

Aboriginal Gang Violence

the facts

Here are some statistics on gangs in Canada according to the *Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs* (2002):

- Canada has 434 youth gangs with roughly 7,000 members nationally.
- Ontario has the highest number of youth gangs and youth gang members in absolute terms, with 216 youth gangs and 3,320 youth gang members. Saskatchewan is second (28 youth gangs and 1,315 members), followed by British Columbia (102 youth gangs and 1,027 members).
- For the country as a whole, the vast majority of youth gang members are male (94%).
- Nationally, 36% of youth gangs are a mixture of two or more racial/ethnic groups. The breakdown provincially is:

British Columbia (46%);
Alberta (25%);
Saskatchewan (7%)

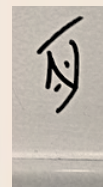
- Almost half (48%) of all youth gang members are under the age of 18. Most (39%) are between 16 and 18 years old.
- The largest proportion of youth gang members are African Canadian (25%), followed by First Nations (21%) and Caucasian (18%).
- First Nation youth gang members are concentrated largely in Western provinces of Saskatchewan (96%), Manitoba (58%) and Alberta (58%).
- There are a growing number of female gang members in western provinces, including British Columbia (12%), Manitoba (10%) and Saskatchewan (9%).

<http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/yg-ja/canada21-eng.htm>

<http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/bldngevd/2007-yg-1-eng.aspx>

What is a Gang?

A gang is a group of people who share a common purpose, who use intimidation and violence to carry out criminal acts such as: drug dealing, graffiti, assaults, rape, vandalism and robbery and human trafficking. They usually have a common name, symbol, tattoo or colour.



Gang members frequently hang out together and claim a specific area or turf which is often marked by graffiti.

“If you are not a member of a gang when you go into jail... you will be when you come out. Many prisoners simply cannot survive jail life without the protection of a gang.”



What do the following groups have in common?

- Saskatchewan Warriors
- Indian Posse
- Native Syndicate
- Redd Alert
- Crazy Cree
- Mixed Bloods
- Tribal Brotherz
- Manitoba Warriors



These are just a few of the Aboriginal gangs operating in Canada. Some of them are combinations of Aboriginal and others, such as: the Crips, Bloods, etc. Although many of the Aboriginal gangs are located in the western provinces, the established gangs are moving into other provinces and territories.

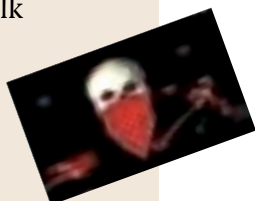
Many have very specific membership, initiation and removal procedures. Although the ages range from 16 to 35 years, these gangs have been known to recruit children that are younger than 12 years of age.

How to tell if gangs are entering your community:



Gangs just don't show up in the community one day. They establish themselves over time. Signs that a gang may be operating in your community are:

- Increased gang-specific graffiti in the neighbourhoods
- Increase in groups of unknown people loitering in the neighbourhoods
- Increase in suspected narcotics activity
- Gang colours and signs in the community area and schools
- Increase in community fear and witnesses are reluctant to talk to police.
- Increased crime, especially violent crime



So who are they recruiting?

It starts with a false friendship and a promise of a better life. A sponsorship that promises to get you into a life of more money, more prestige, more things, and more bling than you can imagine. You may end up with more money but there is a cost and that cost is your freedom. Join a gang and the gang owns and controls you.

Established gang members recruit for new gang members in schools, on the street, while confined in detention, in fast food restaurants and their parking lots, at parties, in prison, at concerts and family get-togethers (many recruits are the little brothers and sisters of established gang members), and anywhere else they may find potential members.

Although most gangs are predominately male, they do recruit adolescent Aboriginal females into prostitution.

Females who participate in gangs are often treated as sex slaves, and have been involved in secondary activities such as looking out for police and carrying weapons and drugs for male gang members.

– BC Centre for Safe Schools and Communities.

“Some women do earn power by association. Tammy’s ex-boyfriend was one of Redd Alert’s ‘top dogs.’ She ‘sold dope and beat up people if they owed money,’ and for a brief period, had the fur coat, the ‘family,’ and the cash, but left because she grew tired of doing time.”

—Maclean Magazine April 16, 2009

Gang leaders and members are looking for vulnerable Aboriginal youth who:

- Have dropped out or having difficulty in school.
- Want to belong and may be feeling peer pressure from family or friends to join the gang.
- Are looking for recognition.
- Have a troubled family life in which there maybe substance or sexual abuse inside the home and are looking for a surrogate family.
- Have substance or alcohol addictions.
- Are easily intimidated.
- Require protection from domestic/ physical/sexual or psychological violence.
- Have low self-esteem or self-worth and, have a sense of helplessness.
- Is experiencing poverty and live in high risk neighbourhoods.
- Are unemployed and lacking employment opportunities.
- Believe the media glorification of the gang lifestyle and are unaware of the consequences of joining a gang.
- Have aggressive and hostile behaviours toward people in authority.

Why females join gangs...

Most females don’t wake up one day and decide to join a gang. Some join for love: their boyfriend is in a gang, and many believe their boyfriends will love them more if they join their gang. Some are raised in gang-affiliated homes and their families expect them to become members.

Getting In...Getting out

Once you have passed the sponsorship marker of a particular gang’s membership code you are now required to undergo an initiation ceremony to demonstrate your loyalty. Before you can gain entrance into a gang you are called a “recruit” or a “striker” depending on the gang.

