Gang Violence Among Youth and Young Adults: (Dis)Affiliation and the Potential for Prevention

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RÉSUMÉ

Les taux de violence et les incidents liés aux gangs de jeunes ne sont pas distribués au hasard; ils sont perpétrés et vécus par un petit nombre de personnes et concentrés dans les quartiers les plus vulnérables aux difficultés économiques et à l'exclusion sociale. Cet article examine les dispositions socio-économiques actuelles et leur influence, autant sur la répartition des possibilités offertes aux adolescents et aux jeunes adultes que sur leur perception d'être dans une position d'exclusion. Ce sentiment de désaffiliation sociale motive la participation de plusieurs dans des gangs de rue. Il est proposé que la réponse à la violence liée aux gangs et à l'utilisation des armes à feu parmi les adolescents et les jeunes adultes devra aller au-delà des stratégies courantes de répression et de prévention qui mettent l'accent sur les caractéristiques des individus et des quartiers défavorisés afin de prendre une approche préventive plus « sociale ». La situation dans la ville de Toronto au cours des dernières années est utilisée pour illustrer les principaux thèmes de l'argument.

ABSTRACT

Rates and incidents of gang-related youth violence are not randomly distributed; they are perpetrated and experienced by a small number of people, and concentrated in areas of our cities that are the most vulnerable to economic hardship and social exclusion. This article examines current

socio-economic arrangements and how they affect both the distribution of opportunities available to youth and young adults, and their perception of being in a position of relative exclusion. This sense of social disaffiliation motivates the involvement of many in gangs. It is argued that the response to gun and gang violence among youth and young adults will have to go beyond current repressive and preventive strategies that focus on the characteristics of individuals and neighbourhoods, and take a more "social approach" to prevention. The situation in the city of Toronto over the past few years is used to illustrate the main themes of the argument.

Introduction[1]

High-profile outbursts of gun and gang-related violence across Canada in recent years have drawn a wave of attention to the problem of gang-related and youth violence. There is some debate as to whether gang involvement and gang-related violence among youth are actually on the rise. As we will see, there are a number of definitional and methodological issues that make it difficult to know exactly where Canada stands in this regard.

The primary focus of this article, however, is not on whether the level of gun and gang violence among youth and young adults has been increasing or decreasing in our major urban centres. The focus, rather, is on how to make sense of the nature and origins of collective violence among youth and young adults in recent times. We begin with the observation that rates of violence are not randomly distributed; they are perpetrated and experienced by a small number of people, and concentrated in areas of our cities that are characterized by economic hardship and social marginalization. This suggests the need to examine current socio-economic arrangements and how they affect the distribution of opportunities afforded certain youth and young adults, and the sense of social disaffiliation that can lead some young people to get involved in gangs.

We then turn to a discussion of whether the current responses to gang violence among youth and youth adults are effective in addressing the factors at play. I will argue that we must go beyond current repressive and reactive responses

and strategies that focus on the characteristics and "risk factors" of individuals and neighbourhoods, and take a more "social approach" to prevention. This will require that we shift our focus and resources from responses that tend to "blame the victim" (Ryan, 1976), and recognize the need for a broad-based solution that reduces relative inequality and relieves some of the frustration caused by our social, economic and political arrangements (Hastings, 2003; Websdale, 2001). The situation in the City of Toronto over the past few years will be used to illustrate some of these themes.

What We Know About Gangs in Canada: A Brief Overview

It is difficult to determine the extent of gang activity in Canada, or whether we are actually witnessing a rise in the violence that is attributable to gang members. This is due in part to a lack of definitional clarity and consistency around terms such as "gang", "gang violence" and "youth", limitations in gang-related data and statistics, and a general lack of Canadian research in this area (Chettleburgh, 2007; Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, 2006; Public Safety Canada, 2007; Wortley & Tanner, 2005). The terms "youth", "street", "major", and "urban" are often used interchangeably when referring to "gangs", and have been associated with a wide range of behaviours, from loitering to school-yard fights, swarmings, common assaults, drug dealing, rape, prostitution, drive-by shootings, shootouts and homicides (CISC, 2006; Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 1994).

In 2003, Chettleburgh conducted the first national survey of police agencies on the issue of youth gangs. Sixty-three out of the 264 police agencies who completed the survey indicated that "youth gangs"[2] were active in their jurisdiction in 2002. Police executives identified 434 active "youth gangs" and a total of 7000 active "youth gang members" under the age of 21, 50% of whom were under the age of 18, and 6% of whom were girls. For the most part, gangs were reported to be internally ethnically diverse, with varying concentrations of African-Canadian, First Nation, Indo-Canadian, Asian-Canadian and Caucasian members depending on their geographical location (Chettleburgh, 2003).

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1 Unless otherwise specified, the word "gang" refers to groups that have at least some organizational/leadership structure, and that are involved in committing criminal and violent acts in order to gain power and recognition and/or control certain areas of unlawful activity (Montreal Police Service, 2004). The phrase "youth and young adults" refers to those who are currently in their adolescence and in what is now referred to as "early adulthood" – the period that straddles adolescence and adulthood (up to age 25) when important transitions in the life course occur (see Gaudet, 2007).

