to being forcefully recruited by a friend or be a victim of gang threats. People who have not yet experienced how it is to have their lives threatened by a gang do not feel that gang crime is a menace to society. While people who have experienced the threats of gang crime one way or another, think otherwise (Brown & Benedict, 2009).

The Government. Innocent citizens are susceptible to the threats of delinquent gangs. This is not only a concern of the immediate locale but to a country's security. The remedy towards problems with the youth lies in preventive measures that a government grants to them such as programs that promote sports and skills development that may distract the youth from delinquency (Peetz, 2008). If deemed ineffective, troubled youth, specifically, gang members, are to be treated through the promulgation of laws that protect the best interests of a child offender. An example of this is the conduct of a diversion program, which refers to an alternative, child-appropriate process of determining the responsibility and the treatment of the child in legal trouble on the basis of his/her social, cultural, economic, psychological or educational background without the need for formal court proceedings (Section 23, R.A. 9344, "Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006", Philippines) or through the manner of training programs or rehabilitation centers managed by agencies that address the problems of these children—making them fit to incorporate into modern society. (Peetz, 2008).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers utilized the quantitative method using descriptive survey. The subjects of this study were children aged 18 and below regardless of sex, parents' occupation, education, gang affiliation and their involvement. Data were generated thru the distribution of close-ended questionnaires to 61 in-school and 20 out-of-school youths. Thus, this study has a total number of 81 respondents. Included in the study were members of gangs identified as having bad reputations.

The data were gathered through the distribution of the questionnaire to the respondents of this study, which was divided into two sets: A. In-school youths, and B. Out-of-school youths, who were members of any gang in Tagbilaran City. The data showed the profile of the respondents and were divided and tallied according to their age, sex, parent's occupation, highest educational attainment, gang affiliations, and their gang involvement.

The information gathered was subjected to statistical analysis; hence, the presentation results. This study used the percentage, weighted mean, and the aggregate mean in interpreting the tabulated data.

Table 1. Distribution of questionnaires

In-school	Out-of-school
61	20
TOTAL: 81 Questionnaires distributed to 81 respondents.	

Figure 1 shows that In-school youths had the highest number of respondents with 35 (57.38%) of them aged from 13-15 years old; while only one (1.64%) respondent belonged to the 10-12 year-old age bracket. Meanwhile, in the Out-of-school, 13 respondents (65.00%) whose ages were 16 to 18 years old, had the highest number. The researchers included this category since it would determine which sex between the males or the females had shown more participation in gangs.

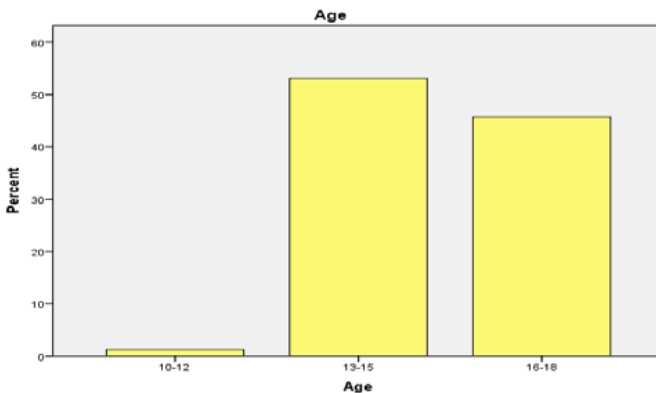


Fig 1. Age of the respondents

Males in both categories had noticeably higher rates with 17 (85.00%) respondents in out-of-school; and 53 (87.00%) respondents of the in-school category. Females, on the other hand, displayed lesser numbers, with three (15.00%) and eight (13.00%) of the total population in both categories.

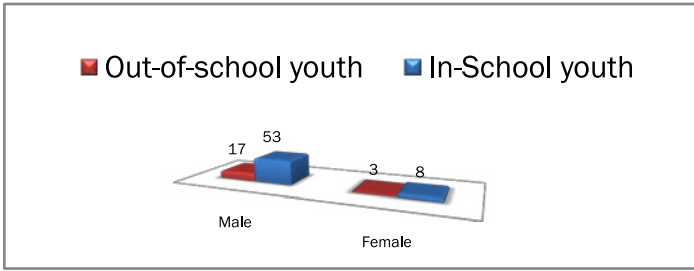


Fig. 2. Sex of the respondents

This section is incorporated because this is intimately related to the family home. A parent's job may require more hours of work and lesser family time.

The above graph displays the parents' occupation. Both categories displayed more parents being Self-Employed citizens with 18 (30.00%) of the In-school, and nine (45.00%) of the Out-of-school respondents. The least belonged to the OFW workers who only comprised of two (10.00%) respondents of the Out-of-school, and five (8.00%) respondents in the In-school who answered Others.

