

**YOUTH GANGS/GROUPS:**  
**COMPARING THE VIEWS OF**  
**POLICE, SCHOOL OFFICIALS,**  
**SOCIAL WORKERS, PARENTS,**  
**VICTIMS, AND YOUTH**

*"I think people often minimize. The schools weren't taking it seriously. I think the police force wasn't taking it seriously. I think they thought it was a bunch of loosely knit kids playing these little games."*

*(Parent #1)*

In comparing the views of youth gang/group members and the adults in the study there are surprisingly few areas of significant contrast or remarkable disagreement. Despite youth impressions that the adults around them are unconcerned, the comments of youth- serving professionals are insightful and sensitive and reveal an honest caring and concern for their well-being. The adult professional participants were often self-critical and spoke candidly about the concerns they have about their role in both addressing and encouraging youth violence and youth gangs/groups.

PERCEPTIONS OF YOUTH VIOLENCE

• Consensus: Youth Violence Is A Problem

Adults and young people alike feel that youth violence is a problem in Canada. The adults' responses ranged along a continuum from simply being 'a problem' to being a "very serious" problem. Their impression is that young people today appear to be more willing and able to resort to violence to solve their problems and deal with frustration and anger than youth of previous generations.

Comments reflect that youth violence has been increasing in recent years, both in terms of incidents and reporting, and involves young persons from elementary to high school age. Concern is expressed that youth violence is still not taken seriously and, despite recent media attention, remains under-reported and unrecognized in terms of its prevalence. Youth violence is also identified as a health problem, a reflection of unmet needs and other deficits.

*It is a very rapidly increasing problem. Youth violence has escalated over the last five to six years in my experience. The assaults themselves are more and more violent. We are seeing more and more weapons used. It's not unusual for kids to bring knives to school and say they need it for protection now which was very unusual five or six years ago.*

*(Police Officer #7)*

*We have a very very violent youth society. They don't even recognize their violence. Their parents don't even recognize their violence. (I've never) worked with a group of young people who have ... been so preoccupied with violence.*

*(Vice Principal #2)*

*I'd have to view (youth violence) as a very significant societal problem. From kindergarten on up in terms of playground behaviours, verbal harassment, verbal threats ... and very often unrecognized. (School Official)*

*I view it as a statement of resourcelessness. I view it as a statement of the changes in society which a lot of people in positions to deal with it have not recognized it (or) dealt with it. This is the young peoples' way of saying, "We have some problems."*

*(Social Worker #2)*

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*If you had asked me (if youth gangs were a problem) five years ago I would have looked at you and thought you were nuts. I honestly, when this thing started, didn't believe it. Then slowly piece by piece (I) could see ... it coming together.*

*(Victim #2)*

- Consensus: Youth Gangs/Groups Are A Serious Problem

Within the context of the broader problem of youth violence, youth gangs/groups were thought to be a serious problem. Again, comments reflect a concern that the issue is not being recognized or taken seriously. Adult participants observe that the individual bully of yesterday has been replaced by the assaulting or threatening group.

*They are serious. I don't see individual acts of violence anymore among youth. I can't remember the last one on one fight I ever investigated. They just don't seem to happen anymore. Clearly it's a trend to a collective nature. (Youth gangs/groups) are acting out more and more each year, certainly for the last few years where those statistics are available, but I believe it's actually been longer than that.*

*(Police Officer #1)*

*I think the problem is extremely serious. Kids in grade school are now banding together asking a kid who wants to be their friend to go do something to the teacher or take something from the mall or beat up a kid. Once that is done that person becomes part of that little clique and (this is) the beginning of full blown gang involvement and gang ideals. I think we're farther gone than people care to imagine.*

*(Social Worker #2)*

- Consensus: Gangs/Groups Are A Problem In Schools

The problem of gangs/groups in school raised some of the strongest feelings among all participants. The involvement of young children is thought to be an indicator of the seriousness of the problem. Gang/group-related activities involving children often resemble those of the older teens in high schools. The prevalence of violence in schools is felt to be a reflection of the violence prevalent outside in the community and the rest of society.

*Gangs are certainly a problem in schools. It's not just a question of one or two bullies in a school anymore. That's long since past. What ends up happening is these groups of kids have a very negative effect on the school environment because they are intimidating. They threaten the peaceful atmosphere in a school and there are many students (and) staff members ... who are frightened of these people.*

*(Police Officer #2)*

*During the month of October I had to suspend 20 kids. Sixteen of those suspensions were for gang-related activities.*

*(Vice Principal #2)*

*I believe that gangs are a problem in schools. I think that what happens in a neighbourhood simply carries into the schools. There are gangs that actually control what kids wear, who kids hang around with and how kids interact together. This is all controlled within the school setting. The most powerful interaction among gangs and regular kids*

*in the schools is the extortion and intimidation. To simply show the power that the gang has is enough to have people respond to their requests.*

*(Social Worker #2)*

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- Consensus: Victims Are Reluctant To Report

Youth victims of violence and gang/group-related activities are reluctant to report to parents, police, or school authorities for fear of retaliation or that nothing will be seen to be done about their complaints. Victims also fear the stigma of being a victim which identifies a person as being unpopular and without friends.

*(Victims) don't report these things because they are fearful of retaliation. I think to some extent too they accept this sort of thing in 1993 as inevitable. It's one of the hazards of going to school. It's the way it is. They're afraid to report it. Nobody else seems to give a shit about it. Nobody is stopping it so what's the big deal. Why should I tell anybody. No good will come of it.*

*(Police Officer #2)*

- Consensus: Kids Mistrust And Have Lost Faith In Adults And Systems

Overshadowing all participants' comments is a feeling that youth today do not trust and have lost faith in adults and adult run institutions that are supposed to be their supports. Young people look to adults to protect them and provide safe and secure environments whether at home or in school. When we fail to provide it young people become fearful and uncertain and eventually learn not to rely on adults.

Some adult participants feel that youth today have very few positive adult role models in their lives who inspire hope, courage, and respect. Their disillusionment with the hypocrisy they see in the adult world leaves them vulnerable to the influence of any individual or group that gives them a sense of belonging and groundedness.

