

GANG MEMBERSHIP AND VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION*

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Extant gang research supports an enhancement effect of membership on delinquency; that is, while delinquent youths may be attracted to gangs, it is also true that gang membership increases delinquency among youths and that while delinquency levels decrease after gang membership, they do not decrease to nongang levels. In this paper, we build on this research, examining the relationship between youth gang membership and violent victimization in a general sample of adolescents. We find that gang member victimization rates are higher than nongang member rates, not only during membership, but before and after as well. Thus an enhancement model of gang membership appears to best fit both offending and victimization rates. This effect of gang affiliation on victimization goes beyond gang members' involvement in violent offending; violence and gang status equate with cumulative disadvantage in terms of violent victimization. Additionally, contrary to gang youths' perceptions, gangs appear to offer no protective value to gang members; we find no

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differences in violent victimization between youths who joined gangs for protection and those who joined for other reasons, either before or after joining.

Delinquent youth gangs have received substantial attention by scholars and the general public during the past 70 years. Early works—such as those conducted by Thrasher (1927) in the 1920s—focused primarily on descriptive accounts of the nature of gangs and gang activities. Since that time, however, examinations of delinquent youth gangs have increased in complexity and their ability to influence public policy. Indeed, the need for studies of delinquent youth gangs has increased substantially as the number of cities reporting gang problems grew nearly tenfold between the 1970s and late 1990s (W. Miller, 2001).

The study of criminal victimization has a shorter—but informative—history in the field of criminology. Studies of groups at higher risk of victimization and of factors related to victimization risk have been undertaken. One key finding from these studies is that being involved in a delinquent lifestyle increases the risk of personal victimization (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1991; Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991; Loeber, Kalb, & Huizinga, 2001; Shaffer & Ruback, 2002).

With a few notable exceptions, however, the relationship between youth gang membership and risk of adolescent victimization has rarely garnered researchers' attention. The exceptions include studies on the link between gang membership and homicide victimization (Curry, Maxson, & Howell, 2001; Rosenfeld, Bray, & Egley, 1999), the victimization experiences of female gang members (J. Miller, 1998, 2001; Miller & Brunson, 2000), and one study linking the two (Miller & Decker, 2001).

This relative paucity of research is puzzling given what is known about the linkages between gangs and delinquency and between delinquency and victimization. Research has consistently shown the connection between gang membership and involvement in delinquent activities (Battin, Hill, Abbott, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1998; Bjerregaard & Smith, 1993; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Esbensen & Winfree, 1998; Huff, 1998; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, & Chard-Wierschem, 1993). Research has also demonstrated the connection between involvement in a delinquent lifestyle and being at increased victimization risk (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1991; Lauritsen et al., 1991; Loeber, Kalb, & Huizinga, 2001; Shaffer & Ruback, 2002). Given these connections, it may be logical to expect that gang members, who are more likely to be involved in a

delinquent lifestyle, would also be at increased risk of victimization. These linkages appear particularly important in light of many gang members' expectations that gang membership will lessen the risk of victimization.

The literature in these areas begs two questions. First, what is the nature of the relationship between being in a gang and being victimized? Second, do youths who join gangs for protection achieve their objective? With respect to the first question, two studies have reported on gang status and homicide victimization using police data (Curry, Maxson, & Howell, 2001; Rosenfeld, Bray, & Egley, 1999), and two other studies have reported on this link using qualitative data (J. Miller, 1998, 2001; Miller & Brunson, 2000). The question remains, however, to what extent these studies can inform the nature of gang status and victimization among adolescents in general. With respect to the second question, of how well expectations of protection are met through gang membership, again, qualitative research reveals that both violent offending and victimization are often normative features of gang life (see, e.g., Decker & Van Winkle, 1996), providing some evidence for the conclusion that gangs do not protect their members from being victimized by others.

In this paper, we examine the relationship between gang membership, reasons for joining the gang (specifically, for protection), and victimization rates across time. Data allowing exploration of these questions are relatively rare in the field of criminology, but two aspects of the current study make such an exploration possible: longitudinal panel data and the transitory nature of adolescent gang membership.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Gangs, Delinquent Activities, and Victimization

Research has consistently illustrated the higher levels of involvement in delinquency of gang members relative to nongang members. Self-report studies in Rochester, Denver, and Seattle have all found that gang members account for a disproportionate amount of crime, especially crimes of violence. In Rochester, gang members comprised 31% of the sample, but committed approximately 69% of all violent offenses and 82% of the more serious violent crimes of aggravated assault, robbery, and sexual assault (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003, pp. 49–50). Similarly, only about 15% of the Denver Youth Survey sample was gang-involved, but those youths committed approximately 79%

of all serious violent offenses (Huizinga, 1997). In Seattle, too, gang members accounted for 85% of all robberies, even though they comprised only 15% of the sample (Battin et al., 1998).