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2 "Youth gang" was defined as "a group of youth or young adults in your jurisdiction, under the age of 21 that you or other responsible persons in your agency or community are willing to identify or classify as a gang. As part of this definition, we ask you to exclude motorcycle gangs, hate or ideology groups, prison gangs, and other exclusively adult gangs" (Chettleburgh, 2003, p. 5).

More recently, CISC (2006) reported a total of 344 "street gangs" and 11,900 "street gang members"[3] active in 166 urban, rural and Aboriginal reserve areas across the country.[4] It reported that the majority of "street gang members" in Canada are between 21 and 30 years old, with a range as broad as 16 to 46 years. Most Canadian gangs have members that are considered "youth" in legal terms, as well as adult members – only about 6% of Canadian gangs are composed exclusively of members aged 17 and under (CISC, 2006). CISC (2006) reports a relatively stable number of street gangs and street gang members in Canada over the past 10 years, with the majority operating in large urban centres. Gang activities were reported to consist primarily of street-level illicit drug trafficking and prostitution, but to also involve weapons trafficking, robbery, home invasions, extortion and fraud, as well as both *strategic violence* (planned or organized incidents to increase the gang's profits, gains and criminal capabilities) and *tactical violence* (more opportunistic, reactive or expressive incidents that can sometimes lead to unintentional or collateral harm to the public) (CISC, 2006).

This gives us a preliminary picture of gang activity in Canada, but differences in focus and terminology (i.e., "youth gangs" versus "street gangs"), definitions, and methodologies result in a slightly disjointed description that is further limited by its reliance on the perspectives of law enforcement agencies and intelligence alone.

Violence and Homicide in Toronto and Links to Guns and Gangs

It can be useful, and somewhat more telling, to look at what we know about youth violence and gang-related violence at the local level, such as within a city like Toronto.[5] According to Statistics Canada, the rate of police recorded violent crime in Toronto has dropped 9% since 1992, compared to 14% for all of Canada (Janhevich, Johnson, Vézina, & Fraser, 2008). However, in 2004, for the first time, youth (i.e., those

12-17 years old) charged with violent crime in Toronto outnumbered those charged with property crime, which is unusual in Canada (Janhevich, Johnson, Vézina, & Fraser, 2008).[6]

The rate of homicide in Toronto has remained relatively stable over the past 30 years (1977-2007) at about 2.5 per 100,000 people, which is close to the national average (Gartner & Thompson, 2004; Li, 2008). However, the risk of homicide victimization for some groups – in particular males, young people, and black Torontonians – has gone up (Gartner & Thompson, 2004):

- Males accounted for 73% of all homicide victims during and after the 1990s, compared to about 64% of all victims from 1974-1989.
- Since 1998, the average age of homicide victims has been 33 and 40% of victims are under the age of 25, compared to an average age of 37 in the 1970s (when 25% of victims were under age 25).
- The homicide rate per 100,000 black Torontonians is almost 5 times greater than the average overall homicide rate per 100,000 population.

The information available on homicide offenders is less complete. Gartner and Thompson (2004) have not been successful in obtaining police files for years after 1991, and the data available from Statistics Canada does not provide detailed information on offender characteristics, such as ethnic background.[7] Nonetheless, police reports show that the number of youth (those 12-17 years old) charged with homicide[8] in Toronto has increased in recent years. For example, 33 youth were charged with homicide between 1992 and 2002, but this increased to 37 for the much shorter period between 2003 and 2007 (Statistics Canada, Uniform Crime Reports). Youth have also become an increasing proportion of all persons charged with homicide in Toronto (Statistics Canada, UCR). That said, these numbers must be interpreted with caution, since they do not take into account the possible effects of population change.

Finally, Gartner and Thompson (2004) have further shown that the characteristics of homicides in Toronto have changed over the past 30 years. The proportion of homicides committed in public spaces and those committed with guns were significantly greater between 1993-2003 than in the 1970s and

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3 The CISC defines a "street gang member" as "someone who is involved (directly or indirectly) in gang-motivated crime", and who has been identified as a gang member through at least two of the following means: reliable source information (i.e., fellow/rival gang member, legitimate community resources); police surveillance; self-report/admission; court findings; common and/or symbolic gang definition (i.e., gang paraphernalia, tattoos, clothing, etc.). We return to more of the CISC methods and findings later on.

4 Data sources included the 2005 and 2006 CISC Integrated Provincial Threat Assessments, law enforcement agency materials and interviews, academic research, and intelligence from the Automated Criminal Intelligence Information System (ACIIS).

5 References to "Toronto" represent the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) of Toronto (as defined by Statistics Canada), which includes a number of police forces. References to the "City of Toronto" refer specifically to that which falls under the jurisdiction of the Toronto Police Service.

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6 This data should be interpreted with caution as it is subject to police discretion and may reflect police activity more than actual rates of offending.

7 There is a long-standing debate in Canada around the potential benefits and harms of systematically coding for race variables in crime statistics (see Gabor, 1994; Roberts & Doob, 1997). It is therefore difficult to obtain information on offending by ethnic group simply because "race" or "ethnic background" is not coded in national crime data, except for with regards to Aboriginals.