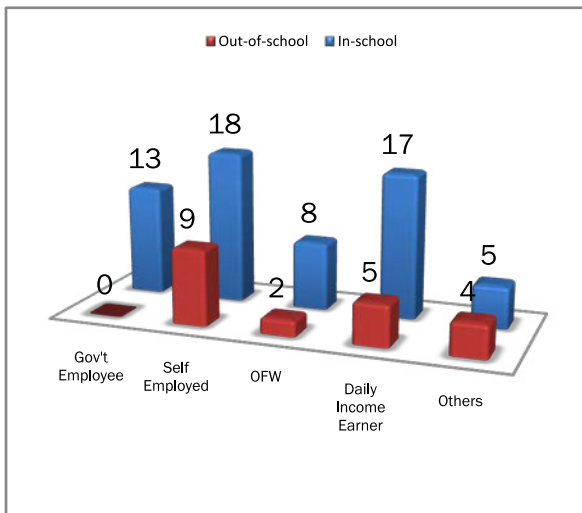


Fig. 3 Parents' occupation

This section gives an overview of the respondent’s education. For the In-school youth, the table below shows the current grade that they were in. While for the Out-of-school youth, this table displays the last grade level that they were in until they stopped school.

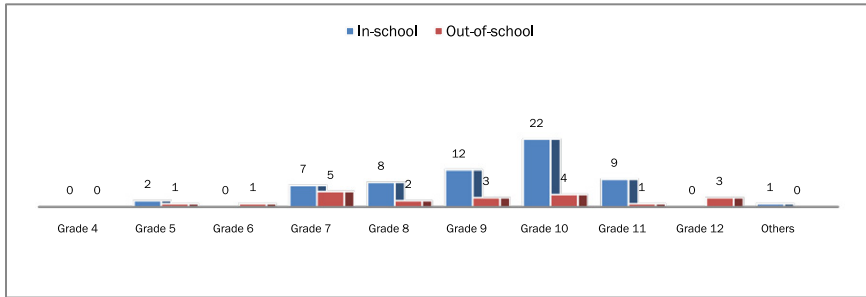


Fig. 4. Highest educational attainment

As seen above, In-school respondents registered highest with 22 of them (36.00%) being Grade 10 students. The Out-of-school respondents, on the other hand, had the highest rate (25.00%) at Grade 7 (See Fig. 4).

This section displayed the different gang groups involved in the In-school category. The data were retrieved inside school premises.

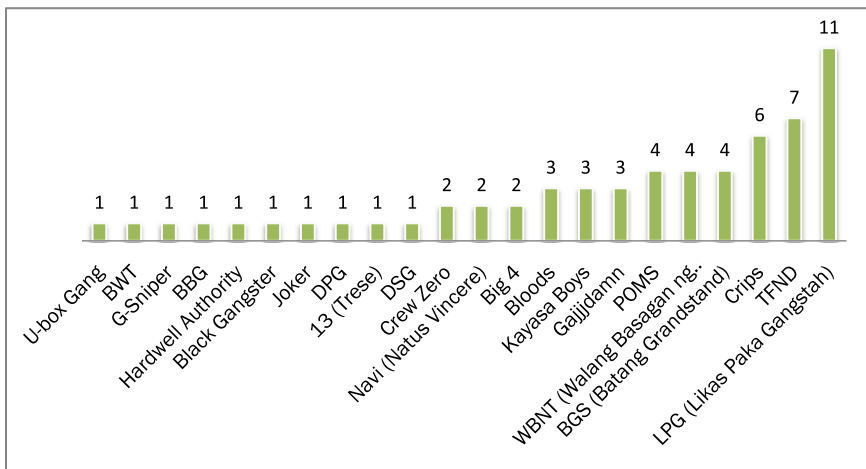


Fig. 5. Gang affiliation: In-school youth

Likas Paka Gangstah, locally known as LPG, had the highest population of respondents in the In-school category, comprising 11 respondents. The second highest was TFND with seven respondents and Crips with six respondents, respectively. The least numbered population are as follows: U-box Gang, BWT (Batang Walang Takot), G-Sniper, BBG (Blue Berry Gangster), Hardwell Authority, Black Gangster, Joker, DPG, 13 (Trese) and DSG, which had one respondent each (Fig. 5).

Figure 6 below displayed the Out-of-school respondents and their gang affiliations. Data were retrieved from random places in the city.