*I think part of the problem has been the breakdown of trust in adults generally. A breakdown in terms of our politicians ... our ministers aren't to be trusted, our priests are making headlines all the time. A general mistrust of not only the institutions but the adults that make up institutions. It's pretty hard for them to find a role model these days other than the ones they find in ... videos and in the media.*

*(School Official)*

*I believe there's a lack of faith or trust in adult systems. Adult systems are letting them down. They're not there for them. They're not working. They're obsolete. I know my own is. They're obsolete and the kids are not buying into it and that's painfully obvious. (We need to) try and get (kids) to have faith or trust in some of the adult systems particularly our own, and get them to report things and to show them that the system can work.*

*(Police Officer #1)*

*Kids, I feel, quite often don't trust the adult systems out there and as a result they feel they have to become reliant on their friends to protect themselves. As a result they're forming gangs.*

*(Police Officer #4)*

*There is a gross misunderstanding of a gang and the workings of gangs and how it impacts on the individual and their families in society. Until those questions are able to be asked and answered by parents and teachers and police and social workers and all of the people in the helping field I think that young people will continue to be victimized by gangs. They are not in a position to be able to accept a lot of our offerings on what steps they should take to leave the*

*gang because as far as they're concerned we don't have to live it on a day to day basis. Our words do not get through (to them).*

*(Social Worker #2)*

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- Consensus: Schools Are Reluctant to Admit There's A Problem

Adults, especially school officials, spoke candidly about the problem they perceive with schools not confronting the seriousness of youth violence and gang/groups. The reluctance is thought to be based on an aversion to draw negative attention to schools thereby creating an impression in the minds of parents, students, and the public that they were unsafe. Some suggest that personal career ambitions of school officials are also part of the problem. A lack of resolve on the part of officials to acknowledge and deal with gangs/groups in schools alienates and angers non-offending students who must live with the fear of gang/group intimidation.

*Many school administrators are motivated by self-interest. If the cops are seen to be at their school too often they get a reputation for being a bad school. It reflects unfavorably on them. It looks like they can't handle the problems. This denial of the problem is a serious mistake because the kids know there is a problem. It's very discouraging to kids because they see (the denial) as bullshit. (Police Officer #2)*

*I had a parent in here last year ... didn't know how to deal with the school administration. The school administration wouldn't believe that the kindergarten level ... at recess ... there's gangs of five year olds. They didn't realize that there was a gang operating. (If the victim didn't hand over his/her recess treat) the tough kid had four or five kids all lined up behind him to beat the hell out of (the victim). The parent couldn't get the school principal or the vice-principal to admit this was a gang activity under ... the policy of the county Board of education. (For) a lot of high school administrators it's political. He wants (a) promotion so he's going to make sure there are no damn problems in his school. Education is full of these guys. The only reason they want this chair is that it's a step to the next chair. If you get somebody like that sitting in a chair ... they never admit to any problem. We have a few of those.*

*(Vice Principal #2)*

*I can understand the school not wanting anyone to know that they're having problems. The school is very cautious about their public image. I had a ... discussion with some good friends of ours and they're both teachers in another area. They said that this is not a problem in their area and that I was exaggerating. We tried to go through it all with them and up to the point where we actually shared with them what had happened to us they really truly didn't believe it. I think there still is a great disbelief that this is happening. When my husband came into the office bleeding from the face I demanded that the principal be brought to the vice-principal's office immediately. They told me he was too busy. I said, "You get him!" We explained to him the situation and they went to get a bag of ice for my husband. The principal basically indicated that he disbelieved (we were attacked). He said, "Oh really. Well that kind of thing doesn't happen at my school." Well ... the vice-principal basically gave him a little sense of reality. They were not going to call the police. They refused to initially and I demanded that they do so.*

*(Victim #1)*

*There were certain activities going on in the schools ... that...teachers, school administration people, Boards of Education did not want to acknowledge. If they acknowledged that it was there they would have to do something about the problem and they had to admit that maybe they weren't doing the best job that they could.*

*(Parent #1)*

- Consensus: Involvement In Criminal Activity Defines A "Gang"

Participants identify a continuum of youth associations ranging from a simple group of friends to more organized

criminal groups. There is virtually unanimous agreement that what separates groups of youth from those considered to be "gangs" is involvement in criminal or illegal activity. Historic stereotypes of what constitutes a gang may prohibit many people from recognizing the form and seriousness of the youth gang phenomenon as it exists in the 1990's.

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*Eight kids walking down the street is not a gang as far as I'm concerned, OK, until they cross the line and do something criminal. That I consider to be a gang. Gangs that we're dealing with are mostly spontaneous in nature. (They) come together for one event and they disband after. Kids will form a gang in a school and the gang might only last two or three weeks then it will disband and (the youth will) go out and make new friends and form new gangs.*

*(Police Officer #6)*

*Basically, the difference between a group of friends or a club (and a gang) is when that group of friends or club crosses over to do something criminal and in my mind intimidation is ... criminal. Any group that intimidates by their power, by their size, by who they are, by their status I would consider to be a gang.*

*(Vice Principal #1)*

*The word gang brings up a stereotype image in your head and you're looking for specific things. When you don't see those specific like gang-related things that a "gang" conjures up in your mind ... you just laugh and say, "They're just a bunch of kids." Well those bunches of kids are the 90's way of being a gang.*

*(Victim #2)*

#### GETTING INVOLVED IN YOUTH GANG/GROUPS

- Consensus: Youth Join Gangs/Groups To Achieve Power, Self-Confidence

There is strong agreement that involvement in gangs/groups gives youth self-confidence and a feeling of power they would not likely achieve on their own.

*I believe there's an appetite for power through violence by the kids. The group's feeling of invincibility is ... the power to be reckoned with.*

*(Police Officer #1)*

*There's a lot of thrill in being a powerful unit. The whole group perceive themselves as the toughest or the meanest.*

*(Vice Principal #1)*

- Consensus: Being In A Gang/Group Provides Protection And Safety

Gang/group involvement provides youth with a sense of safety and security. Young people know they will have backing if they are targeted by other gangs/groups or individuals. Gang/group involvement also confers self-esteem and personal efficacy as measured by the number of friends and associates one has.

*Most of the victims that we saw at first were real naive kids, the loners that weren't really in a group. They were kind of the outcasts and they didn't have any friends. What we found is that the gang would go after them for a while and then what would happen, the kids would finally join a gang for protection.*

*(Police Officer #6)*

*I can see it growing as an attraction as the violence escalates in the schools you are going to have to be part of a group*

to survive.

(Police Officer #7)

- Consensus: The Value Of Gang/Group Names Varies

Adults and youth agree that the importance of names varies from group to group, youth to youth. There appears to be a developmental pattern involved. When a gang/group first forms, a name

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helps them establish their presence in a territory or gain a reputation. The longer a gang/group stays together the less important a name becomes since it draws unwanted police attention.

New members are more likely to be concerned with a name than long term members. For those just joining the name helps them establish an identity and quickly brings them the recognition, power, and status they are hoping to achieve through affiliation with the gang/group.