8 Includes charges for first degree murder, second degree murder and manslaughter.

1980s; the proportion of homicides committed in the course of robberies or sexual assaults have not increased. Furthermore, there was a marked increase in gun-related homicides in the City of Toronto in 2005, dubbed "The Year of the Gun" by the media: 51 of the 79 (65%) homicides were gun-related, which is more than double the number of gun-related homicides in 2004 (Toronto Police Service, 2006). There also appears to have been a relatively high number of homicides and gun-related homicides in the City of Toronto since 2005 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Homicides and gun-related homicides in the City of Toronto, 1997-2007

	Total Homicides	Gun-Related Homicides	% Gun-Related Homicides
2007	84	43	51%
2006	71	34	48%
2005	79	51	65%
2004	64	24	38%
2003	66	32	49%
2002	65	28	43%
2001	59	33	56%
2000	59	25	42%
1999	48	18	38%
1998	56	13	23%
1997	60	24	40%

Sources: Toronto Police Annual Reports.

Though there appears to be some trends in homicide characteristics in the City of Toronto, is it difficult to determine the extent to which they are linked to gang violence among youth and young adults. CISC (2006) reports a total of 80 street gangs in the Greater Toronto Area, noting that they are highly engaged in firearm-related incidents, but providing no additional detail or explanation. Information on gang-related homicides reported by Statistics Canada is available at the provincial level only, and is limited by a change in the definition of what constitutes a "gang-related" homicide that occurred in 2005.[9]

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9 Before 2005, police were asked if a homicide was "gang-related". In 2005, the question was amended to allow for specification of whether the homicide was: (a) confirmed as gang-related, or (b) "suspected" as gang-related. It is unknown if "suspected" gang-related incidents were included in numbers prior to 2005; the criteria used for making the distinction are not readily available (see Li, 2008).

Survey research conducted by Wortley and Tanner (2004) provides some insight into the involvement of some youth and young adults in gangs and violence in Toronto. Their work showed that 11% of high school students aged 14 to 20 years and 27% of the street youth aged 14 to 24 years claimed that they had been a "gang" member at some point in their life. However, a portion (31% of students and 8% of street youth) could be considered "social" members of a "gang" rather than "criminal" members – the activities they described as part of their gang affiliation were more "social", such as hanging out with other gang members or playing sports within the "gang" context. Only 4% of the high school students and 15% of the street youth in the study sample who reported a "gang affiliation" could be considered *current* members of a *criminal* gang. An additional 3% of the students and 9% of the street youth reported being the former member of a criminal gang (Wortley & Tanner, 2004).

Current criminal gang members had much higher rates of self-reported involvement in crime and violence over the past 12 months than any other group (Wortley & Tanner, 2004). For example:

• Nearly 91% of current criminal gang members reported being involved in a fight, compared to 27.5% of social gang members and 26.5% of those never involved in a gang.

• 51.4% of current criminal gang members reported selling drugs 10 times or more, compared to none of the social gang members and 2.1% of those never involved in a gang.

• 11.3% of current criminal gang members reported sexually assaulting someone, compared to none of the social gang members and 0.3% of those never involved in a gang.

• 68.3% of current criminal gang members reported having carried a gun or a knife, compared to 11.8% of social gang members and 11.2% of those never involved in a gang.

For the most part, those who had never been in a gang, or who were current or former social members of a gang, were relatively uninvolved in criminal activities. The criminal involvement of former criminal gang members over the past year was much higher, but still nowhere near the level of involvement of current gang members. Current gang members were also much more likely to report experiencing various types of criminal victimization than any other group (Wortley & Tanner, 2004). For instance, among the high school

students who reported currently being in a gang, 79% reported being physically assaulted and 45% being assaulted with a weapon in the past year, compared to 35% (for physical assault) and only 5% (for assault with a weapon) of those who have never been in a gang (Wortley & Tanner, 2004).

These findings are consistent with a survey conducted by Erickson and her colleagues (2006) who found that among the 14-17 year old males in their Toronto sample, 4.2% of the students, 32.5% of those who left school, and 60.3% of youth detainees reported having carried or carrying a gun in the past year.[10] The strongest predictor of gun violence among male students and detainees was gang fighting, while selling crack/cocaine was the strongest predictor of gun violence among those who left school. A similar survey of 14-17 year old girls in Toronto showed that among those who left school and detainees, 21.2% reported carrying a gun and 52.2% reported carrying a knife; 39.5% reported carrying a weapon (club/stick, knife or gun) as a result of violence experienced by them or others close to them (Erickson et al., 2006). As with the young men, gang fighting significantly increased the likelihood of gun-related violence among young women; involvement in the drug market, however, did not (Erickson et al., 2006).

Concentrations of Risk

Research on urban violence shows that it is not randomly distributed; it is perpetrated and experienced by a small number of people, and concentrated in the areas of our cities that are the most vulnerable to economic hardship and social marginalization (see Fitzgerald, Wisener, & Savoie, 2004; Gannon, 2006; Perreault, Savoie, & Bédard, 2008; Savoie, 2008; Savoie, Bedard, & Collins 2006). Furthermore, violence within and between gangs is far more prevalent than gang-related harms to the public (CISC, 2006; Chettleburgh, 2007; Wortley & Tanner, 2005).

