

Victims of



Gang Violence



WORDS TO KNOW

gang violence

intimidation

retaliation

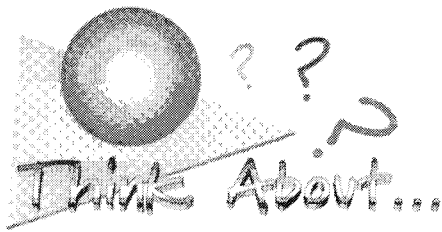
suppression

unique

OBJECTIVES

As a result of this lesson you should be able to:

- define gang violence
- explain the impact of gang violence on victims
- list the unique characteristics of victims, survivors, and witnesses of gang violence



Read the following story and answer the questions.

Shirley Johnson, age 8, her mother and younger brother live in a small two-bedroom house in a busy residential area of Denver. Shirley's mother chose this house to rent because it had a fenced front yard for the children to play in without worrying about them wandering into the busy street.

One afternoon while the children were playing in the front yard, Shirley's mother heard the squeal of tires and the sounds of cars racing down the street. As she approached the front window she heard four sharp pops. She glanced at the yard just as Shirley spun around and fell to the ground. Shirley's mother screamed and ran out the door to her daughter's side.

Shirley was shot once in the chest and was bleeding badly. Shirley's mother picked her up and held her tightly to her chest. As Shirley's brother looked on with tears in his eyes, Shirley took two deep breaths and died in her mother's arms.

1. Who are the victims in the story?
2. What might be the immediate impact of Shirley's murder on the victims?
3. What might be some long-term impact of Shirley's murder on the victims?
4. Who is responsible for Shirley's murder?
5. The police find out that the two cars were occupied by rival gang members. They arrested two of the gang members who were in possession of handguns used in the shooting. What should the gang members be charged with, if anything? Defend your answer.

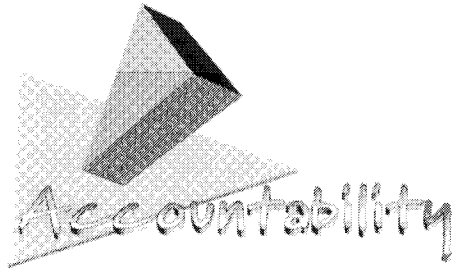


DEFINITIONS

Gang violence refers to violent criminal acts committed by individuals who are associated by common territory, beliefs, activities, and/or goals. Gang membership cuts across all ethnic, cultural, economic, and geographic boundaries. Many states have adopted anti-gang laws to combat what has been referred to as “a state of crisis which has been caused by violent street gangs whose members threaten, terrorize, and commit crimes against the peaceful citizens of their neighborhoods.” (Deering, 1996)

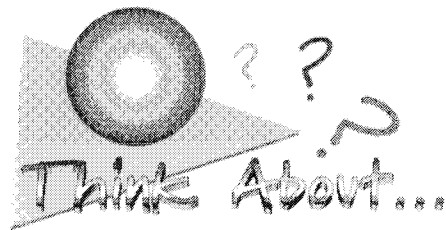
Gang-related crime is primarily a violent crime problem. Homicides and other violent crimes accounted for about one-half of all recorded gang-related crime incidents in the United States during 1995 (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). Although newspapers and television report that most gang violence is related to drug dealing, this is not true. Most gang violence occurs outside of drug dealing and is more often related to status and territorial disputes aimed at members of other gangs. Associated with the rise of violence are more deadly and more available firearms (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995).





It is the right of every person, regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, sexual orientation, or handicap, to be secure and protected from fear, intimidation, and physical harm caused by the activities of violent gangs.

No one has the right to use violence against another human being, regardless of the circumstances.



Watch Part I of the "Victims of Gang Violence" video. This section shows a victim-witness advocate, Christine Lopez, as she informs a mother of the murder of her son Ivan ("Creep") and attends his funeral. Answer the following questions:

1. Ivan was a gang member and, on the night he was murdered, was driving a stolen vehicle.

Was Ivan a victim in this crime? Explain your answer.

2. Christine Lopez states “It’s never easy...it’s the very worst nightmare that a parent can face.” What did she mean by this statement?

3. What do you think about the gang rags and photos being placed in Ivan’s coffin next to a bible? How do you think Ivan’s mother and family felt about that?

4. At the end of the section, Christine Lopez gave advice to mothers. She said “Fight for your son’s life.” What do you think she meant by her statement? How can a mother fight for a son’s life?



VICTIMS OF GANG VIOLENCE

While much attention has focused on the prevention, intervention, and suppression or stopping of gang violence, hardly any attention has been paid to those who are most affected by its impact: **the victims of gang violence.**

While it's easy for the public to blame the criminal gang member for contributing to their own victimization, other victims and survivors of gang violence are also blamed for gang-related crimes for which they are not responsible. Family members of gang members killed or injured in gang violence are accused of supporting their children's gang activity.