*If they consider themselves to be important I think they will (have a name). The individuals that may end up in an altercation or an assault very briefly in the park or spontaneous assault may not have a name. Maybe it's just a group of friends that crossed that line. They could as well. If they want an identifier they will (name themselves).*

(Vice Principal #1)

*To new members (gang names are) very important because that's how they begin to show they have a force behind them. To seasoned members it's not very important because a name is not used, their reputation speaks for itself.*

(Social Worker #2)

- Consensus: Some Youth Are More Vulnerable To The Lure of Gangs/Groups

Participants agree that smaller, younger, abused, and isolated youth may be more drawn to gangs/groups for the protection they afford than other youth. Of course these are not the only youth who join gangs/groups or become involved in illegal or violent activity. Young people experiencing difficulties in school, impressionable children and teens, and youth who have a high need for acceptance also become involved in gang/group activity.

*A person (who) is a low achiever inside the school. They're not doing well. They're constantly being corrected and getting into trouble. They are poor performers. Once they walk out that door (and) they're with their gang they're somebody on the street. They have the respect out of fear. They're somebody on the street. They feel superior.*

(Police Officer #7)

*The ones who are weaker (are more vulnerable) because they are looking for the power that the gang may very well represent.*

(Vice Principal #1)

*The young man or woman who is victimized from grade school onward might ... go to an extreme. So as not to be victimized any longer they would join the perpetrators, just simply associating with them, therefore they're protected. Kids who are isolates might be attracted to it. Kids who are impressionable. That seems to be the largest number of kids who become gang members.*

(Social Worker #2)

- Consensus: Youth From Wealthy Families Also Get Involved

Participant views challenge the stereotype that gang/group members come from families living in poverty or in economically depressed neighbourhoods.

*I think the stereotypes have gone. Some of the people involved in gangs have been from I would say upper socio-economic brackets.*

*(Vice Principal #2)*

- Consensus: Females In Gangs/Groups Abuse Power And Are Violent

The involvement of girls, either as members of mixed gender or all girl gangs/groups is mentioned by most study participants. A recurring theme, especially among adult participants, is that the girls,

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though fewer in number, are as violent as, and sometimes more violent than, the boys. Girls also get involved in gangs/groups to meet power and status needs.

*We're finding, actually finding that the girls are getting more violent than the guys right now. I think girls are more mature now. Most of the girls that we're dealing with are bigger ... than the guys. They get together in their little groups and (beat) up boys and (beat) up other girls. Most of it is over stupid stuff They all get in a little clique and they ... drag (the victim) into the washroom and beat the shit out of (her). (With our) first all female gang ... we charged four of those girls with assault. A girl will take on a guy. A girl will take on a teacher. If you ever get attacked by a group of girls it's the worst thing. I think it's mainly because the guys don't want to fight back. They're really really vicious.*

*(Police Officer #6)*

*Girl gangs usually are acting, if you notice, against other ... it's almost gender specific against other girls. It really threw me at first how violent they could be. How they could carry weapons and knives in their pockets. How they could be just as vicious and vindictive and uncaring and brutal as any guy could be or any guy gang.*

*(Vice Principal #2)*

*The girls, to me, are one of the most mystifying parts because the girls are violent. You just don't imagine the girls as being as violent as the guys and yet they are. It's hard to understand that a girl carries a knife and yet these girls do carry knives. These girls do get in fistfights. They do gang up on other people and cause real serious injuries.*

*(Victim #2)*

- Consensus: Gangs/Groups Are Like A "Family"

Adult participants use the term "family" less than the youth when talking about the cohesiveness of the gang/group. Adolescents' lives are typically more dominated by emotions and needs for peer affiliation than adults and may have influenced their choice of words. However, both groups identify gangs/groups as providing youth with a sense of communion, support, and closeness, qualities one normally expects to be provided by families.

*(The gang) becomes sort of a peer family for the young people in a sense of belonging. I think they need that. It's a replacement for a family that they may not be interested in being involved in which is typical of teenagers.*

*(Victim #1)*

*They also refer to themselves as a family. I think that that's more striking in a lot of ways, that the kids really are*

*developing sort of little families, groups of kids with a sense of belonging where they perceive the members of the group having the time and energy to care about them., possibly more than they perceive their parents or their relatives.*

*(Vice Principal #3)*

- Consensus: Youth Don't Really Know What They're Getting Into

Study participants agree that many youth who get involved in gangs/groups are naive and don't always recognize the seriousness of their illegal activities, the consequences to themselves, and the impact on victims.

*I think they're naive. Most of them don't understand that it is a crime until it's too late. (Police Officer #6)*

*I believe that they know that there are consequences but I don't think they're aware of the severity of the consequences.*

*(Social Worker #1)*

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*I don't believe they understand the repercussions of what they're doing at all. They look at it as minor events in their lives. I honestly don't think that most of them can see what it must be like from the other side, to be the victim.*

*(Victim #2)*

- Consensus: Earning Money Is A Motivator

Beyond meeting power, status, affiliation and other needs involvement in illegal gang/group activity is viewed simply as a way to make money.

*They may see it as a means of raising money ... and to support ... a drug habit or an alcohol habit, buying weapons or whatever. The objective is in terms of a need for money.*

*(School Official)*

- Consensus: Youth Under 12 Are Involved In Gang/Group Activity

Though there was some variation in participants responses there appears to be little question that children under 12 years of age are involved in gangs/groups. Their participation appears to be a growing part of the youth gang/group phenomenon. Participants feel that young people under 12 years of age are perpetuating a violent youth subculture by emulating the behaviour they observe in their older brothers, sisters, and neighbourhood teens. There is some concern that the younger children are capable of acts of violence equal to or more serious than those committed by teens.

*Right now the kids in grade five and six are mimicking what the older kids are doing. Maybe the violence isn't as high because they're ... not big enough yet ... but they are becoming involved. They're (also) being used by the older groups. It is spreading in my view. I think that's another thing that has to be addressed.*

*(Police Officer #3)*

*When we first started our work (here) I can remember .. feeling that this was a secondary school problem only or a senior elementary (or) secondary problem. When we took it to principals committees, our concerns and our policies and things ... the K to six guys (were) saying, "'Hang on, you know we're finding the same behaviour ... going right down to kindergarten level."*

*(Vice Principal #2)*

*Last month ... a lady was driving down the road and wanted to go through a pedestrian crossover. There was a group of elementary school aged children, so we're talking probably kids nine to twelve, all wearing Chicago Bulls jackets. They proceeded to block the pedestrian crossover on a very busy street here and they blocked it for five minutes. One at a time very slowly and patiently they would cross in front of the cars making very obscene gestures and giving people the finger and scream at them. Now looked at from those peoples' point of view was that a gang, organized related activity? Well most people would say no. But on the other hand ... they all went to one school, they all wore the same outfit, and they planned what they were going to do and they obstructed traffic. I guess you could say it's gang-related.*

*(Victim #2)*

- Consensus: Influence Of The Media, Music, Videos

Adults and youth strongly agree that the media influences young people and provides models for gang/group behaviour. Violence as entertainment in the form of music, films, and television as well as graphic portrayals of violence in news coverage are thought to desensitize youth (O the impact of their violent behaviour on victims.