About 16% of offenders between the ages of 12 and 21 (inclusively) can be considered "chronic offenders" (i.e., those with 5 or more incidents that led to a charge and a referral to court), and these individuals are responsible for nearly 60% of all court referrals for their age group (Carrington, Matarazzo, & deSousa, 2005). As previously mentioned, youth who identify being in a criminal gang also report significantly greater levels of criminal activity and violent offending than non-gang-involved youth, as well as a greater levels of

victimization (Wortley & Tanner, 2004). CISC (2006) further contends that gun violence is much more prevalent among street gangs comprised mostly of young men 30 years of age and under.

Geo-coding exercises examining the relationships between the distribution of crime and the socio-economic and demographic makeup of Canadian cities show that crime and violence tend to be concentrated in certain areas of our cities, and tend to be highest in neighbourhoods characterized by economic disadvantage, high mobility[11] and social disorganization[12] (see Fitzgerald, Wisener, & Savoie, 2004; Gannon, 2006; Savoie, 2008; Savoie, Bedard, & Collins 2006). A recent examination of the distribution of youth crime in Montreal shows that rates of violent crime among youth were higher in neighbourhoods characterized by a higher proportion of low-income earners, visible minorities, and residents lacking a high school diploma (Perreault, Savoie, & Bédard, 2008). Though geo-coding studies have certain important limitations[13], it is fairly clear that some areas of our cities are more vulnerable to violence than others. Finally, as reported by CISC (2006), most gangs operate in distinct territories and most gang violence occurs in and around the low-income communities in which members live.

It is difficult to obtain a complete and reliable picture of the location and distribution of gang-related violence in Toronto. There have not been any geo-coding exercises in Toronto, and current data sources are limited by various challenges. Nonetheless, a number of initiatives have contributed some information on Toronto neighbourhoods, and on their relative levels of gun and gang-related activity. In April 2004, the United Way of Greater Toronto (UWGT) and the City of Toronto created the *Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force*. The goal was to develop an action plan for neighbourhood revitalization in Toronto (UWGT, 2005). Its first task was to determine the areas of the city that were the least advantaged in terms of the quality of life of their residents (Janhevich, Johnson, Vézina, & Fraser, 2008). Statistical information on the location and use of essential services and socio-demographic census data were used to determine levels of neighbourhood need (UWGT, 2005).

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10 These rates are higher than those of a male sample in Montreal, where 2.8%, 17.6% and 48.6% of students, those who left school, and detainees, respectively, reported having carried or carrying a gun in the past year.

11 "Mobility" refers to the percentage of the population in a neighbourhood living at another residence one year prior to the Census (Fitzgerald, Wisener, & Savoie, 2004). American research has linked "residential mobility" with higher crime rates through reduced guardianship and/or local social involvement (Sampson, 1993).

12 "Social disorganization" refers to a decrease in the influence of social rules over behaviour, taken from the work of Sampson (1993) and Sampson & Lauritsen (1994).

13 Geo-coding studies rely solely on incidents recorded by the police, raising some concern around issues of underreporting and of police bias. Second, it is unclear whether we would witness significantly different patterns in "homicide" if that variable was disaggregated to reflect different types of homicide, such as gang-related homicide versus spousal and domestic homicide, for example.

Around the same time, in March of 2004, Mayor Miller announced his *Community Safety Plan* which emphasized neighbourhood-level actions to address gun and gang violence among youth (Community Safety Secretariat, 2004). Based on available data, the City designated 13 of its neighbourhoods as "priority neighbourhoods" on the basis of their "high needs" in terms of gun violence, social and economic disadvantage, and poor access to services (Community Safety Secretariat, 2004).[14] That said, there are some concerns regarding the methodology used to identify and select these "13 priority neighbourhoods". The City was unable to obtain the cooperation of the Toronto Police Service in gaining access to information on incidents of gun and gang-related violence within the city, so they had to rely on an inventory of media accounts of the location and nature of gun crimes in Toronto (IPC, 2007). This raises important concerns regarding possible media misrepresentation and/or selection bias, and makes it more difficult to assess the validity of the City's designation of these "priority neighbourhoods".

Finally, in January of 2006, following the high-profile shooting death of bystander Jane Creba, a *Tri-Level Committee on Guns and Violence* was formed, comprised of senior representatives from the City of Toronto, the Government of Ontario and the Federal Government (Janhevich, Johnson, Vézina, & Fraser, 2008). This included the creation of the *Tri-Level Indicators Group* (TLIG) to bring together local, provincial and federal data to obtain a better picture of the quality of life within the 13 priority neighbourhoods and to chart progress in addressing the "risk factors" for crime and violence within them (Janhevich, Johnson, Vézina, & Fraser, 2008). The indicators they used included the number of youth involved in gangs, youth convictions for violent offences and drug offences, school drop-out rates and literacy rates, youth unemployment, family income, and the number of youth involved in sports, recreation and volunteer activities (see TLIG, 2006).

The TLIG (2006) data show that 4,511 City of Toronto youth under the age of 18 were admitted to secure pre-trial detention, secure custody, and community supervision (i.e. probation) during the 2004-2005 fiscal year.[15] More importantly:

- 2,332 (51.7%) of them resided in the "13 priority neighbourhoods", where 2,179 lived in the other 127 neighbourhoods of the City of Toronto;

- 45 youth from the priority neighbourhoods were identified by police or correctional staff with a "gang alert", compared to 35 youth from the other 127 neighbourhoods; and
- 231 youth from the priority neighbourhoods were admitted for violent and/or weapons/firearms offences in contrast to 299 for the rest of the City.

