Comprehensive Approaches to Address Street Gangs in Canada

By

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prepared for

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Street gangs are a growing problem in Canada. In their 2006 report, Criminal Intelligence Service Canada estimated that there were over 300 street gangs with about 11,000 members. Moreover, the CISC’s 2010 report on organized crime noted that since 2006, the number of street gangs identified by Canadian law enforcement agencies has increased, but no exact statistics were provided. Street gangs have spread from major urban centres to smaller communities and many have become more sophisticated in their criminal activities. It is likely that the increase in street gang presence is responsible for much of the 500% increase in gang-related homicides in Canada between 1991 and 2008.

The most important lesson we learn from the gang crime reduction literature is that only comprehensive efforts will have a lasting impact. Isolated programs such as police crackdowns, recreation programs, or classroom anti-gang lessons are not sufficient. Gang crime has many different causes and facilitators. This means that solutions to the problem must also be multi-faceted and involve a combination of prevention, intervention, and suppression programs.

Prevention programs are intended to keep children from joining gangs. These efforts can be broadly directed at all young people in a community, or can be targeted to children and youth who are at greater risk of becoming involved with gangs. Prevention programs often involve crime prevention through social development strategies designed to address the risk factors for crime. There have been decades of research on prevention strategies and promising programs have been found in a number of areas including: prenatal and perinatal parenting programs; parental training; preschool programs; school programs; employment programs; neighbourhood revitalization; and recreation programs.

Intervention programs are intended to help gang members leave gangs and to prevent young people who are on the periphery of gangs from joining. The most effective intervention programs use wraparound strategies that involve youth, their families, service providers and community agencies. These programs provide individualized programming that is available in community settings. Street gang members are frequently imprisoned. However, they return to their communities and may also return to their gangs. Thus some intervention programs operate in correctional institutions, while others provide services that will assist newly-released inmates when they reenter their communities.

The police have typically used suppression programs to deal with street gangs. While evaluations have been limited, the research that has been done suggests that it is rare for pure suppression programs to have a lasting impact on crime. However, the latest work on suppression suggests that targeted deterrence strategies have been effective. Most of these targeted deterrence programs (including the well-known Boston Gun Project) have also had prevention and/or intervention components so they should be considered comprehensive initiatives.
Comprehensive gang crime reduction programs are designed to combine the three categories of gang crime reduction strategies. These combined programs have the greatest potential to provide lasting reductions in gang crime. Suppression can reduce existing street gang crime, while prevention programs reduce the number of potential gang recruits and intervention strategies help gang members to exit gangs and to avoid gangs after being released from prison. Comprehensive programs are designed to hit all “pressure points” at the same time. Several of these comprehensive programs have demonstrated reductions in crimes committed by street gangs, but others have had implementation problems because of their complexity. Thus, if comprehensive programs are to be successful, they must include a strategic planning process and operate within a structure that will facilitate success. Among the characteristics of this organizational structure are: (1) the structure should flow from the program; (2) municipal governments must play a central role in crime reduction; (3) leadership must come from the top; (4) there must be a high-level responsibility centre that is responsible for planning and implementation; (5) the program must have adequate resources; (6) the program must have a data gathering and analysis capability; and (7) process and outcome evaluation are necessary components.

The paper makes five recommendations:

- Only comprehensive efforts will have a lasting impact on street gang crime. Thus programs should integrate the components of suppression, intervention, and prevention.
- Sufficient resources must be allocated to comprehensive street gang reduction programs.
- Programs must develop structures that will facilitate success.
- Comprehensive initiatives must include a strategic planning process.
- Programs should be evidence-based and should address specific risk factors in the target community and its population.
INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is to present some ideas about the best ways to deal with street gangs in Canada. In particular, the paper will (1) provide a brief overview of the street gang problem in Canada; (2) look at some specific programs that address prevention, intervention, and suppression; (3) review the literature on what works in gang crime reduction with an emphasis on comprehensive anti-street gang programs; (4) and discuss the need to utilize a strategic planning model and to develop a structure to implement comprehensive programs.

THE STREET GANG PROBLEM IN CANADA

According the Criminal Intelligence Service Canada the problem of street gangs is growing in Canada (CISC, 2010). In their 2006 report, CISC estimated that there were over 300 street gangs with about 11,000 members. While street gangs were formerly limited to major urban centres, gangs now exist in many smaller communities. Some street gangs have moved beyond their home communities, become more sophisticated, and now have an older membership that includes men in their twenties and thirties. Members of street gangs are involved in a wide range of criminal activities including street-level drug distribution and prostitution. Many also are involved in robberies, break and enters, and vehicle theft. They are characterized by a high propensity for violence which can make their presence highly visible to their communities and can be quite intimidating to local residents. Many street gangs now have ties with long-established organized crime groups (CISC, 2004). Street gangs are responsible for many of the gang-related homicides in Canada. Rates of gang-related homicides are increasing. In 2008 there were 138 gang-related homicides in Canada, an increase of 20 from 2007. Gang-related homicides increased by over 500% between 1991 and 2008 (Beattie, 2009), a period that corresponds with significant increases in the number of street gangs.

While street gangs have become increasingly multiethnic (CISC, 2004), many still draw their members predominantly from one racial or ethnic background and this varies in different parts of Canada. The Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs has estimated that 25% of youth gang members are African Canadian, 21% Aboriginal, and 18% Caucasian. The survey also found a growing number of females were becoming involved in street gangs (National Crime Prevention Centre, 2007a).

THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO GANG CRIME REDUCTION

The most important lesson we learn from the street gang crime reduction literature is that only comprehensive efforts will have a lasting impact. This means that isolated programs such as police crackdowns, recreation programs, or classroom anti-gang lessons are not sufficient. Street gang crime has many different causes and facilitators. This means that solutions to the problem must also be multi-faceted and involve a combination of prevention, intervention, and suppression programs. It is important that each of these types of strategies is used. Relying on prevention strategies such as nurse visiting programs for new mothers and pre-school programs does nothing to solve immediate community crime problems or to help people leave gangs, and even the most effective
suppression and intervention strategies do nothing to deal with the next generation of
gang recruits. The research that has been done on each of these components can help
build an evidence-based comprehensive street gang crime reduction strategy with a high
probability of success.

**Prevention**

Prevention programs are intended to keep children from joining gangs. These efforts can
be broadly directed at all young people in a community, or can be targeted to children
and youth who are at greater risk of becoming involved with gangs. Prevention programs
often involve crime prevention through social development strategies designed to provide
support systems for youth through the family, community and schools. Most of these
strategies recognize that we cannot change individuals unless we also change the
dynamics of their families, peer groups, neighbourhoods, and schools and provide them
with opportunities for the future.

Criminologists have found that a small proportion of offenders commit the majority of
serious crimes. From 5% to 10% of young people are responsible for 50% to 70% of
offences (Waller, 2006). Many of these high rate offenders are affiliated with gangs.
Research on the causes of crime among these offenders has looked at a wide range of
factors including individual characteristics and social variables such as the
neighbourhood, the family, the peer group, and the school. There is a high degree of
consensus about the risk factors that should be addressed in prevention programs (cf.
Surgeon General, 2001). The most important of these are:

**Risk Factors for Crime**

1. **Neuropsychological factors.**

There is some evidence of neuropsychological correlates of offending,
particularly chronic offending. These can be caused by a variety of factors
including heredity, maternal drug or alcohol abuse, exposure to toxic materials,
and poor prenatal nutrition. Some of the behavioural correlates include learning
disorders, attention deficit disorder, impulsivity, and hyperactivity (Moffitt, 1990,
1993).

2. **Family factors.**

Family variables are important predictors of crime and delinquency. Among these
family variables are: lack of supervision and monitoring of children’s behaviour
(Linden, 2004); harsh and/or inconsistent punishment (Thomas, 2004); poor
communication; parent-child conflict; family violence; family dependence on
welfare; delinquency of siblings (Anderson and Linden, 2002) and parental
criminality (Howell & Hawkins, 1998). In their review of longitudinal
delinquency studies, Lipsey and Derzon (1998) found that the strongest predictor
of youth violence was the quality of parent-child relations.

Early school failure is predictive of subsequent violent behaviour (Maguin & Loeber, 1996). Many other measures of school adjustment and school success are also correlated with delinquency.

4. Peer Factors.

Crime and delinquency are strongly influenced by peer groups. Gangs increase the likelihood of delinquency even more than other peer groups (Huizinga, 1997; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, & Chard-Wierschem, 1993). Much of the violence that takes place among young people is caused by the need to maintain “respect” from their peers. The street code of conduct, which values respect and prescribes violence as a response to disrespect, is difficult for many young people to resist (Anderson, 1998). Gangs offer money, prestige and social status, a sense of belonging that the youth may not feel at home or at school, and may also provide protection from other gangs.

5. Neighbourhood factors.

Children’s behaviour is shaped by their communities. Crime and delinquency breed in disorganized communities where community members cannot exercise control over what happens in their neighbourhood. Researchers have found high rates of crime in poor neighbourhoods with high rates of residential mobility (Sampson, 1995), high rates of single-parent households (Sampson, 1995); and a high degree of anonymity and minimal relationships among people (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).


While there is almost no correlation between crime and broad measures of social class, there is evidence that those at the very bottom of the class ladder are much more likely to become involved in criminal behaviour than the rest of the population (Clelland & Carter, 1980). Gang crimes are particularly likely to occur in the poorest parts of our communities.

7. Racism and Marginalization

Many of those who grow up in poor neighbourhoods also belong to racial and ethnic minorities. Poverty can also be associated with family dysfunction, poor schools, a lack of employment opportunities, and exposure to violence in the home and in the community. These factors can combine to marginalize young people who may not see any opportunities outside of gang life.
Addressing Risk Factors

Gang prevention programs must address the risk factors just described and there is an extensive literature dealing with the best ways of doing this. While space does not permit a thorough review, several of the most important studies are discussed below:

- Prenatal and perinatal parenting programs – one of the most promising programs involved a nursing home visitation program. Olds et al (1997, 1998) found a wide range of positive outcomes for these programs including reductions in criminality and involvement in alcohol and drugs.

- Parental training – Tremblay et al (1992) provided parenting skills training to disruptive male kindergarten students in Montreal. The boys were also given social skills training. By the time they reached 15 years of age, the boys in the treatment group had lower rates of self-reported delinquency but no difference in charges under the Young Offender’s Act. They were rated by teachers as being less disruptive, and were more likely to be in an age-appropriate grade. However, these school effects diminished over time.