Victims of gang-related violence are often ignored by the system which adds to the emotional crises that they endure when they are brutally injured by, caught in the crossfire of, or lose a loved one to gang violence

There are a few characteristics of victimization that are unique or different from victims and witnesses of other types of crime:

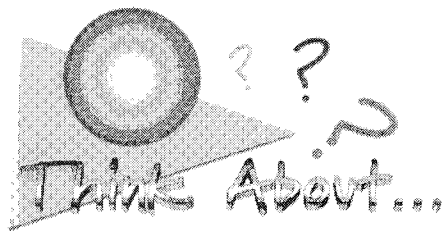
- **Victims and witnesses generally live with and/or among their victimizers:** Gang violence victims and witnesses live with or among their victimizers after the crime, similar to domestic violence. Victims and witnesses often face the entire gang instead of a sole victimizer. As a result they are frequently intimidated into not cooperating with the criminal justice system and are fearful of retaliation if they do.

- **Victims and survivors are often seen as contributors to the crime:** Many victims and survivors face a lack of sympathy and services from the criminal justice system because they are seen as having contributed to the crime in some way. This is even true for surviving family members of children killed by gang violence. Victims who have no gang affiliation, but happen to live in the same territory or are from the same racial or ethnic group as certain gangs, complain of unfair treatment by medical and criminal justice personnel, service providers, and community members. Victim blaming is considerable with frequent questions being asked, for instance, “Why didn’t you just move away from your gang-infested neighborhood?” or “Why was your child out, and why don’t you control that child?” The belief of “contribution” leads some victim compensation programs to deny funds to victims and survivors of gang violence.

- **Victims are frequently afraid or unable to exercise victims’ rights:** Because of intimidation, fear of retaliation, or due to poverty or culture, many victims of gang violence do not exercise their rights, which often include the right to be notified, attend, and be heard at court proceedings, to be informed when the defendant is released or escapes, and to receive restitution. Victims are sometimes fearful of seeking or receiving restitution because a convicted gang member whose sentence includes restitution may use this as a further reason to intimidate or retaliate against the victim. Some victims are poor and cannot afford transportation to court to

exercise their right to be present. Some gang violence victims do not speak English but are informed of their rights and the offender's case only in English. Also, a general distrust of government (courts and police) may keep some victims from participating with the system.

(Reprinted from U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime - Special Report
Victims of Gang Violence: A New Frontier in Victim Services, 1996)



Watch the "Killing Ground" section of "48 Hours: On Gang Streets". Listen closely to the words of the victims as they share their stories and be prepared to answer the following questions:

1. Charlotte Austin's daughter was murdered by Crip gang members in a case of mistaken identity. How has the death of her daughter affected Charlotte?

2. Ann Dirks was impacted three times by gang violence - what happened?

3. Ann was asked by the reporter, "Do you see these gang kids as monsters?" What did Ann reply? What do you think?

4. What did Charlotte mean when she said, "I would hate to see that she (her daughter) died for nothing...?"

GANG CHARACTERISTICS

In a survey conducted by Children Now/Kaiser Permanente in 1995, about one-third of young people surveyed reported that by the time they turned 17 years old, they or some of their friends had joined gangs. The reasons that 15 to 17 year-old youths said they join gangs include the following:

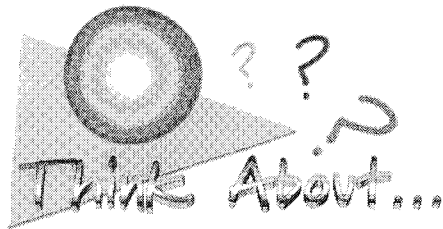
- For a sense of belonging like a family (62%)
- They are afraid and want a gang's protection (16%)
- They are pressured to join (8%)
- They are troublemakers (5%)
- Combination of reasons (7%)
- Don't know (2%)

Other factors have been identified that contribute to gang involvement:

- Gangs provide security and support to their members.
- Communities lack other means to provide security and support, especially to youths.
- Some gangs are multigenerational, and an expected lifestyle of parents and children.

In some communities where gangs are present, children often have a strong frame of reference for violence. For many parents, it is an everyday battle to maintain control over their children. There is little support for parents who want to protect their children and prevent them from entering into gang lifestyles.

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Watch Part II of the "Victims of Gang Violence" video. This section focuses on a 13 year-old gang member named Jose ("Risky"). Be prepared to answer the following questions:

1. Jose's mother said that the gang is stealing her son and that he is brainwashed. Do you agree? Defend your answer.

2. Jose looks up to the gang leader "Grumpy". Is Grumpy responsible for Jose's gang involvement? Is he a good role model for Jose?

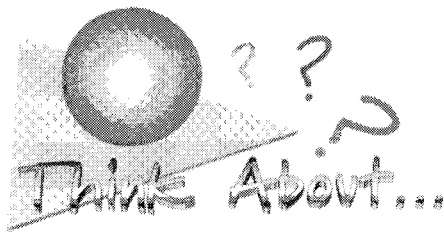
3. If Jose was your brother, would you want him to “associate” with Grumpy and the gang?

If not, what could you do?

4. Is Jose’s probation officer doing the right thing by taking him into custody? Defend your

answer.

Grief has changed the lives of victims of gang violence forever. As Christine Lopez stated, “it’s the very worst nightmare that a parent can face...”



Watch Part III of the "Victims of Gang Violence" video. You will listen to 12 mothers discuss their thoughts and feelings. Be prepared to answer the following questions:

1. The mothers discuss two emotions - anger and sorrow. Why are the mothers angry? Are they justified in being angry?
2. What did the mothers say about Jose?
3. List some important statements you remember from this section.

GUEST SPEAKER NOTES