This information suggests that when compared to the 127 other neighbourhoods in the City of Toronto, the "13 priority neighbourhoods" account for a disproportionate amount of Toronto's young offenders, "gang alerts", and youth committing violent and/or weapons/firearm offences. Though official data such as these are always subject to limitations of bias and subjectivity, they are consistent with other findings that violence is disproportionately perpetrated and experienced by a relatively small number of people and is concentrated in certain areas of our cities.

Making Sense of Gun and Gang Violence Among Youth and Young Adults in Recent Times

Gang members in Canada come from a variety of ethnic, demographic and socio-economic backgrounds (Chettleburgh, 2003; CISC, 2006). However, the majority of gang members seem to come from groups that suffer from the greatest levels of inequality, disadvantage, and social marginalization (Chettleburgh, 2003; CISC, 2006; Wortley & Tanner, 2005). Canadian research shows that some of these youth have been exposed to violence since childhood, and many are struggling with mental health and substance abuse problems. Their motivation for joining a street gang can range from seeking money to looking for prestige, protection, and a sense of belonging (Dorais & Corriveau, 2006; Totten, 2000; Wortley & Tanner, 2005; as well as the articles by Corriveau and Totten in this volume). Gun and gang violence among youth and young adults should therefore be considered in the context of the socio-economic conditions and structural arrangements that influence the lives of young people, and on the social context of gun and gang violence among youth and young adults.

The Attributes of (Dis)Affiliation

In his work on issues relating to social cohesion, crime and insecurity, Castel (1995) identifies a continuum of social integration that is based on measures of social affiliation along two axes: (1) ***work***, and the economic position associated with it; and (2) ***social relations***, meaning one's interaction with —

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14 Visit http://www.torontopaye.ca/PriorityAreas.pdf for a map of the 13 priority neighbourhoods.

15 Information on youth admissions and "gang alerts" was generated by the Youth Offender Information Tracking System maintained by the Youth Justice Services of the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (Tri-Level Indicators Group, 2006).

and level of attachment to – others, and to mainstream society groups and institutions (see Graph 1).

Graph 1. Continuum of Social Integration

WELLBEING

Social Relations

EXCLUSION — INCLUSION

Relative Economic Position

DEPRIVATION
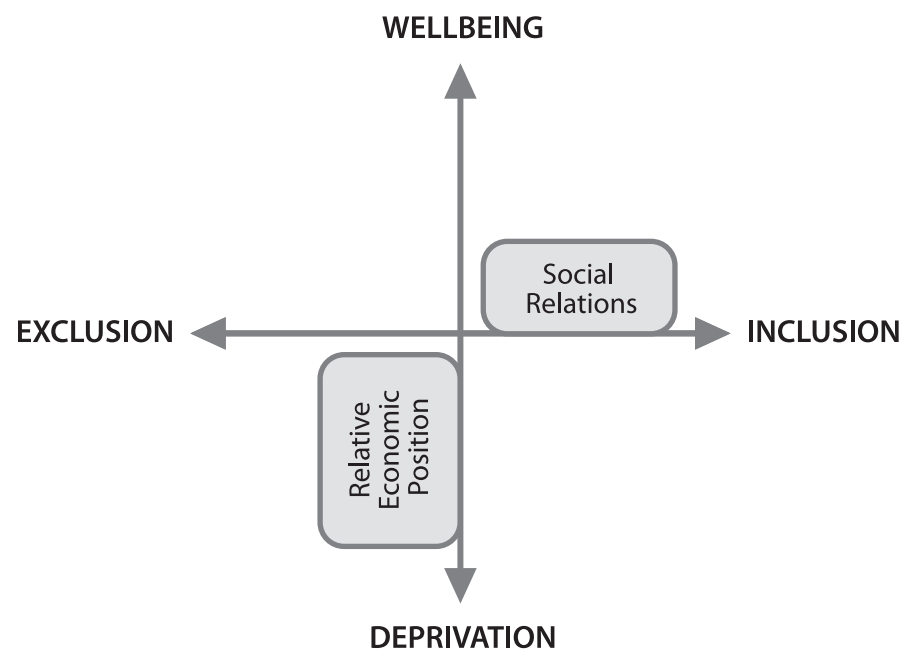
Adapted from Janhevich, Bania, & Hastings (2008).

Castel (1995) argues that in our current global capitalist economy, one's status within society is increasingly determined by the attributes attached to "work", and less by other aspects of identity such as heritage and family history. At the same time, the very nature of the post-industrial, global capitalist economy has led to increasingly problematic relations to "work". These are manifested by (Castel, 1995):

1. A destabilization of the "middle-class" due to the increasing difficulty of obtaining a full-time, permanent salaried position and the certainty and stability that come along with this.