- Preschool programs – one of the best-known crime prevention initiatives is the Perry Preschool Program (Schweinhart et al, 2005). This program combined an intensive preschool curriculum for poor African-American children along with home visits. The program has been evaluated for over 3 decades and the outcomes for the participants on a wide variety of measures including crime and drug use have been significantly better than those for controls.

- School programs – preschool programs have been far more successful than school programs for older children (Tremblay and Craig, 1995). In their well-known review of crime prevention initiatives, Sherman et al (1997) concluded that some types of school programs were most likely to have an impact on delinquency: (a) programs that build school capacity to initiate and to sustain innovation; (b) programs that effectively communicate appropriate behavioural norms; and (c) programs that teach social competency skills such as problem solving, communication skills, and decision-making. There is also some evidence that programs which encourage disadvantaged young people to complete high school and to go on to post-secondary education can be very effective in reducing

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1 More detail on many of these studies can be found in Linden (2010). The National Crime Prevention Centre (2008) has prepared a very useful reference work that describes a variety of programs, including several comprehensive programs, and rates them as innovative, promising, and model programs.
criminality (Lattimore et al, 1998). Outside the immediate school environment, mentoring programs have also shown some success. However, curriculum-based programs such as the Gang Resistance Education and Training Program (G.R.E.A.T.) do not have any long-term impact on street gang membership (U.S. Surgeon General, 2001).

- Employment programs – there is little data on the impact of employment programs on crime. One large-scale study has examined the impact of the provision of employment assistance to disadvantaged young people. The U.S. Job Corps Program is a national program for disadvantaged young people between the ages of 16 and 24. It is a residential program that offers a broad range of training in academic, vocational, and life skills, as well as transition and job placement assistance after graduation. In addition to its other benefits, including increased employment and earnings compared with control groups, the Job Corps Program also had an impact on crime. The evaluators found that there were 100 fewer arrests per 1,000 participants in the program and that program participants were also less likely themselves to be victimized by crime (McConnell & Glazerman, 2001).

- Neighbourhood revitalization - the Bushbury Triangle Project on a housing estate in Wolverhampton, England involved a modernization program, improvements in home security, new fencing, and a variety of community activities run by the residents from a newly designated community house. During the modernization, it became apparent that behaviour on the estate was not improving. Planners realized that the project needed more consultation with the residents so they would develop a sense of ownership of the improvements. To facilitate this ownership, part of the estate – the Triangle – was designated as a separate community and physical changes were made that encouraged pedestrian circulation within this area. These changes appeared to make a substantial difference. Crimes reported to the police dropped by one-third compared with other parts of the estate which had been modernized but which lacked the community component. Victim surveys showed substantial reductions in crime, and crime fear declined by 50% (Webb and Woodall, 1986).

Another example of neighbourhood change comes from the work of Oscar Newman (1992). Crime had increased dramatically during the 1980s in the Dayton, Ohio neighbourhood of Five Oaks, a formerly middle-class neighbourhood which had become a favourite commercial location for drug dealers and prostitutes. Newman’s planning team worked in consultation with the community and civic officials to develop a program of using street closures and other design changes to divide the area into ten mini-neighbourhoods. Internal streets were redesigned into culs-de-sac. This redesign was intended to make access more difficult for criminals and also to encourage residents to make more use of the area. Other elements involved police cooperation with the community and aggressive
action against the prostitutes and dealers, better enforcement of building code regulations (because many houses had been illegally converted to multiple family rental units), and a city program to encourage residents to own their own homes. The impact of these changes was dramatic. Over a one-year period violent crime dropped by 50%, non-violent crime dropped by 24%, traffic accidents dropped by 40%, and house prices increased by 15%.

- Recreation programs - a U.S. Congressional review pointed out that recreation programs may actually increase criminality if high-risk youth are allowed to mix with low-risk youth without a strong intervention to establish positive group norms (Sherman et al., 1997). Regular supervision may help some high-risk young people, but the children most in need of help are also the least likely to choose to participate in these programs. The research is limited, but it suggests that recreational programs will not be effective unless they are very intensive. There is some evidence that programs such as Outward Bound, which allow youth to test themselves in a wilderness setting, may help. In Manitoba, summer sports camps on reserves in Northern Manitoba showed significant declines in crime rates compared with reserves that did not have the programs (Murray, 1993). This program involved very intensive recreation activities that were run over an entire summer. Sherman et al (1997) found that after-school recreation programs operated in high-crime areas by community-based organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs may have a positive impact on crime, but here again the intervention must be substantial if it is to have any effect. An Ottawa study also provides evidence that properly run recreation programs can have an impact. For almost three years, low-income children 5 to 15 years of age living in a public housing project took part in an intensive after-school program that offered sports, music, dancing, and scouting. Arrests in the program site declined by 75% compared with the two years prior to the program while they rose by 67% in the comparison site. However, within sixteen months after the program ended, these positive effects had worn off (Jones & Offord, 1989, as cited in Howell, 1995, p. 95).

While a large number of studies have been conducted on the best ways of preventing gang crime by addressing risk factors for crime among youth, it is far from an exact science\(^2\). While there are some consistent patterns in the research that provide guidance to program planners, you should not assume that they will be effective. Thus ongoing evaluation - preferably using experimental or quasi-experimental designs – is crucial.