*There (are) ... certain types of music out right now, heavy metal music advocates violence, some of the rap music. Film media, even to the point where the news reports are extremely violent on television. They show blood and gore and whatnot all the time now. Television programming itself (has*

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*experienced) a heavy, heavy increase in violence shown. (Kids) are seeing it all the time. They're not sensitive (to the fact that) they're actually hurting people that badly. I mean this is something they see on T. V. I think that has an impact.*

*(Police Officer #7)*

*In the newsletter (of) the public school up the way ... the principal (was trying to inform) parents that some of (the) children (were) acting out male/female behaviour on the school grounds. It's not playing doctor anymore. It's acting out copulation. These are five and six and seven year olds. (Imagine) having to mention this in a parents' newsletter (in) a fairly good K to six school. Simulated intercourse and the teachers are having to deal with it. How is the kid learning this. He is watching the videos that mommy and daddy are watching.*

*(Vice Principal #2)*

## YOUTH GANG/GROUP ACTIVITIES

- Consensus: Gangs/Groups Are Involved In A Wide Range Of Illegal Activities

The youth and adults report gangs/groups are involved in a wide range of illegal activities. Among those identified by adult participants are theft of guns, break and entering, extortion, arson, intimidation, and prostitution.

*We've had the kids run the gamut here. We've had them involved in setting up break and enters, theft of hand guns, extortion, robberies, firebombing.*

*(Police Officer #6)*

*Shoplifting ... vandalism ... uttering ... intimidation ... breaking ... and ... entering ... armed robbery ... prostitution. They're the pimps so they would attract a stream of young girls into that world.*

*(Social Worker #2)*

- Consensus: Weapons Are Common

Weapons typically are a part of being in a gang/group and are commonly found in schools. They range from simple "exacto knives" to automatic weapons and explosives. Their use is believed to be on the increase. Weapons, especially guns, convey status and power to the carrier. Though they can be purchased illegally from various sources, most guns appear to come from the homes of family, friends, and neighbours. Adults agree with youth that knives are the most common weapon used.

*They're a major, major, major, major, problem. I've never seen so many weapons out there now all of a sudden. The spectrum of weapons is from knives right up to and including sawed-off shotguns. The bigger the gun the more power you carry. That's the way they measure how big you are. (Police Officer #5)*

*The weapon of choice is the knife and the pellet pistol. The kids will use anything. We've had gang fights where kids were using golf clubs, bars, machettes, bayonettes, dart guns. We've also had nine millimeter (guns), 357 magnums, replica Uzi machine guns, all kinds. Most of the weapons they're getting, especially the guns ... (are) coming from their relatives ... they're stealing the things from home. (Parents) don't have them properly locked up. (Weapons give status). When they go into school and ... especially if they have a shoulder holster or a gun in their belt and they flash it to a couple of kids it gives them a lot of power. They see guns as power. If you have a gun ... you have a lot of prestige in the gang.*

*(Police Officer #6)*

*We've had a whole range of weapons. I couldn't even begin to describe them. Knives ... switchblades...butterfly knives...brass knuckles. We had kids making the weapons in shop.*

*(Vice Principal #2)*

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- Consensus: Drugs Have Become A Part Of The Problem

There is strong consensus that drugs are becoming a larger part of the youth gang/group scene. The major concern is that drug dealing will lead more increasingly to turf wars and a further rise in the use of weapons, especially guns.

*We're dealing with a drug today (crack cocaine) that's very marketable, that is very accessible to young people, that provides pleasure in a matter of seconds. I think if you are a young person who is unemployed who feels that there is no future, that the only way to survive is to get rich quick ... you seek out and have access to crack, hey, you're set. So you fall into a mentality and culture that goes along with the sales and use of that drug.*

*(Social Worker #3)*

*A lot of it comes from the drugs. There's a big market for it. When the drugs come into play the weapons come into play.*

*(Parent #2)*

- Consensus: Involvement In Illegal Activities Is "No Big Deal" To Youth

Participants feel that most young people involved in illegal gang/group activity see their behaviour as inconsequential, justifiable, and status enhancing. When apprehended, many youth seem surprised their violent and criminal activities even attracted the attention of the police.

*If you charge a kid for beating someone up and being part of a group that beats someone up for an article of clothing outside of a school and you charge them with robbery the first thing they ... say to you is, "How is that robbery?" They think (of robbery) as a bank holdup or mugging.*

*(Police Officer #1)*

*I think they see particularly violent crime as status gaining amongst their peers. Swarming type robberies, multiple suspect assault and robberies are usually trophy crimes. The thefts and drug trade is just a money making venture ... or a way to party for the night. They can go in and steal a number of items get some money and then party with the money later on. They know it's wrong but they've gotten into a different mind set where you gain status by doing it.*

*(Police Officer #7)*

*The major sense that they give you is that they aren't doing anything wrong. In a lot of cases the victim didn't complain. I've had cases where ... I'll call it harassment and intimidation (took place) and the response would be, "Well he never said anything about it so I thought it was OK." And yet when you talk to the victim, the victim is usually very upset.*

*(Vice Principal #1)*

- Consensus: Involvement In Gangs/Groups And Illegal Activity Is Fun

The adults also see youth involvement in illegal activity as fun and excitement, a way to live on the edge. Some worry that violence has become a real life form of entertainment for youth.

*The sense of adventure. I mean this is something new to them, it's exploratory. Teens ... always try to experiment with things, you know, like your first drink ... drugs ... your first sexual encounter. There's that sense of adventure of just trying it out.*

*(Social Worker #1)*

*The kids who committed the offence (against us) went and told my children that they really enjoyed creating the harm that they did. That it was fun. So I think there is an element of excitement and fun in that type of thing. Violence has become a form of entertainment.*

*(Victim #1)*

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- Consensus: Fear of Getting Caught Is No Deterrent

There is agreement that some young people, even when they are aware of the potential consequences of their illegal behaviour, will proceed because the benefits, in terms of material gain and enhanced status among peers, are worth the risk. Other youth understand the consequences but simply don't care.

*Even though you could sit down with a new gang member and tell them exactly what the consequences are, it does not effect them in the way that it would someone who was not in a gang. They're driven by the fact that they want to be friends with those people. They want to be a part of that fun that they see and so they become blinded to the real consequences. There is a very high level of ignorance on their part. There is a small number, for example, the kids who have been in the criminal justice system, who know exactly what the consequences are and what it means ... and they (could) care less about that. They just go ahead with what their friends want to do.*

*(Social Worker #2)*

- Consensus: Gangs/Groups Typically Victimize Younger, Smaller Youth

Though not the only victims, youth gang/groups will typically target smaller, younger, and vulnerable young persons who are loners or who do not appear to have many friends.