2. The emergence of a certain "peripheral" group caught in a cycle of short-term and unstable part-time minimum wage jobs or welfare dependence, either because they are too old or not skilled enough for training but too young to retire, or because they are youth who are under or over qualified for the work that is available to them; and

3. A deficit of "spots" within the mainstream social structure associated with social usefulness and public recognition.

Castel (1995) insists that those most affected are youth, especially the less educated and non-skilled youth and young adults who have fewer options for integration into the labour market. The decline in manufacturing industries and in "good" working class jobs (i.e., secure and unionized jobs), affects them the most (Castel, 1995; see FitzGerald, Stockdale, & Hale, 2003; Websdale, 2001). Many are left with "McJobs" (Ritter & Anker, 2002) as their only option – those unstable, low-paying service sector jobs that promise very little in the way of career development or advancement. This lack of integration into the workforce can result in disqualification for civic/political integration and for broader social integration (Castel, 1995). When combined with other forms of social marginalization, such as a lack of meaningful ties with family and friends, discrimination based on gender, race/ethnicity, ability, and/or the stigma of having been in conflict with the law (see Davies & Tanner, 2003), some youth and young adults are left with a sense of exclusion and pessimism about the future (Chettleburgh, 2007; Totten, 2000; Wortley & Tanner, 2005). Castel (1995) calls this group the "surnuméraires", the "excess baggage" who may seek prosperity and stability, but who are stuck in a social "no man's land" and are doubtful that it is achievable. Given their lack of integration into the workforce and into mainstream society, these youth often give up on traditional means of "success" and adopt survival strategies that are based in the present, on living "day to day" (Castel, 1995).

There are indications that the economic position and sense of exclusion of certain groups have been getting relatively worse in Canada, and that this may influence involvement in gangs. Canada is experiencing growing inequality with increasing disparity between high and low-income families (Heisz, 2005). Young men in Canada have felt this income inequality most acutely, despite general increases in educational attainment for this group (Beaujot & Kerr, 2007). The relative economic position of men aged 16-29 years in Canada has declined over the past twenty years both in terms of their rate of full-time employment and in their earnings, while the economic position of older men and of women of all ages has remained relatively stable (Beaujot & Kerr, 2007). There has also been an increase in the spatial polarization of low-income families into distinct neighbourhoods (Heisz, 2005). In Toronto, the number of higher poverty neighbourhoods increased dramatically over the past twenty years (from 30 in 1981 to 120 in 2001), and "poor" families are increasingly concentrated in neighbourhoods with a high proportion of families living in poverty (UWGT & CCSD, 2004). There has also been a

60% increase in the number of youth living in higher poverty neighbourhoods over the twenty-year period from 1981-2001 (UWGT & CCSD, 2004).

Furthermore, 87-90% of the employable population in "very high" to "high" poverty neighbourhoods in Toronto are working, compared to 93% for the rest of the city (UWGT & CCSD, 2004). The high poverty levels in these communities are likely linked to residents having less stable and lower-paying forms of part-time work (UWGT & CCSD, 2004). This is despite evidence that the percentage of residents in Toronto's "higher" poverty neighbourhoods without a high school diploma dropped from 46.5% in 1991 to 33% in 2001 (UWGT & CCSD, 2004). Within this spatial polarization, there is also an aspect of ghettoization of visible minority "poor" (Heisz, 2005; Hou & Picot, 2003). Visible minority families now account for 77.5% of the total "poor" family population in higher poverty neighbourhoods in Toronto, compared to 37.4% in 1981 (UWGT & CCSD, 2004). Finally, there is evidence that black men living in Toronto's predominantly black neighbourhoods are more likely to be unemployed than any other group living in an ethnic enclave (Hou & Picot, 2003).[16]

Link to Gang Involvement and Violence

Castel (1995) argues that those who feel the least connected to a valuable and valued role in the economy, the lowest sense of attachment to others, and the most pessimistic about their chances for improving their situation in the future (i.e., those in the lower left quadrant of Graph 1) are the most likely to offend, as well as most likely to become chronic offenders. Relative economic deprivation and social marginalization have indeed been linked to gang membership. Gangs are seen as a "fast-track" to the material goods and sense of belonging some disaffiliated youth crave (see Chettleburgh, 2007; Decker, 2004; Sutherland, 1947). These themes were prominent in Wortley and Tanner's (2005) *Toronto Street Gang Pilot Project*, a series of 102 face-to-face interviews with Toronto youth (aged 16-24 years) who have been identified (or self-identified) as being part of a gang:

> We made lots of money sellin drugs and stealin and ripping people off. I got to buy stuff I could not get with no job at McDonalds (21-year-old male).

Nobody respects some guy flippin burgers or wearing some stupid ref shirt at Foot Locker. I make real cheddar in the gang, we are our own bosses, and we get plenty more respect from people cause of money we got… (22-year-old male).

It's like us against the world. We respect each other, support each other. Nobody in the outside world helps, or cares, so it is up to us. That's it man. Family (20-year-old male).

What chance has a guy like me got in the real world. A poor black guy? … teachers don't think you can do the work. Nobody's gonna give me a job. So I'll get paid and live in another way, in another world where I get respect and nobody cares what I look like or where I come from. I know I'll probably die young or go to jail, but what other chance is there? (22-year-old male).

The competition for limited resources, profitable markets and social status that emerges within a climate of deprivation and exclusion has further been linked to gun violence in urban centres (see Daly & Wilson, 1988 and 1997). Research reveals that acts of "strategic" or "instrumental" violence, such as those relating to heists and robbery, tend to occur in the context of competition for material wealth, whereas more "tactical" or "expressive" forms of gun-related violence, such as homicide, occur mostly in the context of competition for social status (Wilson & Daly, 1985).