For some females whose boyfriend or family member is in the gang, this initiation ceremony is sometimes bypassed and they are “blessed-in” which means they must simply pledge an allegiance and/ or receive a tattoo or other marking. For females recruited by the gang, they are usually subjected to very abusive forms of initiation similar to their male counterparts such as:

- The recruit must commit a crime for the gang or recruit another female to prostitute for the gang.
- The recruit must demonstrate that they have a criminal record. The more convictions equate more respect and higher status within the gang.
- The final phase of the initiation ritual is the “beating in” or “jumping in” process. In this the recruit must endure a beating or punching sessions from the other gang members. You cannot cry. You cannot scream or fall down. You must demonstrate that you are tough enough for the gang. For some female recruits they must be “sexed-in” which means a gang rape in which the stigma of being a sex toy to the gang is difficult to shed.





the truth about gangs

Getting In... Getting Out (continued)

Depending on the gang getting out may be difficult or easy. In some cases, you change your friends, walk away and start making healthy choices such as:

- Going back to school.
- Getting counselling for substance addictions.
- Going back to traditional teachings.

In other cases, it may be very difficult to leave a gang. In some gangs, membership is for life and the only way out is death. Others gangs require a member to be “beaten out” before they are allowed to leave. This is a process where the exiting member is assaulted to the point of severe injury or death by other members of the gang. Sometimes in order to ensure the protection of not only you but also your family, you may need to work with community agencies, the police, family members, etc. to assist you in exiting a gang. In some instances, you may be required to move to another community.



“Female Aboriginals are often traded among gang members and as part of their initiation, are made to have sex with numerous gang members at the same time.”

– Dr. Mark Totten
CP Release
March 16, 2010



The Myth

The Truth

Gang life is glamorous.

There is nothing glamorous about losing your individuality and being controlled. More gang members die from suicide and overdoses compared to homicide.

A gang is like family.

As a gang member you are required to sacrifice your individuality for the gang. They are not your family and do not have your best interest in mind.

A gang will protect you.

It depends on your status and usefulness to the gang. At any point you can become expendable. In the crossfire of a turf war, bullets do not discriminate.

By being a member of a gang people will respect you.

Using fear and intimidation does not bring you respect.

You can leave a gang any time you want.

Once you become a gang member it can be extremely difficult to get out.

Sexual trafficking is prostitution or sex work.

Sexual trafficking is a form of slavery which involves the uses of threat, force and deception.

Having a boyfriend who is a gang member will protect me.

Not necessarily, many personal relationships with gang members end in sexual exploitation, forced prostitution and sexual trafficking. A boyfriend who expects you to sleep with other guys doesn't respect you and puts you at risk of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

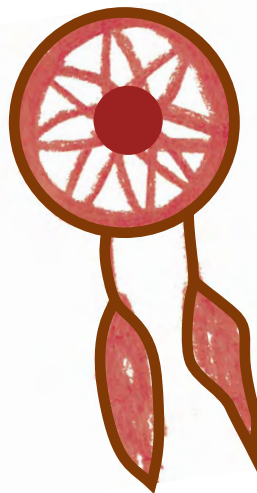
A gang will provide you with money, prestige, drugs, alcohol, sex and sense of belonging.

You may end with more money and bling but you end up paying with the loss of your freedom and ultimately your life.

How to tell if your friend is at risk of becoming involved in Gang life...

Although not all of these behaviours are indicators that someone you know may be involved in a gang, they are signals that they are making some unhealthy choices.

- Unexplained injuries such as bruises, cuts or broken bones
- Staying out late
- Skipping or quitting school
- Secrecy about new friends
- Abrupt negative changes in personality such as aggression or anger
- Preference for single colour clothing
- Family problems
- Graffiti on personal items such as notebooks or bedroom walls
- Tattoos or markings of gang symbols on hands or body
- Unexplained new possessions or money
- Frequent contact with the police or other authority figures
- Carrying weapons such as guns and knives
- Doing drugs and drinking



Alternatives to Joining a Gang

You Can:

- Participate in sports or the drama club at school.
- Volunteer for something that interests you.
- Hang out at your community or Indian Friendship centre.
- Stay in school! You will be thankful later.
- Get a summer or part-time job. Earning your money legitimately builds your self-confidence.
- Participate in traditional teachings.
- Hang out with people who are making healthy choices in the life.
- Connect with your Elders within the community

You Can also prevent gang recruitment in your community by:

- Encouraging your friends to take part in positive activities
- Being careful not to copy gang clothing, symbols and tattoos
- Building positive relationships and patterns of interaction with mentors and pro-social peers.
- Promoting social and economic policies that support positive youth development

Check out the following YouTube clips if you want an inside view:



Noam Gonick film from 2005 on Aboriginal Gangs: *Stryker* is the story of a brutal turf war between two street gangs in Winnipeg's North End. This film follows one Stryker (Kyle Henry), a 14-year-old Native arsonist from a northern reserve whose arrival in the city serves as a catalyst in this fierce turf battle.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnfTcg_diPU



TheStar.com: *Alberta town struggles with gangs and violence* is a video clip dealing with the problems of gangs and the community of Hobbema.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfYPXOtAX_s&feature=fvwrel



Rich Canadian Reserve Becomes a Gang War Zone (Part 1 of 2) is another video clip depicting life in the community of Hobbema and the effects of oil development.

Part One: www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGckY1mGnNE&feature=related

Part Two: www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbHWjSxMxkA&feature=related



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