*It is almost exclusively another kid who is viewed as having either a small or non-existent friend base. The kid who wears a calculator on his belt.*

*(Police Officer #1)*

*Kids are cruel to each other. When a guy is known to be vulnerable, when a victim is labelled as a victim then the number of victimizers increases because this is someone you can go up to and take a poke at and he will do nothing about it. (Then) there is some escalation of it.*

*(Police Officer #2)*

*I think that it is human instinct that the weaker the individual is, whether it be physically or emotionally, intellectually, those individuals will very much be picked on. It is the bully aspect of it. Some kids are walking victims. I don't know how they get their thrill out of that but that seems to be the way it goes.*

*(Vice Principal #1)*

- Consensus: Inter-Racial Conflict Is Becoming A More Serious Problem

Conflicts among racially or culturally homogeneous groups, not previously a significant or remarkable part of the gang/group phenomenon, appear to be increasing. Adult participants share young peoples' concern that small, otherwise insignificant incidents at school between individuals from different cultural backgrounds are becoming flashpoints for larger gang/group conflicts, and that these conflicts are becoming more violent.

*Right now ... it is the emerging problem. It is the most important, most serious problem looming on the horizon.*

*(Police Officer #2)*

*When (the) music you listen to differentiates you from the next person, your colour, your creed, your background) your language) where you live) all those factors can create a division between you and the next person. It is only natural that the racial, ethnic background will be a factor. What is socially acceptable in one culture may not be in another and so we are dealing with all those differences that only those within the same culture would appreciate. Here at (my) school it is a very, very small percentage. Now that is because we have a very very small percentage of (different) cultural backgrounds.*

*(Vice Principal #1)*

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*The youth gang/group phenomenon is changing. In the beginning it was just any youth that was interested in having a little fun would just go out with whoever, be they Black, White, Chinese, whatever. Five years later we're seeing a change where kids are organizing according to their racial group. If someone does something to one member of that group the gang will come to their defense ... so more and more of the conflicts are racially based.*

*(Social Worker #2)*

- Consensus: Gangs That Other Gangs/Groups Are Afraid Of

Among youth gangs/groups, those possessing more members, weapons such as guns, and a reputation for using extreme violence to settle scores are the most feared.

*If the group is larger they're scared of them. If they're smaller they're not. It's as simple as that. (Police Officer #1)*

*(Those that have) a preponderance for violence, a preponderance for weapons, carrying weapons ... size.*

{School Official}

- Consensus: The Y.O.A. Needs To Be Modified And Better Promoted

Adults share young peoples' opinion that certain aspects of the Young Offenders Act are exploited by youth who consciously choose a criminal lifestyle. Participants agree that sanctions for first time offenders, violent offenders, and weapons offences need to be reviewed and possibly strengthened. There is also agreement that the Young Offenders Act does indeed hold youth accountable, but that the impression of leniency needs to be addressed by more public education.

*We do kids a huge disservice if we perpetuate the myth that the Young Offenders Act is ineffective. The kids who come into contact with the law and go into the criminal justice system I think are surprised that the Young Offenders Act does have some impact on them. Their expectation is that nothing can happen to (them). Then they discover that something can happen to you.*

*(Police Officer #2)*

*If you talk to some of these offenders...they will be the first ones to tell you, "Had I gotten six months the first time I went in ... I (wouldn't) have done this again. But the first three times I went (to court) I got probation and walked out of there laughing. Yeah, I kept doing it."*

*(Police Officer #7)*

*I think they understand it well enough where they could work, you know, with the loop holes. Those that created the Act may not necessarily see those as loopholes. But certainly from the kids point of view it works for them and they know exactly where and for how long ... the Act protects them. Almost every gang has had someone who has been through the system ... the expert on consequences, on recognizing the loopholes and so on. So the gangs quickly become informed as to how to use the Act in their favour. Their actions suggest that there are some problems with it serving as a deterrent.*

*(Social Worker #2)*

*It has to be changed that (if) somebody goes in for a violent crime that it has to be dealt with much more severely than some kid who goes out and steals something. People who go around with guns and knives (are) really serious. If you don't stop a person when they're young why should they stop when they get older. This kid that shot my son, if (he) gets six months for what he did I'll be surprised after watching first hand how it was dealt with in court. Why (should) any juvenile be afraid to go and shoot somebody? There's no deterrent, none. People only listen when there's ... when you have to pay a price for something.*

*(Parent #2)*

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- Consensus: Leaving A Gang/Group Can Be Easy Or Difficult

There is strong agreement that leaving a gang/group can be as easy as just walking away or life threatening, depending on the gang/group and its activities. The more organized criminal gangs are thought to be the most difficult to exit. However, leaving can be difficult emotionally at any time given all the needs the gang/group meets for the young person. Exiting often mean severing ties with life-long friends and strong neighbourhood peer associations.

*It depends on the gang. (With one organized gang here) when you joined ... you filled out an application form. They get all the names of your relatives. The main reason for that was they made the threat to you that once you're in the gang if you leave we're going to go after your relatives and that was done a couple of times. The loosely formed gangs, the spontaneous gangs, they just disband ... and the kids go their own ways.*

*(Police Officer #6)*

*I think you have to be stronger to get out of a gang than you do to get into it. Peer pressure is an enormous pressure. Peer influence is an enormous influence. Once you are in the gang I think you have the knowledge of how powerful you can be at any particular moment. So if you aren't in it you lose that power.*

*(Vice Principal #1)*

*It is absolutely terrifying to live through. You don't go to sleep at night without checking every window and every door. You get phone calls ten times a day, people hanging up. People trying to break down your front door. We had gun shots go off in the backyard, threats, verbal threats that you're going to get killed. "We'll kill your kid. We will find him." There (are) severe consequences of trying to get out of the gang.*

*(Parent #1)*

- Consensus: The Problem Has Increased in Recent Years

There is strong consensus that youth violence and youth gang/group activity has increased remarkably in the past few years, and it is not limited to large urban centres. Adult participants report noticing similarities between communities in Canada and those of large urban centres in the United States, in terms of patterns of growth and expansion of activities. Crimes against persons has been the most remarkable part of the increase.

*It's not kicking in lockers anymore. It's not acting out in a group to commit vandalism. There's the odd one, but (it's) generally a crime against a person, against another young person.*

*(Police Officer #1)*

*In Ontario, and I've seen it the last three years since I've been involved with it, that a lot of different agencies thought it was just a Toronto problem. (But) it just spread like wildfire. We're getting calls from Ottawa, St. Catherines, Chatham, Windsor ... Sudbury. What it seems to be is that nobody really knows what to do about the problem.*

*(Police Officer #6)*

*We are no different than the States was say about ten years ago. We're rapidly catching up to the u.s. cities as far as the gangs (are concerned). We now have gangs coming up from the Buffalo area. They are heavily involved in the crack trade, procuring prostitution. We also have the NeoNazi Skinhead groups. They are becoming far more organized than they ever were. We are seeing a great deal more of ... school gangs. Extortion is becoming a problem in the schools, group extortions.*

*(Police Officer #7)*

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- Consensus: Youth Gang/Group Activity Can Get Very Serious

Issues of naivety and carelessness on the pan of the youth aside, participants express great concern about just how serious youth gang/group activity can get for both young people and their victims.