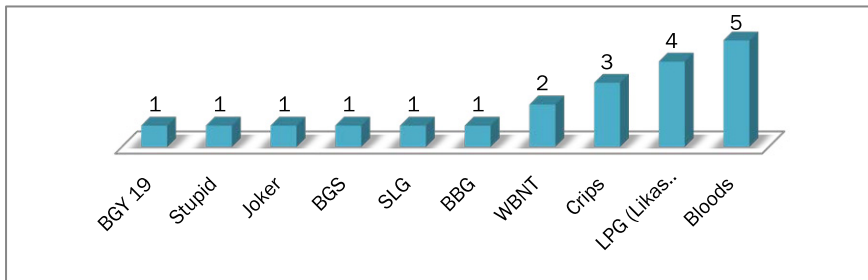


Fig. 6. Gang affiliation: Out-of-school youth

As seen above, the Bloods, comprising five of the Out-of-school population had the highest number. It is followed by the LPG and Crips, successively. BGY 19, Stupid, Joker, BGS (Batang Grandstand), SLG (Street Loco Gangster) and BBG (Blue Berry Gangster) had the lowest membership, with only one each.

This result showed the involvement of a gang whether the subject was a regular or transient member.

In this study, most of the respondents were regular members of a gang with 16 from the Out-of-school and 45 of the In-school population.

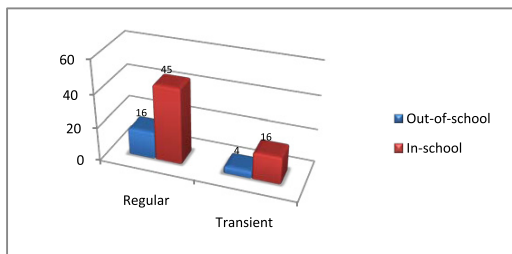


Fig. 7. Gang involvement

Table 2. Reasons for joining gangs

Reasons	IN-SCHOOL		OUT-OF-SCHOOL	
	WEIGHTED MEAN	INTERPRETATION	WEIGHTED MEAN	INTERPRETATION
a) My family experiences financial crises and gang members are my refuge	2.4	A	2.6	A
b) One of my parents died, gang members provide comfort	2.0	D	2.5	A
c) I think my parents did not guide me well, I considered gang members as my family who provide direction	2.0	D	2.5	A
d) I am not close to my parents and siblings, gang members gave strong ties and affinity.	2.0	D	2.8	A
e) I don't feel that I belong in my own family, I feel at home with my gang	1.9	D	2.5	A
f) I don't like going to school, I prefer to hang out with my gang members	1.7	D	N/A	N/A
g) I live in a place where I feel unsafe, gang members gave me the sense of security	2.4	A	2.5	A
h) I enjoy being with my co-gang members, I am happy with them	2.5	A	3.2	SA
i) I can gain more friends in joining gangs	2.3	A	3.1	SA
j) I feel I am protected with my gang members	2.2	A	3.3	SA
k) I have someone to share my problems with my gang	2.3	A	2.9	A
l) My peers joined gangs, it is the 'in' thing now	2.3	A	2.9	A
m) I am bored and being with them provides excitement	2.2	A	2.7	A
AGGREGATE MEAN:	2.2	A	2.6	A

Table 2 shows the respondents' reasons for joining a gang. For the In-school youth, *I enjoy being with my co-gang members, I am happy with them* obtained the highest weighted mean of 2.5 or Agree while *I don't like going to school; I prefer to hang out with my gang members* had the lowest weighted mean of 1.7.

Meanwhile, in the Out-of-school category, *I feel I am protected with my gang members* had the highest rating of 3.3 or Strongly Agree. On the other hand, *One of my parents died, gang members provide comfort; I think my parents did not guide me well, I considered gang members as my family who provide direction; I don't feel that I belong in my own family, I feel at home with my gang and I live in a place where I feel unsafe, gang members gave me the sense of security*, each had the lowest weighted mean of 2.5 or Agree, respectively. Aggregate mean were 2.2 or A for In-school; and 2.6 or A for the Out-of-school.

Table 3: Gang activities

Activities	IN-SCHOOL		OUT-OF-SCHOOL	
	WEIGHTED MEAN	INTERPRETATION	WEIGHTED MEAN	INTERPRETATION
a) Skips/cuts classes in school	2.4	MT	N/A	N/A
b) Plays online games in class hours or beyond bedtime	2.4	MT	2.8	MT
c) Smokes cigarettes	2.1	MT	2.7	MT
d) Drinks alcoholic beverages	2.2	MT	2.4	MT
e) Takes shabu	1.7	S	1.9	S
f) Takes marijuana	1.4	S	1.8	S
g) Sniffs rugby	1.0	N	1.5	S
h) Sniffs gasoline	1.2	S	1.6	S
i) Sells prohibited drugs (e.g. shabu, marijuana, ecstasy)	1.4	S	1.9	S
j) Resorts to vandalism	1.4	S	2.1	MT
k) Commits burglary	1.2	S	1.8	S
l) Engages into shoplifting	1.3	S	1.8	S
m) Participates in gang riots	1.9	S	2.1	MT
n) Engages in initiation thru Sexual Activities	1.2	S	1.8	S
o) Engages in initiation thru Public Humiliation and/or Nudity	1.2	S	1.7	S
p) Practices in initiation thru Hazing	1.5	S	1.8	MT
q) Resorts to drag racing	1.7	S	1.3	MT
r) Allows gang rape to be committed	1.1	S	1.0	N
AGGREGATE MEAN	1.6	S	1.9	S