Imagining a Better Response to Gun and Gang Violence Among Youth and Young Adults

The most common response to youth violence, and especially in the case of violence perpetrated by members of youth gangs, is suppression by the criminal justice system (Chettleburgh, 2007; Wortley & Tanner, 2005). These responses focus on identifying persistent offenders and aggressively enforcing laws as they apply to these individuals (Chettleburgh, 2007). Critics suggest that these enforcement strategies alone have little effect on rates of crime and victimization, and can lead to unintended consequences and counter-productive impacts on individuals and communities, including: increasing the cohesiveness of a neighbourhood gang and its attractiveness to vulnerable youth in the face of high profile and aggressive police activity; undermining the reputation and legitimacy of the police when few arrests actually turn into serious charges; and creating a damaging cycle of release and imprisonment of young adults, especially young males (Chettleburgh,

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16 "Ethnic enclaves" are defined as census tracts with at least 30% of the population from a single visible minority group (Hou & Picot, 2003).

2007; Decker, 2004; United Nations, 2006; Wortley & Tanner, 2005). That is not to say that there is no role for enforcement. When the emphasis is placed on neighbourhood level problem-solving and coordination between criminal justice and other agencies, reductions in gang-related crime and violence can occur (see Braga & Kennedy, 2002). However, these benefits are likely to be temporary unless the structural context of the underlying problem is addressed.

This has led to increasing attention to "the promise of prevention" and to a shift to the "community" as a new partner in prevention initiatives (Cohen, 1985; Crawford, 1998; Garland, 2001; Hastings & Jamieson, 2001; Hughes, 2007; Jamieson, 2008). The focus in Canada has been placed mainly on Crime Prevention Through Social Development (CPSD) initiatives that seek to address the factors that place young people at "risk", and enhance the factors that can provide some protection or resiliency to individuals, families and communities (see Birbeck, 2005; Hastings, 1998).

There are three main variants of CPSD, as identified by Hastings (1998):

- the **developmental approach**: focused on addressing the individual risk factors associated with persistent offenders;
- the **community approach**: focused on local problem-solving through mobilization and partnerships; and
- the **social approach**: focused on addressing and reducing patterns of stress, inequality and relative deprivation.

In Canada, the focus has largely been on *developmental* and *community* approaches to crime prevention (see Birkbeck, 2005; National Crime Prevention Council, 1997; National Crime Prevention Centre, 2007). However, investment in prevention initiatives pales in comparison to the ever-expanding resources going towards the suppression of gang violence in Canada through enforcement. The policies and practices that have emerged in the City of Toronto since 2004 are but one example.

In Toronto, Mayor Miller introduced the *Community Safety Plan* (CSP) in 2004 in an attempt to "balance" criminal justice responses with a more "preventive" approach (Miller, 2004, p. 1). The primary focus of the Plan was youth violence, particularly guns and gangs within the 13 priority neighbourhoods. The CSP is coordinated by the *Community Safety Secretariat* and overseen by the *Mayor's Panel on Community Safety*. In 2004, the Panel's membership included the Mayor, two city

councillors, three provincial government ministers, the federal minister for infrastructure and communities, the chairs of the two school boards as well as a youth and a community representative (Community Safety Secretariat, 2004). The main goals were to create positive opportunities for marginalized youth who live in the 13 priority neighbourhoods and to strengthen neighbourhoods through problem-solving partnerships under the guise of *Neighbourhood Action Teams* (NATs) (Janhevich, Johnson, Vézina, & Fraser, 2008).

The NATs focus on integrating City service planning and delivery from a neighbourhood perspective (Toronto Community Housing, 2006). They describe their priorities as: increasing the equitable participation of racialized (and especially African-Canadian) youth by identifying and reducing systemic barriers; creating and maintaining safe spaces that support healthy youth development; providing meaningful youth engagement opportunities that build resilience; and harmonizing standards and policies in City service delivery as it pertains to youth (Toronto Community Housing, 2006).

Building on the *Community Safety Plan*, the City of Toronto launched the *Making a Safe City Safer* strategy in 2007. It focuses on five key areas: (1) gun control, (2) victims of violence, witnesses and their families, (3) violence against young women and girls, (4) the youth justice sector, and (5) skills development, training and employment (Janhevich, Johnson, Vézina, & Fraser, 2008; Miller, 2008). Also, in January of 2006, in the aftermath of the shooting death of Jane Creba, all three orders of government came together to form the *Tri-Level Committee on Guns and Violence* (IPC, 2007). The aim was to bring together various representatives from the City of Toronto, the Government of Ontario and the federal government to share information and resources relating to the challenges posed by youth gangs in Toronto (IPC, 2007). Other than the ongoing work of the Tri-Level Indicators Group, which was previously discussed, very little information is available on the progress or other activities of this Committee.

Both the provincial and federal governments have invested funds in various developmental and social approaches in Toronto since then, mostly geared towards improving skills training and job opportunities for youth. These include:

- The *Ontario Youth Challenge Fund*, created in February 2006 with $15 million towards funding of local training and job programs for at-risk youth in Toronto's 13 priority neighbourhoods (Office of the Premier, 2006); and

- The *Youth Opportunities Strategy*, launched in 2006 to provide funding for 800 summer jobs for youth from Toronto's priority neighbourhoods, youth outreach workers, and a school-based prevention and diversion program to keep at-risk youth in school (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2007).