*I know a mother in (a city in southern Ontario) she and her daughter were in the (local) mall and she went to go the washroom. (When) she came out ... she turned around and there her daughter was being taken out of the mall by a bunch of fellows. She was unconscious because they had put something on a cloth on her face as they were trying to abduct her. (In my case) I could have been blinded. My husband could have been seriously harmed. It could have been very very serious. Luckily it wasn't and it wasn't without want of their trying either. And there were girls involved too who were just as vicious.*

*(Victim #1)*

*My son and I went into (the local mall) and started to walk a very short distance. I suddenly realized that we were surrounded. We were surrounded by about a dozen youths ranging in age probably from about 14 to 17 years old, all wearing a certain kind of baseball cap. It was a strange feeling ... very unnerving because ... I've got my son here and I've got my wife out there in the car. We continued out into the parking lot just sort of walking as this group, and they're not saying anything. It was more of an intimidation thing. It's very hard to describe. They blocked the car. They never made a demand. They just intimidated you through their presence and it was odd. It was a very odd occurrence.*

*(Victim #2)*

*I think it's extremely serious. The ultimate end of being in a gang is jail or death. Those are your choices and I don't think it should be minimized for a moment because those are your choices. (Parent #1)*

## RESPONDING TO YOUTH GANGS/GROUPS • Consensus: The Need For An Enhanced Role For Police

Police officers are critical of their present approach to dealing with the phenomenon and provide suggestions for enhancing their role that are similar to those of the youth. The strongest theme to emerge in this area is the need for improved communication and mutual respect between law enforcement officers and youth. Police are viewed as an important and integral part of a community wide response. An enhanced role for police *should* include a community-based policing focus, providing education about the law and legal consequences to parents and youth, and support, and law enforcement and education resources to school staff.

*I think our biggest problem (is) we're a paramilitary organization. We only react to crime. We've done it a little bit different here. We've gone out and we've talked to the kids. We've put clothes on and gone into the malls and sat down, had a pop with the kids, and shot the shit with the kids, got down to their level and found out really what the problem was in '89. What we were dealing with ... really (blew) our minds. Kids were scared. Kids were afraid to go to school but they (wouldn't) talk to anybody. They wouldn't talk to their parents about it. They wouldn't talk to the teachers about it. They were just living in their own little world but they were afraid. We got down ... at their level and started to attack the problem and told the kids, "We are on your side, like we think you should be able to go to school without being bothered and we will help you." Once they believed ... that we could help them ... you can't shit them. You can't say one thing to them to their face and then turn around and say something different to somebody else. If you fool around with kids you lose them right away. We have won the respect of the kids. The gang members know that if we get on to them we don't let go and we prosecute.*

*(Police Officer #6)*

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*I have two thoughts on that. One is ... enforcement. The second ... is prevention, and prevention is the knowledge that the police are there to help as opposed to always enforcement. The education of the kids on what is going on, the education of the rest of the school staff as to what is going on. (Vice Principal #1)*

*I think they should take education and enforcement together. As well, they can't work in isolation. They must work in partnership because a kid listening to a police officer saying the same thing, you know, about an issue, will not hear it as comfortably as that same kid hearing it from ... a youth worker.*

*(Social Worker #2)*

## • Consensus: Schools Must Acknowledge And Confront The Problem

There appears to be little question in the minds of participants that schools are a major point for intervention in the youth gang/group phenomenon. Participants are overwhelmingly in agreement that little progress can be made until school officials acknowledge the problem and form working partnerships with police. Evidently, school/police

partnerships have proven to be successful in reducing violence and youth gang/group activity in the few communities where they have been tried. School officials must also keep parents and the community informed about their problems and concerns and look outside to develop partnerships with other youth-serving social service agencies.

*The education system was the same as the police. They were going their own little way. "We're just here to educate kids and that's all. We don't want to listen to any of their problems. Kids don't have any problems." And kids had big problems. (One) principal...had blinders on. He thought he had a great school. He didn't really know what was going on out in the hallways or the lunch room or after school. He didn't know the intimidation that was going on and ... or he did know and didn't want to tell anybody. I think that was one of the problems.*

*(Police Officer #6)*

*I believe the school has to work hand in hand with the police dealing with the total package in confronting youth violence. The schools that sit back and ignore or do not acknowledge (it) could very well have some difficulty. (We need) the openness of the schools to talk about youth violence ... to be aware of the youth violence that is taking place, the gangs. Schools need to deal with ... prevention. There's curriculum, there are services and agencies that you can bring into the schools to deal with those type of things. You know anger management, stress management courses, sexuality courses, self-esteem components within courses, policing the building. Those all lead to better communication. Parents also have to be involved in that.*

*(Vice Principal #1)*

*Schools first of all need to acknowledge they have a problem. They need to start...looking outside the system and engaging some of the resources that are readily available to assist them. Traditionally they've just looked in-house and have not been able to effect any kind of change because they haven't had this problem before. They don't have the resources to deal with it. I think schools need to merge with the outside services to more effectively understand and work with the problem.*

*(Social Worker #2)*

*I think the schools have to be the information link between parents and community groups such as police and agencies. Let's face it. Young people don't generally tell their parents an awful lot about what's going on in schools. So the parents may very well not be aware of what's going on. Teenagers...certainly are not going to go home and say, "By the way mom, we have a gang at school that carries weapons." They're not going to do that because ... those people for one thing may be their friends and they don't want to get them into trouble.*

*(Victim #1)*

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#### • Consensus: Social Services Can Play An Important Support Role

Social service agencies are seen as having the kind of expertise that could be of significant benefit to schools, police, and parents. Concern was expressed that there needs to be more social service resources directed toward vulnerable youth at risk of becoming involved in gangs/groups.