Legend: AT-All the time; MT-Most of the time; S-Sometimes; N-Never

In blue: highest weighted mean; in red: lowest weighted mean; N/A-Not Applicable to respondent

The gang activities are seen above in Table 3. For the In-school youth, *Skips/cuts classes in school* and *Plays online games in class hours or beyond bedtime* obtained the highest weighted mean of 2.4 or was done by the students most of the time. The lowest, *Sniffs rugby* had a rating of 1.0 or Never. The Aggregate mean had a rating of 1.6 or Sometimes.

For the out-of-schoolers, *Plays online games in class hours or beyond bedtime* had the highest weighted mean of 2.8 or was done most of the time, while the least was *Allows gang rape to be committed* obtaining a rate of 1.0 or Never. Hence, the aggregate mean of 1.9 or Sometimes.

Table 4: Effects of gangs

Effects	IN-SCHOOL		OUT-OF SCHOOL	
	WEIGHTED MEAN	INTERPRETATION	WEIGHTED MEAN	INTERPRETATION
a) Has lower grades	2.3	MT	N/A	N/A
b) Drops out of school	1.9	S	4.0	AT
c) Constant corporal punishment from parents	2.0	S	1.9	S
d) Gets easily irritated	1.9	S	2.0	S
e) Gets caught with authorities	1.8	S	1.8	S
f) Damages properties	1.4	S	2.0	S
g) Annoys neighbors	1.6	S	2.0	S
h) Steals money from parents	1.4	S	2.2	MT
i) Steals money & other valuables from friends	1.5	S	2.5	MT
j) Sustains personal injuries	1.7	S	1.9	S
k) Inflicts injuries to other persons	1.7	S	2.6	MT
l) Experienced vehicular accidents	1.6	S	1.6	S
m) Condone to follow what is being decided by the gang whether right or wrong	1.7	S	1.6	S
AGGREGATE MEAN	2.0	S	2.2	S

Legend: AT-All the time; MT-Most of the time; S-Sometimes; N-Never;

In blue: highest weighted mean; in red: lowest weighted mean; N/A-Not Applicable to respondent

In the In-school, the highest weighted mean was Item A. *Has lower grades*, had 2.3 or was experienced most of the time. The lowest of this category, *Steals money from parents*, and *Damages properties* had a rate of 1.4 or Sometimes.

On the other hand, for the Out-of-school, Item A was not applicable to the out of school respondent. The highest rating was derived from Item B, *Drops out of school* with a rate of 4.0 or All the time, while the lowest were Items L and M, *Experienced vehicular accidents* and *condones to follow what is being decided by the gang whether right or wrong*.

Reasons for Joining Gangs. *I enjoy being with my co-gang members, I am happy with them* was the top reason why a child joins a gang. Ranking second is, *I feel I am protected with my gang member*. Meanwhile, *I don't like going to school, I prefer to hang out with my gang members* was the least stated reason.

Gang Activities. The activity done by both classes of respondents all of the time was *Playing online games in class hours or beyond bedtime*. Second is *Smoking* and then lastly, *Drinking alcoholic beverages*. The respondents never *Sniffed rugby* and never *Allows gang rape to be committed*.

Gang Effects. Both categories of respondents experienced *Constant corporal punishment from parents*. Out-of-school respondents *Drop-outs of school* all the time while in-school respondents *Had lower grades* when they engaged in gang activities. Meanwhile, *Experienced vehicular accidents* was least encountered by both categories.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are made:

1. The largest number of gang participants was found in children aged 13 to 15 years old, which showed that children of this age are more likely to be susceptible to gang influence.
2. Male respondents dominated the population of this study, which revealed that vulnerability to gang influence is stronger in males.
3. The 10th graders comprised the largest group of gang members. This implies that membership in gangs is popular in high schools and that social groups may have influenced it.

4. Enjoyment and a sense of security are the top reasons why children engaged in gang activities. The result corresponds to the Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura.
5. The respondents stated that the activity most done with their fellow gang members was playing online games in class hours or beyond bedtime. This activity is strongly linked to the effect of gangs.
6. One of the top three reasons for joining gangs was the constant corporal punishment from parents. The respondents also experienced lower grades and dropping out of school. Thus, truancy due to gang activities has severely affected the education of the respondents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Responsible parenting should be practiced by parents in their homes.
2. The value system in the school curriculum should be clearly embedded.

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