At the federal level, an $11.1 million *Youth Gang Prevention Fund* was established in January 2007. Housed within the National Crime Prevention Centre, the fund was created to provide financial support to community level programs across Canada that address individual, family, school and community "risk and protective factors" associated with youth violence and gang membership; programs that work with youth to help them exit gangs; and programs that provide ex-gang members with the support needed to avoid returning to the gang lifestyle. Much of the focus is on equipping Canadian youth with the supports they need to resist joining or returning to gangs (Public Safety Canada, 2007).

However, the money invested in these initiatives does not compare to the ever-expanding resources going towards the suppression of gang violence in Toronto. For example, in 2005, the Toronto Police Service (TPS) announced the new *Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy* (TAVIS), which included the hiring of 450 new police officers (TPS, 2008). In January of 2006, the province of Ontario announced an additional 150 officers for TAVIS and another $5 million in annual funding over 3 years. The province has also spent $26 million towards the creation and implementation of a new state-of-the-art Operations Centre for a provincially-led *Anti-Guns and Gangs Task Force* in Toronto that brings police and prosecutors together under one roof (Ministry of the Attorney General, 2005; Office of the Premier, 2007).

In contrast, Toronto's *Community Safety Secretariat* is comprised of one Project Manager and a few staff (Janhevich, Johnson, Vézina, & Fraser, 2008). A large part of the Secretariat's work therefore involves seeking and securing funds and resources (both human and material) from other orders of government, community partners and the private sector, including for programs and projects conducted under the Neighbourhood Action Teams (NATs). Though the Secretariat has had some success in leveraging resources, long-term funding and sustainability remain a great concern (see Janhevich, Johnson, Vézina, & Fraser, 2008).

Furthermore, it is difficult to determine the nature and quality of the relationship between the *Community Safety Plan* and the *Toronto Police Service*, or the extent to which the activities of one take into account the planning and activities of the other. The fact that the City has not yet been successful in obtaining crime and violence data from the TPS for its planning exercises points to a serious gap in collaboration and coordination. The same can be said for the various prevention initiatives being introduced in Toronto by different orders of government. There are indications that consultations and collaboration are not taking place (IPC, 2007), which leads to serious concerns regarding the comprehensiveness and integration of various prevention efforts within the city.

What we are left with, then, is a social problem in need of a broad-based and well-coordinated solution that includes mechanisms to address and relieve the inequality caused by our social, economic and political arrangements, but that is dealt with mainly through criminal justice and enforcement (Hastings, 2003; Websdale, 2001).

Conclusion

Developmental prevention policies and programs for marginalized youth are unlikely to make a significant difference – and could even accentuate the frustration – if current labour market conditions are not addressed (Castel, 1995). What is the use of encouraging youth to "maximize their potential" or of spending resources on preparing them for the workforce if they are unlikely to find adequate employment? Similarly, placing a focus on the dynamics within neighbourhoods fails to acknowledge the broader socio-political and economic factors (i.e., lack of affordable housing, poverty, (un) employment, racism, exclusion, etc.) that are beyond the jurisdiction and control of local "communities", but that play a significant role in challenges of crime and safety (Cohen, 1985; Crawford, 1998; Hastings & Jamieson, 2001; Hughes, 2007). In this sense, we may be setting the "community" up to fail, and setting the stage for increased frustration and resentment (Hastings & Jamieson, 2001).

If we are serious about addressing the issue of gang involvement and violence among youth and young adults, we need a comprehensive, coordinated approach that addresses underlying issues of child poverty, inadequate housing, barriers to education, unemployment, mental health, racism and discrimination. The recent *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* report, prepared for the Province of Ontario and released in November of 2008, reiterates this (see Government of Ontario, 2008).

Why, then, do we continue to rely on all other types of strategies that focus mainly on criminal justice and individual level "risk factors"? Ryan (1976) argues that "blaming the victim" in this way serves to justify action that is designed to change society's "victim" and its "symptoms" rather than society itself. Hastings (1998 and 2007) argues that we often start with solutions that protect our vested interests, then work backwards to legitimize them. Developmental and community streams of crime prevention are "safe", tangible responses, but we end up with what organizations and communities are willing and able to do with their limited resources, rather than what needs to be done (Hastings, 1998 and 2007).

In this sense, our current political responses remain largely expressive and focused on managing public perceptions and expectations, rather than on responding adequately to the complexities of the issue at hand (Cohen, 1985; Garland, 2001; Hughes, 2007; Jones, 2003). A shift to a more comprehensive, equitable and long-term solution requires greater awareness of the complexities surrounding issues of crime and safety, and the political will to tackle these issues head on. It also requires more access to the knowledge, skills and resources to accomplish what needs to be done, as opposed to expending resources on "solutions" that can be done within our current mindset and budgets (Hastings, 1998). A more effective response to the challenges posed by youth involvement in gangs in Canada begins with the tools and data needed to study this phenomenon more appropriately. This includes developing clear and measurable indicators to help guide our objectives, target our efforts, and serve as benchmarks for assessing our success.

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