

The Psychological Effect of Exposure to Gang Violence on Youths: A Pilot Study

Sarah Kelly, RN, MSN, PhD Candidate

Debra Anderson, RN, PhD

Ann Peden, RN, DSN

College of Nursing

University of Kentucky





Background

- Gang violence is an escalating public health problem in society
- The National Youth Gang Survey (2004)
 - 24,000 active gang in the United States
 - 760,000 active gang members in the United States



Background

■ Gang Violence

- “any of a number of crimes in which either the victim or the suspect is an active gang member and the crime occurs as a result of that membership”

Hutson, H.R., Anglin, D., & Pratts, M.J. (1994) The New England Journal of Medicine, 330 (5), 324-327

Background

■ Gang Violence

□ Society Issues

- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Lack of parental supervision

□ Gang Issues

- Reputation
- Respect
- Retaliation





Exposure to Community Violence

- A ripple effect throughout community
- People are affected
 - Physically
 - Mentally
 - Financially
- Mental health
 - Internalizing symptoms
 - Externalizing behaviors

Purpose

- To examine the psychological consequences to youths due to exposure to gang violence in their community





Methodology

■ Design

- Non-experimental qualitative descriptive
- Data collection
 - Semi-structured individualized interviews
 - Audio recorded
 - Transcribed verbatim



Sample

- Convenience sample
- Enrolled 8 youths
 - Exposed to gang violence within 2 years
 - Ages 8 to 18
- Recruited from a community center in Louisville, Kentucky
 - Louisville is the largest city in Kentucky with an estimated population of 554,496 people
 - Many ethnic gangs are located in Kentucky



Measures

- 5 open ended questions
 - What type of activities do you participate in
 - Tell me about your experiences in your neighborhood
 - Tell me about your experiences with gangs
 - Talk about how those experiences have affected your school and family life
 - How have these experiences with gangs affected your participation in neighborhood activities



Procedure

- Expedited IRB approval
- Identified subjects
 - Parental informational sessions
 - Parental consent and child assent
 - Invitation to participate
 - Background and purpose of study
 - Contact information for PI
 - Information about anonymity and rights as a research participant



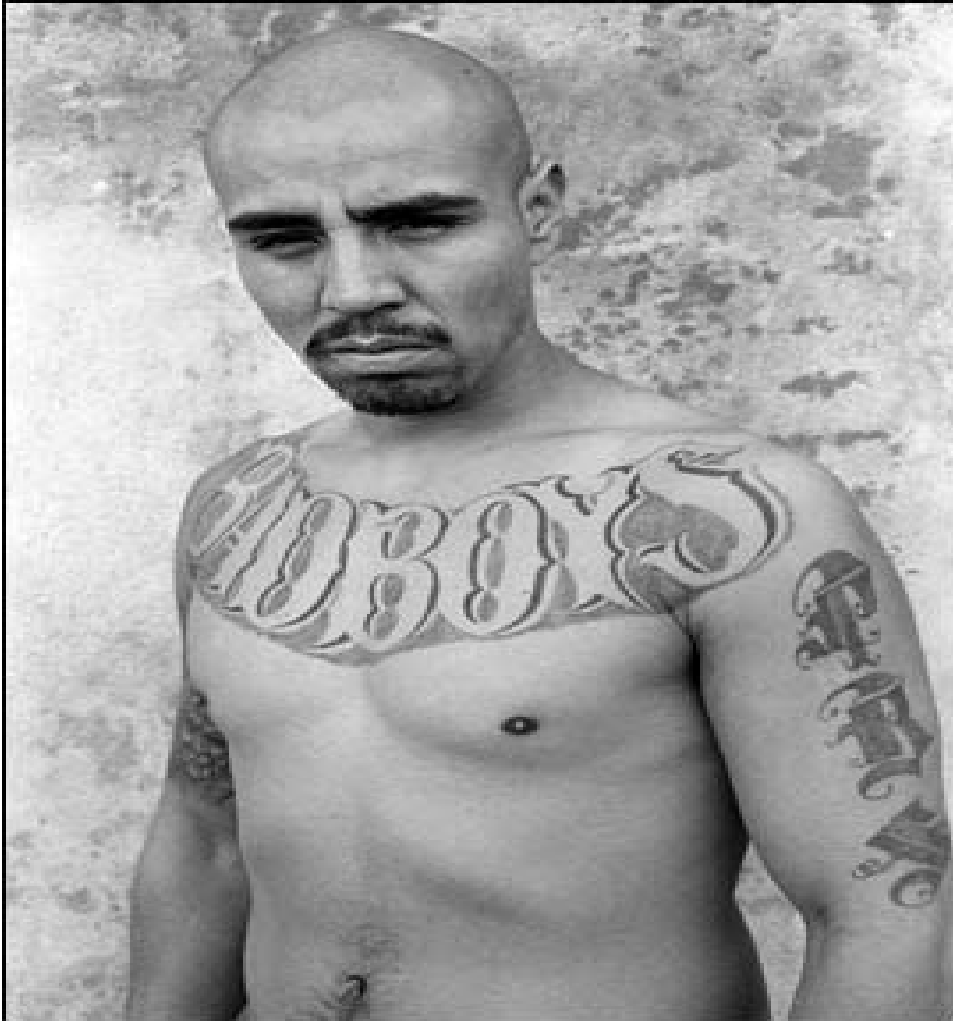
Data Analysis

■ Content Analysis

- Coded the responses
- Evaluated frequency of similar responses
- Synthesized categories

■ Data Trustworthiness

- Member checking
- Peer debriefing



Findings



Characteristics of Sample

Characteristics	<u>n</u>	%
Sex		
Males	3	60%
Females	2	40%
Educational Level		
2	1	20%
3	1	20%
5	2	40%
8	1	20%

Primary Categories

- Emotional Implications
- Personal Experiences
- Activities and Socialization





Emotional Implications

- Feeling safe in the community
 - “Kind of”
 - “Mom doesn’t want to live up here like no more”
- Feelings after exposure to gang violence
 - “I watch myself every time I walk to school... I just watch my back every time”
 - “I was scared and thought I was going to get shot”
 - I feel “sad” for the victim



Personal Experiences

- Witnessing and hearing violence towards others
 - “In the neighborhood that I live in now, somebody got shot by in the alley”
 - “I saw some, some boy get tied up with these two little boys...”
 - Gang members “...they just talking about how like what they’re going to do...”



Activities and Socialization

■ Playing outside

- “The only time I will go outside is if I have to go down to my auntie’s house to drop something off; that is the only time I go outside”

■ Participation in community and extracurricular activities

- “The gangs, it don’t it, if doesn’t interfere with me. I come here (referring to the community center)...”



Discussion

■ Emotional Implications

- Exposure to gang violence influenced youths' emotions
- These youth had a variety of emotional responses
- Community safety was a major concern
- A few had a lack of concern for their own safety



Discussion

■ Personal Experiences

- Youth experienced different situations with gang violence
- Reflective of different methods of violence used by gang members



Discussion

■ Activities and Socialization

- Youth had differing opinions
- Community center used as a haven
- Participating in school sponsored and extracurricular activities



Future Research

- Exploring adolescents' exposure to gang violence and the influence it has on their development
- Investigating adolescents' exposure to gang violence and the different options available to treat those affected by it



Future Research

- Comparing parents' and adolescents' perceptions of adolescents' exposure to gang violence
- Examining the differences between gender and their exposure to gang violence and mental health development

Questions?