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\(^2\) The tentative state of this research is shown by a recent report by the Campbell Collaboration which could not find any methodologically sound studies of the impact of opportunities provision programs for preventing youth gang involvement (Fisher et al, 2008).
Intervention

Intervention programs are intended to help street gang members leave gangs\(^3\) and to prevent young people who are on the periphery of street gangs from joining. The most effective of these programs use individualized treatment programs. The need for this has been illustrated by Totten (2009), who showed that there are many different pathways to street gang membership and these pathways require different types of intervention. Thus any programs set up to prevent gang involvement or to provide the opportunity to exit gangs must be individualized.

Multisystemic Therapy (MST) was designed to help violent and chronic juvenile offenders. While it has not been targeted specifically on street gang members, there is considerable overlap between these populations. MST is an intensive home-based service that involves the family as well as the other groups that have an influence on the young person, including the school, the peer group, and the neighbourhood. MST therapists work with youth in community settings and are available 24 hours a day. Therapists work very intensively with the youth and his or her family as well as with the other groups. The ultimate goal of MST is to “empower the family to take responsibility for making and maintaining gains... parents are encouraged to develop the requisite skills to solve their own problems rather than rely on professionals” (Leschied & Cunningham, 2002, p. 9). This program has shown success in the U.S. (Farrington and Welsh, 2003). For example, a long-term evaluation of the Missouri Delinquency Project found that MST participants had 41% lower violent crime recidivism rates and 32% lower felony recidivism than controls (Sawyer, 2008). However, a large Canadian study did not show any difference between treated and untreated youth (Leschied and Cunningham, 2002). A similar program called Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care has had success with youth in foster care (Chamberlain and Mihalic, 1998).

Several Canadian programs are currently using gang intervention strategies, though none has yet reported a final evaluation. One of these is the Regina Anti-Gang Services (RAGS) program. RAGS was designed for gang-involved Aboriginal youth aged 12-30 in Regina’s North Central neighbourhood (Public Safety Canada, n.d.). The goal of RAGS is to reduce gang crime by providing services that will reduce gang involvement and help the young people to leave gangs. The program is operated by a not-for-profit community agency, the North Central Community Association.

\(^3\) It is interesting to note that several of the intervention programs cited by Decker ‘recruit’ potential candidates in hospital emergency rooms because “gang members who are victims of violence may be at their most vulnerable and therefore receptive for hearing a message and receiving services designed to deter them from further involvement in violence (Decker, 2008: 30).
The program uses a wraparound process that involves youth, their families, service providers and community agencies. RAGS was based on several programs, including Wraparound Milwaukee, youth engagement programs, and Circle of Courage. The North Central Community Association has a number of partners including: Regina Police Service, Regina Board of Education, Inter Provincial Anti-Gang Programs, Saskatchewan Department of Corrections and Public Safety, Project Hope Street Nurses Organization, Regina Aids Foundation, faith-based organizations, and federal departments including Heritage Canada and Service Canada. Program activities include intensive counseling, teaching life skills and cognitive skills, a ‘Circle Keeper’ program designed to help female gang members to leave the sex trade, cultural and faith-based programming, a gang exit strategy, outreach programs, and family programming. The program began in late 2007 and is now being evaluated. Preliminary results indicate that the program is reaching its target population of Aboriginal gang members, and that it is having some success in helping the youth to leave their gangs (Public Safety Canada, n.d.).

Some of the research suggests that intervention programs need to identify and to focus on criminogenic risk factors. Goldstein and his colleagues provided Aggression Replacement Training to gang members in Brooklyn. Program participants reported a 13% re-arrest rate in a four-month post-treatment follow-up compared with a 52% re-arrest rate for a matched control group. Participants showed improvements in interpersonal skills and work adjustment ((Goldstein et. al. 1994) cited in Jones et al 2004).

While incarceration is usually considered a suppression strategy, ideally prison will provide an intervention that will discourage individuals from continuing their criminal careers. A recent review by the Colorado Department of Corrections concluded that incarceration does not have a positive impact on reoffending. In fact, “incarceration is associated with higher rates of recidivism when compared with community-based sanctions” and “longer prison sentences are linked to higher rates of recidivism” (2008:2).

However, some programming in prisons may have a positive impact on gang members. One strategy that has been used with some success in the U.S. has been to separate gang members from the general prison population and to provide them with programming emphasizing mental health, vocational and educational programming and life skills training aimed at improving their functioning at home and in the community (Spergel, 1995).

Another area for intervention that has recently received attention is reentry into the community after imprisonment. Virtually all inmates are released and most come back to their home communities. Many become re-involved with their old gangs. Thus it is important to help them to avoid re-involvement. One way of doing this is to ensure that support services are available to ex-inmates when they get back on the street. Reentry programs involve the provision of services and monitoring for returning inmates to help keep them from returning to their criminal ways.
Suppression

The police have traditionally used suppression tactics such as crackdowns, the use of informants, enhanced prosecution efforts and tougher laws to deal with street gangs. These efforts have not often been evaluated but there is little evidence that they have a lasting impact. For example, Sherman’s review of police crackdowns showed that there were often positive short-term effects, but that these were rarely sustained (Sherman, 1990). More positive findings came from an evaluation of the Dallas Anti-Gang Initiative which involved saturation patrol, and aggressive curfew and truancy enforcement. While undirected saturation patrol had no impact on crime, aggressive curfew and truancy enforcement did reduce gang violence in target areas though there was no impact on the overall number of crimes reported to the police in those areas (Fritsch et al, 1999). Finally, the International Centre for Science in Drug Policy (2010) recently conducted a very thorough meta-analysis of the impact of drug law enforcement on violence. They found that 13 of the 15 studies of this relationship concluded that increasing drug law enforcement led to increased levels of drug gang violence. The reason for this is likely that disrupting existing drug distribution networks leads to competition between gangs who seek to fill the distribution vacuum and this competition involves violence.

