

Disaffiliation from Security Threat Groups: A Review of the Literature

Internal and external factors leading to STG disaffiliation are varied and dependent on age and gender.

What we looked at

Data indicates that Security Threat Group¹ (STG) membership has increased among federal offenders in Canada.^D While the majority of the research literature on this topic has focused on pathways to STG affiliation, less research has been conducted on STG disaffiliation.² Therefore, a literature review was conducted to examine the factors associated with STG disaffiliation, in order to assist the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) in supporting offenders through the STG disengagement process.

What we found

Overall, reasons for STG disaffiliation are categorized into push and pull factors. While there may be one major reason for disaffiliation, most individuals choose to leave the STG because of a combination of reasons.^{3,B}

Push factors refer to internal elements of the STG that 'pushed' the individual away from their STG.^A The main push factors identified are violence/violent environment, victimization, aging, fear of incarceration (particularly long sentences), disillusionment and disbanding of the STG.^{Ac} Importantly, the disbanding of a STG does not necessarily indicate that the offender wanted to leave the STG.

Pull factors are external factors from the STG that 'pull' the individual away and offer a better, pro-social environment for the offender.^A Like pathways to STG affiliation,⁴ social networks are important pull factors to STG disaffiliation.^{A,B,E} Overall, the literature indicates that friends and family can offer the strongest pull to spark the desire to disaffiliate.^{A,B} The responsibility of parenthood, desires for employment opportunities, commitments to significant others and/or desires to be with family are common pull factors.^A

Despite the limited research available regarding STG disengagement, there is some evidence to demonstrate that reasons for leaving a STG may depend on age. Research regarding youth gang affiliates suggests that violence and avoiding victimization are the main push factors, whereas older adult gang affiliates are more likely

to disaffiliate due to their age and responsibilities related to parenthood, family, partnerships, or employment.^A

Research regarding STG affiliated women and STG disengagement is limited. However, the literature suggests that pregnancy and motherhood are strong pull factors for women leaving the STG.^A Interestingly, despite the literature on STG pathways suggesting that women are primarily affiliated through their STG affiliated partner,⁵ there is little discussion of women leaving the STG after separating from their STG affiliated partner.

What it means

Identifying the reasons for disaffiliation may further support CSC services, and interventions to facilitate STG disaffiliation. Internal versus external factors (i.e., push versus pull) for leaving STGs has implications for the support and reintegration of offenders. Therefore, recognizing these differences may increase the effectiveness of STG disaffiliation-related interventions.

References

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¹ STGs include gangs (i.e. motorcycle outlaw, prison, Indigenous, Street and Asian gangs), terrorist organizations, traditional organized crime, white supremacy groups, subversive groups, cults, and other hate groups (Commissioner's Directive 568-3, 2016).

² Disaffiliated offenders have formally terminated their affiliation with the STG.

³ Of note, most literature referred to gang disaffiliation.

⁴ Cram, S. & Farrell MacDonald, S. Pathways to security threat groups: a review of the literature (RR-21-01). Ottawa, ON: CSC.

⁵ Cram, S. & Farrell MacDonald, S. Women offenders' pathways to Security Threat Group affiliations (RIB-21-16). Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.