*(Social Services) should be in the schools. The more we can bring services to the schools the more effective those services are going to be. Like very simple health services, counselling services, addiction ... health. They should be based in the schools as opposed to across town. Instead of sending the kids to the services, bring the services to the kids.*

*(School Official)*

*The best role for social services is to educate. We see the kids in a very candid situation. We see them in the*

*neighbourhoods. actually out there committing those acts. We may see them in our office after they've been victimized or after they've been caught. We understand the individual. We need to take that understanding to ... the police ... educators, the local community association, parents need to be informed, the media needs to be ... better informed. We must continue to work with ... the young people to send out messages that prevent them buying into that lifestyle.*

*(Social Worker #2)*

*A lot of these kids who chronically get involved in inappropriate activities usually have some sort of family dysfunction and that's where social services fit in. Unfortunately services for youth ... tend to be lacking. Young people, especially the 15 to 17 age group, seem to fall through the cracks. (Victim #1)*

- **Consensus: Government Must Act**

Participants express strong opinions about the need for government to begin taking the phenomenon of youth violence and gangs/groups seriously and provide financial and human resources to address the problem. Specific suggestions are made to amend the various Acts of Legislation that govern the activities of professionals directly involved with the phenomenon. Concern is expressed that there are too many impediments in the current Acts to enable youth service professionals to respond effectively. Many advocate for wider community consultation and involvement of young people in making the necessary changes to the legislation.

*Most of the people who are shaping a molding a lot of the policies ... are either adults or legal minds, which is part of my complaint. It has to start including a lot of other people including the kids themselves.*

*(Police Officer #1)*

*The Young Offenders (Act), Freedom of Information (Act), Criminal Code, Education Act, those four pretty well have to work hand in hand for us to deal with individuals because (as professionals) we are all coming from different backgrounds (and are governed by) different Acts. I don't know where the blames lies. (They) haven't been written in conjunction with each other.*

*(Vice Principal #1)*

*The gangs continue to flourish because people continue to question whether it is a media created thing or are they really here. Well, they're here. We have kids living in social conditions that in no way ... should be churning out the gang activities ... and the gang ideals that...we're seeing. Yet it's here and we have to work with that. We should skip over blaming one source and look at what to do. We are caught in a cycle of denial that only perpetuates the problem. Government (must) acknowledge we have a problem and ... provide assistance and ... resources...to work (on this) problem.*

*(Social Worker #2)*

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- **Consensus: Parents Have The Most Important Role To Play**

More than any other group parents are identified as the single most important players in preventing gang/group formation. Participants advocate for more parental involvement in the lives of their children, more open communication between parents and offspring, and more direct involvement with schools. Parents need to be supplied with information, supports, and other resources to help them deal with their children who are already involved in gangs/groups and to prevent their siblings from joining. Adult participants especially want to see a more collaborative and mutually supportive relationship between school personnel and parents.

*I think the main thing is communication. I think parents aren't talking to their kids right now. Most gang members that we get in here, the parents are shocked. They are good little kids (at home) but when they get out with their group of*

*friends they turn into a totally different personality and I think it shocks a lot of parents. There's no place really for kids to get help especially if they're not getting it from their parents, if there's no communication there, they're really out in left field. I think we've put a lot of responsibility on kids now at a younger age, especially with ... both parents working.*

*(Police Officer #6)*

*Parents need to be more involved in the schools. Parents need to advocate more and be more demanding of what is expected (from) schools. I think there would be a lot more parents involved in activities in the school if they were aware that these things were going on. Historically, there has always been a dichotomy between parents and schools and I don't think that has changed as much as it needs to. There seems to be a real division and a lack of cooperation between parents and schools.*

*(Victim #1)*

*(The problem is) how to get information to the parents that require (it) 'cause their kids are in gangs. A lot of them to me are just treading water and hoping that this thing will pass not knowing where to go or what to do. The school offers information night on gangs (but) the parents that are going to show up are the parents you don't need to worry about. (My advice to parents is) as soon as you see the signs (of gang involvement) go get help from the police department. Educate yourself about what kind of gang (your child) might be in. What (are) the type of things that might be going on.*

*(Parent #1)*

- Consensus: The Need For Community Partnerships

Participants agree there is no one group or community agency can solve the problem of youth gangs/groups on their own. It will require a concerted effort on the part of many players, including young people, to find solutions.

*I think the biggest thing is communication. You have to form a partnership between the different groups and unless you do that you're not going to get anywhere with this phenomenon of gangs. (Police Officer #6)*

*Any educator who thinks they can handle this by themselves today is living in a dreamworld. It's not just the police that (they)' need to be involved with too. It's probation, interaction with crown attorneys and courts. It has to be a combination of all our resources, working together to make this work.*

*(School Official)*

*We have a fragmented approach to dealing with ... social problems. We have a multitude of experts who are responsible for different areas of a problem ... (but) all the different players are not talking, are not working collaboratively.*

*(Social Worker #2)*

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- Consensus: Unless We Intervene the Problem Will Continue to Escalate

Adult and youth participants share the opinion that if we as a society do not take the problems of youth gang/groups and youth violence seriously we will find ourselves in trouble. All participants point to the gang/group problem in the United States as an indicator of where we are headed. Some feel we are irrevocably on that path in some communities.

*I think we're going to have a problem like Chicago and L.A., especially in Toronto. I think we've lost control in Toronto ... and the reason ... is ... you have the police doing one thing and the educators doing another thing and you have*

*social workers doing another. But nobody's doing anything together.*

*(Police Officer #6)*

*What's down the road are public murders. There will absolutely be no remorse. I think we will see a very firm marriage between drugs and youth gangs. I think because of the merger of drugs and youth gangs there will be greater and more intense turf wars which will lead to racial clashes which will lead to an extremely violent and depressed society. The beginning of the disintegration of our future.*

*(Social Worker #2)*

## SUMMARY OF YOUTH AND ADULT PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS

- Why Young People Get Involved In Gangs/Groups - Youth Perspectives

Individual Needs

Personal safety

Status and recognition Power and control

Affirmation of self and efficacy Friendship and affiliation

Escape judgment of parents and family

Associate with other youth who understand their culture Fun, thrill of living on the edge

Boredom

Familial

Escape abusive home environment

Modelling of pro-criminal or anti-social siblings

Racism of parents

Lack of discipline and boundaries by parents

Parents unable to control behaviour of youth

Parental neglect or indifference

Too many rules at home

Single parent

Family poverty

Family wealth creates boredom in youth

Social/Systemic

No jobs for youth

Lack of social programs and other resources for youth

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Young Offenders Act is lenient

Consequences for illegal behaviour are minor and not a deterrent

Influence of media images

Influence of music videos and lyrics

Mistrust of adults and adult-run institutions Police, schools are powerless to stop gangs/groups

Negative experiences with police, courts, schools, social services

Racism and cultural conflict

Drift

Peers

Peer pressure

Peer modelling

Influence of older teens

Neighbourhood gang/group culture

Financial

Money for drugs

Money for food and shelter

Money for cars, clothing, and personal luxury items Money to impress peers/girlfriends

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Why Young People Get Involved In Gangs/Groups - Adult Perspectives

Individual Needs

Personal safety

Status and recognition Power and control

Affirmation of personal efficacy Friendship and affiliation

Associate with other youth who understand their culture Fun, thrill of living on the edge