While suppression programs may have little lasting impact, more recent work on suppression suggests using a strategy of targeted deterrence has the potential of reducing gang crime. Most of the targeted deterrence programs that have been evaluated over the past decade could be considered comprehensive programs to varying degrees because most have also included prevention and/or intervention components in addition to suppression.

Targeted Deterrence

Many Canadians feel that ‘cracking down’ or ‘getting tough’ is the best way to deal with crime. However, there is little evidence that tougher penalties such as mandatory minimum sentences and even very harsh 3-strikes laws like that passed in California have had any impact on crime rates (Kennedy, 2009).

Consideration of why tougher penalties do not work suggests another approach that might be more effective. Psychological research has shown that certainty of punishment is more important than the severity of punishment. Unfortunately, the justice system does not provide this certainty (Kennedy, 2009). Many crimes are not reported, most reported crimes do not result in a charge, and most of those charged do not receive a prison sentence. The most common punishment for committing a crime is nothing [for example, one estimate has suggested that the chances of going to prison for a cocaine sale in the U.S. are about 15,000:1 (Boyum and Reuter, 2005)]. The justice system also works slowly so there is no immediate connection between committing a criminal act and being punished for it. Finally, we should not assume that potential offenders even know about changes to penalties – for example, how likely is it that gun-carrying gang members realized that the mandatory minimum penalties in Canada for many gun crimes had been raised from 4 to 5 years? The result of tougher penalties is what Kleiman (2009) calls “randomized severity”.

A new approach, advocated by several researchers including Kennedy and Kleiman, involves targeting deterrence so that serious offenders will face penalties that are swift and certain. Police, prosecutors, and corrections officials work together to focus their resources on the most serious offenders. These offenders are told directly that future misconduct will result in enforcement actions and sufficient resources are provided to ensure that this promise is carried out. A basic principle of targeted deterrence is that promises must be kept.

The Boston Gun Project

One of the best examples of the use of the strategy of targeted deterrence is the gang violence reduction program called the Boston Gun Project. The program was developed in response to high homicide rates among young, African-American males in Boston. The project used a problem-oriented planning framework and involved a cooperative effort by a significant number of different agencies and groups. Planners sought to deter gang violence by telling gang members that violence would not be tolerated and that gangs that continued to use violence would be targeted for intensive enforcement. The Boston Gun Project was not just a police effort but involved other laws enforcement and criminal justice agencies and also recruited social service agencies, local churches and community groups to work with youth in their communities. These community groups also made it clear to the gang members that their violent behaviour was not going to be tolerated by the community and used whatever sanctions they could to enhance the certainty of deterrence (the ‘pulling levers’ approach). While suppression was a major component of the project, the project also offered gang members training, counseling, mentoring, and remedial education. Community organizations including faith-based agencies were involved in these services. The overall impact of the project was dramatic. Over a period of nearly 3 years, the project was responsible for a 63% decline in youth homicide (Kennedy et al, 2001).

4 This project is also known as Operation Ceasefire. However, using this name creates confusion because another well-known gun violence program also uses the same name.

5 The project also had other suppression components including trying to reduce the sale of illegal firearms.

6 The Boston project specifically targeted gun violence and not other offenses committed by the gang members.

7 Many different types of sanctions might be used as tools in a targeted deterrence program. For example, Maxson et al (2005) found that civil gang injunctions had positive short-term effects on neighbourhoods. Manitoba has implemented a Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act that enables the province to close houses that are being used for threatening or disturbing activities, many of which involve street gangs.

8 It is important to note that when the Boston Police Department dropped the program and several of the community groups also ended their involvement, rates of youth
Variations of this approach have been implemented in a number of other cities. For example, Philadelphia implemented the Youth Violence Reduction Partnership which combined intensive probation supervision with street workers and enhanced police support. In addition to closer supervision, high-risk youth are provided with social supports including mental health counseling to educational and employment support. As in Boston, homicide rates declined in areas where the project was operating (McClanahan, 2004).

A project in the Hollenbeck neighbourhood of Los Angeles lacked the prevention and intervention elements of some of the other programs because of implementation issues, but still led to modestly greater reductions in gang crimes and gun crimes in program areas than in control areas, while violent crime rates declined at the same rate in both program and control areas (Tita, et al, 2003). However, the program was not sustained beyond a trial period.

The largest replication of targeted deterrence was the Strategic Approach to Community Safety Initiative which sponsored programs in 10 cities (Roehl et al, 2006). The results were very positive. For example, in Indianapolis there was a 32% reduction in homicide, in New Haven there was a 32% reduction in gun crime, and in Portland there was a 42% reduction in homicide and a 25% decrease in other violent crime. The model is now being promoted nationally in the U.S. through Project Safe Neighbourhoods.

