

Gangs In Schools

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## GANGS IN SCHOOLS

### **Abstract**

It has been noted by many people across the country that there has been a consistent and steady increase of gang activity within the school systems nationwide in recent years. There has also been a rise in the occurrence of drug related behaviors and other related illegal actions in these same areas. This study will attempt to determine whether there is a causal link between these two factors and, if possible, to define what areas of the country are most susceptible, if there is a particular type of student who is most at risk for gang recruitment and what if any signs of gang infiltration are visible in the afflicted communities. Educators, teachers, and the community require information as to which behaviors and activities to look for. This study hopes to expose the clues and signs of gang infiltration and drug abuse among students so that effective tools can be developed to combat this disturbing trend.

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### **Introduction**

In recent years, the influx of gangs within our communities has created a sense of foreboding for parents. Gone are the days when children were able to play safely in their neighborhoods. Even the safety of schools is no longer an option for those parents looking for an alternative place for their kids to go to escape the dangers of the streets

**Problem Statement:** The presence of gangs in schools has had a profound negative impact on students' behavior and their performance in the classroom. Incidents of illegal activity such as drugs, theft and violence in these communities are also on the rise.

**Hypothesis:** Gangs in schools cause an increase in drug use and other illegal behaviors among students.

The removal of gangs, and subsequently gang activities, from schools will cause a decrease of violence and other illegal behaviors in those schools and the surrounding communities.

### **Background and Literature Review**

The purpose of the literature review is to show how gangs have become the source of ongoing concern within many communities. Not only do they wreak havoc on society in general, but they also have had a negative impact on schools and the children who attend them. There have been many studies done to date as to just how prevalent gangs are, the impact they have, and recommendations as to what can be done to combat them.

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Some of the studies that have been done over the past few years have been regarding the presence of gangs within schools and the increase of drug use among the students. These studies have examined the relationship between the use of drugs and alcohol and high school students who are also gang members. The literature found that the high school students who were gang members were more likely to engage in peer drinking, drug use, drug selling and other illegal activities than those students who were not (Swahn, West, & Topalli, 2010).

The literature indicated that gang activity has been found to be on the rise in schools in recent years (Swahn, West, & Topalli, 2010). This increase has been continuing exponentially since Wilson began his study in 2000. The literature goes on to recommend actions to be taken and strongly suggests that such actions be taken immediately (Wilson, 2000).

The use of drugs among teenagers in the US public school system has become more common and the influx of gangs on school campuses has impacted on school-aged children. According to a study by Curie (2010), there is a difference in the occurrences of gang presence/drug use in public schools as compared to private schools.

While gang culture is nothing new in any society, the growing problem of gangs in our schools has been and is having a negative impact on students. One way that we can have an impact on this, is by keeping watch for the usual characteristics that can be found in almost every gang. Dress, behavior and actions can be tells; as well as graffiti and other types of markings show that there has been gang activity (Wallach, 1995).

There are measures that schools can take to address gang problems and courses of action that can be taken to alleviate this problem. Probably the most effective way would be to create a “neutral zone”. This would mean talking to the various gangs that are presence and come to an

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agreement that the school stay a “safe zone”. Other ways could include coming up with alternative activities for youth in the neighborhoods or having a police presence at the school (McEvoy, 1990).

Information done about the presence gangs in the United States gives conflicting data due to confusion over the prevalence of gangs and what exactly constitutes a gang. We are now labeling certain activities as gang activities where we didn’t before. It is this confusion which is what gives us the conflicting data, according to Kathryn A. Chandler, an NCES statistician.

The same information also shows a link between the presence of gangs and violence. “Of the students who reported no street gangs in their schools in 1995, 2.9 percent said they had been violently victimized in school, compared with 7.5 percent of students who had reported gangs in their school” (Coles, 1998).

## **Research Methods**

### **Research Design**

This study would use the classical design to help describe and explain the relationship between gangs in schools and drug usage among students. It would also use a time-series design using case-oriented research to collect data regarding gangs and schools. Information would be gathered about students and their behaviors from a sampling of 500 schools scattered all over the country by interviewing students each of these schools. Surveys of the community would be taken to ascertain how much gang behavior has been noticed by parents and other adults.

### **Sampling**

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The sampling used in this research would be a mixture of quantitative and qualitative systemic research. The quantitative portion of this research would involve questionnaires being given to students in 500 schools from across the country. From each of these schools, students from each grade (K-12) would be chosen for the qualitative section of the study from the initial quantitative sampling of these schools based on their answers to the questions in the survey.

### **Data Collection**

The population of students initially chosen for this study will be broken down into two groups; those who have knowledge of gang activities in their school and those who have no knowledge. These two groups will then be interviewed person to person to determine what, if anything is different between those communities which have stated that they see no gang activity and those that have.

The students would also have been questioned about their home life. After being told that their answers will remain confidential, inquiries into whether or not they have seen or been party to any behaviors which could be construed as being abusive or drug related, etc. would be made. Prior involvement in these types of behaviors can have an impact on how a person interacts with the outside world.

The grade level of these students will also be a consideration when evaluating the results of the study. Determining what age the gang activities begin could help researchers to begin to develop a program (or programs) that could dissuade those students who are in danger of entering into violent or other illegal activities.

These questions are aimed at determining what the criteria needed is to determine whether or not a student is in danger of becoming involved in gangs at school.

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### **Ethical Issues**

Before beginning this study, all potential participants will be told that all information gathered will remain confidential and can not be used in any other way. This may cause those who may not come forward with information vital to this study to feel safe in divulging otherwise dangerous information. They will also be informed that they can leave the study at any time that they feel that they are in any kind of danger and that no questions will be asked of their decision to leave.

This will all be put forth in a consent form which will be given at the beginning of the study at all of the schools involved. Those students who opt out of the study will be excused and no further involvement of them will be asked.

### **Conclusion**

The problem of gangs in schools is not a new one. There have always been groups of students who have separated themselves from the rest of the school population. In the past few decades, however a new menace has started infiltrating the presumed safety of such institutions. By becoming educated in the warning signals put forth by those individuals who would like to gain access to the student population and putting into place alternative activities which can be utilized by those who are most at risk for illegal behaviors, such as after school programs and community programs, the spread of this type of behavior can be thwarted.

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