

SAFE

Surrey Anti-Gang
Family Empowerment
Program

SUPPORTED BY



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



GANG-INVOLVED GIRLS IN THE LOWER MAINLAND

AUGUST 2020



RESEARCH GAPS

With more attention historically paid to the activities of male gang-involved youth, female gang involvement is an under-studied area of research. Sexual exploitation of females by gangs is a likewise under-explored area.

OBSERVATIONS

While the participants in the study work in broadly similar areas, they observe the extent of female youth gang involvement differently. In fact, some do not even see female youth being involved with gangs at all. Variations in observations also exist in sexual exploitation and human trafficking of females through gangs.

STUDY AND METHODS

In 2020, the Surrey Anti-gang Family Empowerment Program and Pacific Community Resources Society undertook a qualitative inquiry into female youth involvement in gangs in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The research comprised a literature review, media scan and expert interviews, which were transcribed and analyzed through a thematic approach. The major findings of this study are summarized in this document.

RESEARCH AREAS

- Roles of females aged 11-19 in gangs
- Female youth experiences of sexual exploitation by gangs
- Factors that put female youth at risk of sexual exploitation

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

- RCMP 'E' Division
- Surrey Wraparound Program
- The Salvation Army
- PLEA Community Services
- Ministry of Children and Family Development
- Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit

RESEARCH FINDINGS

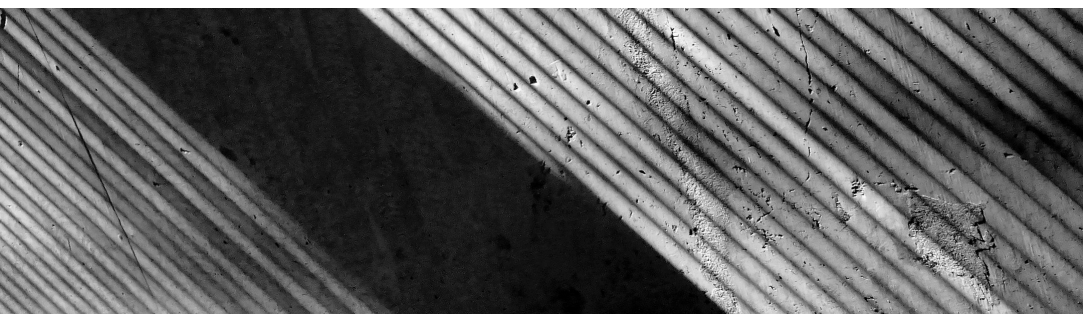


ROLES OF GANG-INVOLVED FEMALES

Participation in gang activities may be highly gendered, with girlfriends of gang-involved males being asked to hold drugs or weapons, rent cars and homes with the expectation that females pose a lower risk of detection.

Females may be more actively involved in gang activities as well. These include drug dealing to other girls, calling in debts, and violent robberies of vulnerable people.

Sexual exploitation may be a core component of involvement. Female youth are recruited to be exploited by male gang members or to be pimped to others. Often, female gang-involved youth may reduce their own exploitation by recruiting other females to take their place. Much of this recruitment and exploitation occurs online.



HELD BELIEFS OF EXPLOITATION VICTIMS

Among gang-involved exploited female youth, feelings of shame paradoxically coincide with a belief that they are not victims. Many believe they are complicit in their own exploitation, despite their young age. Girlfriends of exploitative gang-involved males also struggle with victim self-identification, with males engaging in significant mental manipulation. Some females may even feel a sense of accomplishment in being adept at recruiting other girls or being involved in other exploitative activities.

For many of these youth, the concept of victimhood is inherently one of weakness, and recognizing that they have been victimized is to portray that sense of weakness for the world to see.

AGE DIMENSIONS

Older, more entrenched females are more likely to be involved in activities such as robberies, drug dealing and calling in debts while younger females are more likely to be involved in sexual exploitation.

INDIGENOUS DIMENSIONS

Indigenous females in gangs often have very active roles in that they are expected to run income generating activities like drug dealing and collecting alongside males. Moreover, sexual exploitation is less common within Indigenous gang-affiliated youth, relative to non-gang affiliated exploiters of Indigenous youth.

ENTRENCHMENT

The unmet need for belonging is a major driver of initial recruitment of female youth within gangs. This need exerts a powerful influence on decisions to remain gang-affiliated as well. By providing a sense of belonging to vulnerable female associates, gangs may impose continued exploitation and abuses.