**Winnipeg Auto Theft Suppression Strategy (WATSS)**

The targeted deterrence approach was also used successfully in the WATSS project. While not specifically targeted at gangs, about 80% of the serious auto theft offenders involved in the project were involved with street gangs. From 2003 to 2008, Winnipeg had North America’s highest rates of vehicle theft. These rates were about 80% higher than the next highest city. The crime did not have only financial costs as several people were killed or injured as a result of the thefts. The Manitoba Auto Theft Task Force based WATSS on detailed crime analysis which provided a detailed picture of the patterns, causes, and consequences of vehicle theft in Winnipeg. Most thefts were committed by young offenders and virtually all the vehicles were stolen for joyriding. Most of the offenders were gang-involved. Vehicle theft was an important part of the youth culture in some inner-city neighbourhoods. Certain makes and models, particularly older Chrysler vehicles, were extremely vulnerable to theft.

WATSS is a comprehensive strategy that involves several partners including the Winnipeg Police Service, Manitoba Justice (including youth probation and Crown prosecutors), and Manitoba Public Insurance. The Strategy has three components: a tiered approach to at-risk youth with intensive community supervision of high-risk youth; a program requiring compulsory vehicle immobilizers for the most at-risk vehicles; and youth programming addressing the underlying causes of vehicle theft. In order to ensure that sanctions for violating release conditions are certain, youth are contacted every 3 hours by probation services or by the police and there is zero tolerance for any violations. A core principle of the program is that there are clear rules and
domicide returned to previous levels and continued to climb until at least 2006 (Pollack, 2006).
consequences and that promises must be kept. This is possible because enforcement resources are concentrated, not dispersed.

WATSS has been very successful. Vehicle thefts declined by 29% in 2007, 42% in 2008, and 34% in 2009. Rates are now almost 75% lower than in 2006. Ongoing savings attributed to the program are now over $35 million/year. The program was recently recognized by the International Association of Chiefs of Police and has been awarded their 2010 awards for quality policing and for vehicle theft.

Because of the program’s success, many of its innovations have been incorporated into a new Gang Response and Suppression Program (GRASP) which targets Winnipeg’s most violent gang offenders. These elements include: a focus on high-risk offenders; partnerships with probation services and prosecutors; a link between a specialized gang crime unit and line officers in district platoons, and a social development component run by probation services and community partners.

**Comprehensive Street Gang Crime Reduction Strategies**

Comprehensive street gang crime reduction programs are designed to combine the three categories of gang crime reduction strategies. These combined programs have the greatest potential to provide lasting reductions in gang crime. Suppression can reduce existing street gang crime, while prevention programs reduce the number of potential gang recruits and intervention strategies help gang members to exit gangs and to avoid gangs after being released from prison. In other words, comprehensive programs are designed to hit all “pressure points” at the same time.

**Spergel’s Comprehensive Strategy**

Perhaps the best-known example of a comprehensive gang crime reduction initiative was developed by Irving Spergel. Spergel’s model has been adopted by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention as the basis for its Gang Reduction Program (OJJDP, 2007). The model involves a combination of five strategies:

- **“Community Mobilization:** Involvement of local citizens, including former gang-involved youth, community groups, agencies, and coordination of programs and staff functions within and across agencies.

- **Opportunities Provision:** Development of a variety of specific education, training, and employment programs targeting gang-involved youth.

- **Social Intervention:** Involving youth-serving agencies, schools, grassroots groups, faith-based organizations, police, and other juvenile/criminal justice organizations in ‘reaching out’ to gang-involved youth and their families and linking them with the conventional world and needed services.

- **Suppression:** Formal and informal social control procedures, including close supervision and monitoring of gang-involved youth by agencies of the juvenile/criminal justice system and also by community-based agencies, schools, and grassroots groups.
Organizational Change and Development: Development and implementation of policies and procedures that result in the most effective use of available and potential resources, within and across agencies, to better address the gang problem” (OJJDP, 2007: 2).

Spergel evaluated a project in Little Village in Chicago and found that it had an impact on serious gang crimes (Spergel, 2007). However, several later demonstration projects sponsored by OJJDP had mixed results. While some showed positive outcomes, others had implementation problems (National Crime Prevention Centre, 2008). Programs like Spergel’s are very complex and can involve dozens of different organizations. These programs require careful preparation and coordination. This will be discussed later in this paper.

Wraparound Strategies

Earlier in this paper, we discussed the Regina Anti-Gang Services program which is a wraparound strategy. Wraparound programs involve comprehensive intervention programming designed to deal with crime-involved and at-risk young people in the community. Programs are tailored to each individual, which means that a significant investment must be made in case management. Interagency teams involve participants from social services, mental health services, youth justice, and the education system. Care coordinators help to create the specialized treatment programs for youth selected for the program. The programs include working with the youths’ families. Accountability is built into the programs through the use of performance measures. Evaluations of these programs have been favourable. For example, Wraparound Milwaukee reported 41% fewer felony referrals and 46% fewer misdemeanour referrals in the 3 years following discharge from the program compared with the 3 years preceding discharge (Find Youth Info, n.d.). The cost of the program was about half the cost of residential treatment. Many of the programs now being implemented in Canada use the wraparound approach.