Boredom

Familial

Escape abusive home environment

Modelling of pro-criminal or anti-social parents and siblings

Racism of parents

Lack of discipline and boundaries by parents

Parents unable to control behaviour of youth

Parental neglect or indifference

Single parent

Family poverty

Social/Systemic

High youth unemployment

Lack of social programs and other resources for youth Young Offenders Act is lenient

Consequences for illegal behaviour are minor and not a deterrent Influence of media images

Influence of music videos and lyrics

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Mistrust of adults and adult-run institutions Racism and cultural conflict

Peers

Peer pressure

Peer modelling

Influence of older teens

Neighbourhood gang/group culture

Financial

Money for drugs

Money for food and shelter

Money for cars, clothing, and personal luxury items

• Responding To Youth Gangs/Groups· Youth Perspectives

Police

Acknowledge the seriousness of the problem of youth gangs/groups and youth violence Show respect to youth gang/group members

Build trust with youth

Honest, open communication with youth Involvement with youth in community Involvement with schools

Explain their role and law enforcement process when confronting youth Firm but fair interventions with young offenders

Recognize that not all youth are bad

Provide education to youth about the Young Offenders Act Arrest all gang/group members at the same time

Support and protect gang/group members who are exiting or assisting police

Provide support and information to parents whose children are involved in a gang/group Educate all community members about youth gangs/groups

Schools

Acknowledge the seriousness of the problem of youth gangs/groups and violence in schools Respond to victim complaints and hold offenders accountable

Do whatever it takes to keep schools safe

Protect the non-offending student majority

Use suspension and expulsion to get rid of violent students and gang/group members Build trust with students

Provide drug and alcohol abuse information to students

Provide education to students about consequences of gang/group involvement Start education about gangs/groups, violence, drugs as early as possible Recognize that racism is becoming a serious problem in some schools

Provide information about other cultures

Provide opportunities for students from different cultures to get to know each other Keep intruders out of the school

Train teachers to better recognize vulnerable students and youth in crisis Provide mental health resources to students

Link up with social service agencies who can provide support and assistance to youth in crisis Be interested and involved in the lives of students

Make gymnasium and sports programs available to students and the community after hours

## Social Services

Non-judgmental approach to youth in trouble Build trust with youth

Create more peer support groups

Work with schools to provide supports and resources to youth

Provide resources for homeless youth to keep them off the streets and out of gangs/groups

Link youth with private community service groups

## Government

Acknowledge the seriousness of the problem of youth gangs/groups and youth violence

Become more aware of the youth gang/group problem

Harsher sentences under the Y.O.A. for repeat and violent offenders

Harsher sentences under the Y.O.A. for weapons offences

Create more employment opportunities for youth

Use of house arrest under the Y.O.A.

Clear, consistently applied consequences for young offenders

Establish more recreational and sports activities for youth in their communities

Provide financial support to youth leaving custody while they are searching for work

Fund programs for ex-gang/group members to talk to other youth at school

Try and help youth before they get caught up in the criminal justice system

Make youth on welfare work in their communities

Create public awareness advertising campaign about youth gangs/groups

Reduce the amount of violence in television and films

Direct more resources to parents, families, and social services to help them provide better care to at risk youth

## Parents

Teach youth and model discipline and respect for others Teach youth to think for themselves

Love and acceptance of their children

Enthusiastic involvement in the lives of their children

Talk honestly and openly to children and youth

Hold their children accountable for their behaviour

Give youth curfews

Provide safety for children so they know they can come and talk to parents

Don't be overly protective of children, let them make some mistakes

Keep current on information pertaining to youth

Monitor and discuss with children the films, videos, and television programs they watch and the music they listen to

#### • Responding To Youth Gangs/Groups - Adult Perspectives

#### Police

Acknowledge the seriousness of the problem of violence and youth gangs/groups Recognize that incidents of violence or gang/group activity are under-reported Involvement with schools in both pro-active and reactive ways

Police should be available to schools on an "on call" basis, not in the schools full-time The same police officer should respond to calls from the school administrator Involvement with students in non-law enforcement activities at school

Be an information resource to staff and students

Provide education to youth about the Young Offenders Act

Provide parents with information about the early warning signs of gang/group involvement

Provide support and information to parents whose youth are involved in a gang/group

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Educate all community members about youth gangs/groups

Be partners in a coordinated community-based response to youth gangs/groups

#### Schools

Acknowledge the seriousness of the problem of violence and youth gangs/groups in schools

Recognize that incidents of violence or gang/group activity are under-reported

Recognize that racism is becoming a serious problem in some schools

Work cooperatively with police and other community partners to maintain safe schools

Provide space in the school for a police officer to work

Develop zero tolerance policies for violence and youth gang/group activities

Support and protect victims when they disclose

Respond to victim complaints and hold offenders accountable

Balance the rights of victims and offenders when formulating anti-violence policies

Use suspension and expulsion to get rid of violent students and gang/group members

Provide drug and alcohol abuse information to students

Provide education to students about consequences of gang/group involvement

Start education about gangs/groups, violence, drugs as early as possible

Keep intruders out of the school

Increase visibility of principal in school

Greater vigilance with respect to the physical plant of the school

Hallway and lunchroom supervision

Train teachers to better recognize youth in crisis

Provide mental health resources to students

Link up with social service agencies who can provide support and assistance to youth in crisis

Make gymnasium and sports programs available to students and the community after hours

Involve non-teaching staff, students, and parents in the planning and development of any school based anti-violence or anti-gang/group strategies

Social Services

Work with schools and police to provide supports and resources to youth

Provide training and information about youth to police officers and school personnel

Assist and support parents whose offspring are involved in gangs/groups

Government

Acknowledge the seriousness of the problem of violence and youth gangs/groups in schools

Become more aware of the youth gang/group problem

Harsher sentences under the Y.O.A. for repeat and violent offenders

Harsher sentences under the Y.O.A. for weapons offences

Create more employment opportunities for youth

Clear, consistently applied consequences for young offenders

Establish more recreational and sports activities for youth in their communities

Try and help youth before they get caught up in the criminal justice system

Create public awareness advertising campaign about youth gangs/groups

Reduce the amount of violence in television and films

Direct more resources to parents, families, and social services to help them provide better care to at risk youth

Parents

Teach youth and model discipline and respect for others

Love and acceptance of their children

Enthusiastic involvement in the lives of their children

Provide opportunities for children to experience success and acquire positive self-esteem

Talk honestly and openly to children and youth

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Hold their children accountable for their behaviour

Provide safety for children so they know they can come and talk to parents

Keep current on information pertaining to youth

Monitor and discuss with children the films, videos, and television programs they watch and the music they listen to

Be more involved in the schools their children attend

Work more collaboratively with teachers and police

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