In addition to those programs reviewed in this paper, the National Crime Prevention Centre has recently funded a significant number of Canadian comprehensive programs. Most of these programs follow either Spergel’s comprehensive model or the wraparound model. While evaluations have not yet been completed of these programs, descriptions of a number of them are included as Appendix 1.

Planning and Implementing Comprehensive Street Gang Reduction Programs

Canada’s street gang problems are largely the result of longstanding and deeply-rooted community problems. These problems have taken a long time to develop and it would not be reasonable to expect that they can be eliminated without an intensive, well-organized, and well-planned initiative. Planning and organization are the foundation of successful street gang reduction.

9 The term ‘wraparound’ refers to this tailoring of programs to individuals rather than putting them into ‘one size fits all’ programs.
Planning – A Problem-Oriented Approach to Street Gangs

People often believe that reducing gang crime is like getting rid of an infection. Just find the right medication and the problem will quickly go away. Unfortunately, there is no magic pill or program that will solve the gang problem. Even if we find a program that is very effective in one community, there is no guarantee that it will work in another, because there can be large differences in the nature of gang members and gang structures; differences in the structure, values and traditions of communities; differences in community leadership and resources; and so on. Thus we need to take a problem-oriented approach to gang problems (See Figure 1).

While space does not permit discussing this planning process in detail\(^\text{10}\), a few points can be highlighted.

- It is important to emphasize that as many partners as possible should be involved in the planning process. Comprehensive street gang reduction strategies can be very complex and can involve a broad range of criminal justice and government agencies as well as community groups, faith-based organizations, and the business

\(^{10}\) For a thorough discussion of this planning model, see Linden (1996).
Involving these partners at the beginning of the process will help to ensure their continuing cooperation.

- Effective planning requires as much information about the street gang problem and its community context as possible (see Decker, 2008). The more diagnostic information you have, the more likely you will be to develop successful programs. Thus, the analysis of the gang problem should encompass the frequency and type of gang crime, the nature and structure of gangs, the backgrounds of gang members, the characteristics of the community, and the resources available to deal with the problem.

- Street gang problems are very difficult to deal with, so strategies need to be as comprehensive as possible and include the components of prevention, intervention, and suppression.

- Resources will never be sufficient to deal with all street gang problems in all parts of your city. Thus, you should try to define specific gang problems and/or target high priority neighbourhoods.

- Finally, the evaluation process is important so that you can ensure your program is being implemented as planned and in order to make it more effective. It is also important to evaluate because many gang programs have actually made things worse. For example, detached worker programs have actually been found to solidify gangs by giving them official recognition and ‘bus therapy’ (breaking up gangs in prison by transferring gang members to different institutions) can spread gangs rather than reduce them.

**Structure – the Need to Organize for Success**

Comprehensive street gang reduction strategies require coordination and this coordination requires structure. Even the best-planned programs will fail unless they are properly implemented and sustained and unless they are integrated into an overall street gang reduction strategy. For example, evaluations of programs based on Spergel’s comprehensive model have shown mixed results that can be at least partly attributed to poor implementation. The model was so complex that it was beyond the capacity of some communities to implement. Some of the sites had organizational problems including: “undefined organizational structure, lack of leadership, ambiguous goals, conflicting community attitudes, recruitment difficulties, high turnover, unbalanced representation of the community, and inadequate conflict resolution processes” (National Crime Prevention Centre, 2008: 83). Thus it is important that planners establish a structure that will help the program to succeed.

Local conditions will ultimately determine the best structure to be used in any community. That said, some guidance can be provided concerning the best way to organize comprehensive street gang reduction programs:

- *The structure of any program should flow from the problem and its community context*. Hastings has concluded that “success ultimately depended on starting...
with the problem, and on organizing agents and institutions around what is required to solve that problem. This sounds obvious, but it is quite different from our usual tendency to start with what is already in place and limit our responses to those aspects of the problem that are relevant to the mandate and within the resource constraints of the organizations or agencies involved” (2010:11).

- **Municipal governments must play a central role in street gang crime crime reduction.** Municipalities control policing and many of the other services that must be part of street gang prevention initiatives. However, federal and provincial governments also play important roles in reducing street gang crime. The provinces and territories have authority over many of the areas related to risk factors, including families, education and welfare so they have a role in developing policy and in funding interventions (Hastings, 2010). The federal government should play a lead role in research and development.

- **Leadership must come from the top.** Comprehensive gang initiatives are so complex that strong leadership is required. Without a strong mandate, the people responsible for the street gang crime reduction strategy will not be able to overcome the obstacles to successful planning and implementation. Along with strong leadership, members of the planning and implementation group must be people who have the authority to commit their agencies to work cooperatively with the other partners. They must also be committed to the street gang initiative. Projects will not likely succeed unless staff turnover is kept to a minimum and unless the individuals involved in the initiative are held accountable for the results (Tita et al, 2003).

- There must be a *high-level responsibility centre* that has the institutional and political power to cut across bureaucracies, to negotiate the cooperation of a variety of diverse organizations, and to involve communities in the planning and implementation of gang crime reduction programs.

- **Significant resources must be invested in the initiative.** The serious, chronic problems that lead to street gangs cannot be solved without sufficient resources. Small, fragmented programs will not work, so programs must be scaled to the nature of the problem. Budgets must be structured to support collaboration across agencies (Tita et al, 2003).

- **Information is crucial to planning** and implementing a successful street gang reduction strategy. Therefore a street gang prevention program must have a *data gathering and analysis capability.*

- **Process and outcome evaluation** are necessary components of gang crime reduction strategies. Process evaluations tell us if our strategy is being implemented as planned, while outcome evaluations tell us if the strategy works.

**Conclusions and Recommendations: The Implications of the Research on Street Gang Crime Reduction**
• Only comprehensive efforts will have a lasting impact on street gang crime. This requires a multi-agency approach that focuses on prevention, intervention and suppression. All levels of government must work together to ensure that street gang problems are addressed. Project planning and implementation teams should include criminal justice officials (police, prosecutors, corrections), community representatives, researchers, and others who can bring knowledge and resources to help deal with the problem.

• Sufficient resources must be allocated to comprehensive street gang reduction programs. Unless a project is scaled to the problem, the program will fail. Street gangs are the result of serious longstanding problems such as poverty, family dysfunction, and community disorganization. Small-scale interventions will not be sufficient to alleviate these problems in order to reduce the crimes committed by street gangs. Resources must provide for long-term funding of successful programs. Projects that have short-term funding almost always have short-term futures – even highly successful programs have been cancelled because long-term funding was not available.

• Structure is important – you need to organize for success. The particular structure that will work best will be based on local circumstances. While the specific program structure may vary, all programs will need strong leadership to enable the collaborative work that is required to plan and implement comprehensive street gang reduction strategies. Programs will also require a high level responsibility centre that has the authority to do things and is accountable for results.

• Comprehensive initiatives must include a strategic planning process. This planning should involve as many of the partners as possible, as requires a thorough analysis of the specific local problem. Resources should be targeted on particular problems and/or particular communities.

• Programs should be evidence-based and should address specific risk factors in the target community and its population. Decades of research have shown us the best ways of addressing crime and new programs should build on what has worked elsewhere.
APPENDIX 1

SELECTED COMPREHENSIVE STREET GANG CRIME REDUCTION PROGRAMS FUNDED BY THE NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION CENTRE

The National Crime Prevention Centre has funded several comprehensive street gang crime reduction programs. None of these has been fully evaluated but all are evidence-based and represent promising Canadian initiatives. Most of these initiatives follow either the wraparound strategy or the Comprehensive Gang Model advocated by the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) which is also known as the Spergel Model. We can briefly describe some of the programs that follow each of these models11.

Wraparound Programs

These programs are modeled on initiatives such as Wraparound Milwaukee that involve youth, their families, service providers and community agencies. These programs provide individualized programming that is available in community settings.

- Gang Prevention Strategy – involves youth 13-25 in Hamilton. The program is delivered by Living Rock Ministries along with several partners including the Hamilton Police Service, John Howard, the City of Hamilton and several other churches. Extensive support is provided to those who are admitted to the program.
- A Positive Alternative to Youth Gangs works with racial minority youth age 11-14 in Toronto’s Jane-Finch community. The program is delivered by the San Romanoway Revitalization Association in partnership with school organizations and a property management company. Many of the activities are school-focused along with family support intervention and a summer program for youth.
- Project Prevention and Intervention Toronto – has been implemented under Toronto’s Community Safety Plan. The program is targeted toward young people from 13-24 and is run by the City of Toronto with the support of the Centre of Criminology at the University of Toronto. The program has a number of partners including the Toronto Police Service, several community organizations, and several municipal departments.
- Wraparound Surrey – is operated by the Surrey Board of Education in partnership with the RCMP, the provincial government, the City of Surrey, the YMCA, the Pacific Community Resources Society, and several other local organizations.

11 We have not provided summaries of all the current programs. A complete list is available from the National Crime Prevention Centre at: http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/ythgng/index-eng.aspx
The Comprehensive Gang Model

The model program has the five core components of community mobilization, social intervention, opportunities provision, suppression, and organizational change and development.

- **Durham Youth Gang Strategy** – has each of the five elements of the OJJDP model. The program is targeted at youth who are involved with street gangs or at risk of involvement. The program is sponsored by the Durham Family Court Clinic and the Murray McKinnon Foundation, and has a broad range of partners including the justice agencies, school boards, social services agencies, the YMCA, and the transit authority.

- **Just TV** – is targeted toward gang-involved Aboriginal youth and young adults in Winnipeg. The program is delivered by the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre along with a number of community partners. While it is not as comprehensive as the Durham program, it has the innovative element of an activities component that involves teaching the youth television production skills.

- **Programme de Suivi Intensif de Montreal** – is targeted at high risk youth and young adults. The program has fewer partners and components than the Durham program, but has a very intensive program of Individual Action Plans. These plans entail 3 or 4 meetings a week with project staff, youth and their families and a broad range of activities that can keep the youth involved 20-40 hours a week.

- **Project O.A.S.I.S.** – is targeted at male, African, refugee youth and their families. Those in the program are young people who have been traumatized by war and violence in their home countries. The program is run by New Directions, a community-based social service organization, with support from the Manitoba Youth Centre, the University of Manitoba, the Manitoba government and several other organizations involved with adolescent health and refugee issues.

Anyone who intends to start a comprehensive street gang initiative should examine these programs. Not all of these programs will be successful – some have already had serious implementation difficulties. However, other communities can learn from both positive and negative outcomes. It is as important to know what will not work as it is to know what is likely to be successful.
REFERENCES