But what can account for the higher levels of delinquency among gang members? According to Thornberry and his colleagues (1993), explanations may be grouped into three categories: selection, facilitation, and enhancement. Selection explanations propose that gang members are involved in high levels of delinquency prior to joining the gang, and that these levels continue when they are active in the gang and after they leave it. The selection model leads to an expectation that an underlying "criminal trait" is responsible for gang members being more highly involved than nongang members in delinquency before, during, and after their involvement with the gang (see, e.g., Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Conversely, facilitation models suggest that the gang environment itself, rather than an individual trait, is the primary reason for gang members' increased involvement in delinquency. Under the facilitation approach, levels of delinquency are low before individuals join the gang, increase markedly as they enter the gang, and then drop back to pre-gang low levels after they leave the gang. Unlike the selection model, the level of delinquent involvement exhibited by gang and nongang members differs only when gang members are active in the gang. The final model, enhancement, may be viewed as a combination of selection and facilitation. According to this explanation, gang members may exhibit extensive involvement in delinquency before joining a gang, increase their delinquency even more upon entering the gang, and then decrease their level of delinquency after exiting the gang. The enhancement approach suggests that gang members are more extensively involved than nongang members in delinquent activities during all three periods, but the differences are greatest during the periods of gang involvement.

Research examining these contrasting explanations of higher rates of offending for gang than nongang youths has provided support for both the facilitation and enhancement models of offending. Thornberry and his colleagues (1993, 2003) found evidence supporting a facilitation effect of gang membership on delinquent behavior in their study of Rochester youths. Conversely, research conducted by Esbensen and Huizinga (1993) in Denver and by Hill and his colleagues (1999) in Seattle found evidence for an enhancement effect. That is, while all three found evidence that gang membership increased the level of youths' involvement in delinquent activities, Thornberry and colleagues found that gang and nongang youths were not substantively different before

becoming involved in gangs, while both Esbensen and Huizinga and Hill et al. found that gang members were more involved in delinquency even before joining gangs and remained so after leaving the gang.

Given the empirically supported relationships between victimization and delinquency and between delinquency and gang membership, we propose that gang members will have higher rates of violent victimization than nongang youths both during and after gang membership. The weight of the evidence also leads us to hypothesize that gang members will have higher rates of victimization than nongang youths prior to joining their gangs as well.

One somewhat unexpected outcome from these earlier investigations into the effect of gang membership on illegal activity was the finding that youths transition in and out of gangs rather quickly. Contrary to the popular conception that "once you're in, you're in for life," the majority of gang members were found to be in the gang for 1 year or less. In Rochester, for example, 66% of female and 50% of male gang members were members for 1 year only; 28% of both gang girls and gang boys were 2-year members; 4% of girls and 14% of boys were members for 3 years; and only 7% of boys (and no girls) were members for 4 consecutive years (Thornberry et al., 2003, p. 39). This transitory nature of youth gang membership allows for examination of the effect of gang membership on both offending and victimization rates.

Gang Membership and Victimization Risk

Providing further support for the hypothesis that gang membership should be positively related to victimization are recent qualitative studies of the lives and experiences of youth gang members as well as research on the gang-drug connection. One area of inquiry explores the relationship between gang membership and violence. Involvement in violence is often an important component of the gang lifestyle. Indeed, early research by Thrasher (1927) found that violence, ranging from "play group roughhousing" to "gang warfare," was a defining attribute of gangs. According to Decker and Van Winkle (1996, p. 117), violence remains an integral part of gang members' lives that separates them from nongang members. Specifically, violence "strengthens the bonds between existing members, increases the stake of prospective or fringe members in the gang, and serves as a means by which nongang youth come to join the gang" (p. 68).

This violence may take a variety of forms, each potentially resulting in an increased likelihood of victimization for gang members relative to their nongang peers. Members may be required to

participate in violent initiation rituals when entering or exiting a gang. Approximately two-thirds of the gang members in Decker and Van Winkle's sample, for example, reported being "beat in" as part of their initiation process (p. 69). While the process varied from gang to gang, interviewees often recounted a process whereby prospective members were expected to fight against several current gang members, who were arranged in a line or a circle.

Gang members may also be subjected to harsh discipline from members of their own gangs for violating gang rules. Padilla's (1995) research on one gang organized around drug sales uncovered the use of violence by the gang to sanction members for violations of collective rules, referred to as "Vs" (p. 57). Although this work was focused on the activities of the gang, rather than gang members, the process Padilla outlined is similar to one Decker and Van Winkle (1996) describe, under which violators are expected to walk through a line of other gang members who take turns beating on the transgressor.

Gang members are also involved in other types of activities that increase their vulnerability to predatory victimization by others. Previous research has found, for example, that gang members are more likely than non-members to be involved in drug selling activities (Esbensen & Winfree, 1998; Howell & Decker, 1999; Howell & Gleason, 1999; Huff, 1998; Maxson, 1995). Padilla (1995) provides one such example in the Diamonds, a gang organized around street-level drug dealing. Members of the Diamonds were responsible for moving marijuana and cocaine on the streets for higher-level distributors. While others (e.g., Howell & Gleason, 1999; Klein, 1995; Maxson, 1995) debate the extent to which gangs are primarily organized around drug-selling behavior or the extent to which gangs control drug sales in a city, extant research leaves little doubt that gang members are often more involved in drug selling than their nongang peers, whether they are acting for their own or the gangs' profit.

It is reasonable to conclude that the increased involvement of gang members in drug sales may translate into greater likelihood of victimization. Jacobs (2000) has documented the increased risk of victimization for individuals involved in such activities. While Jacobs' work did not examine gang members per se, his findings suggest factors relevant for both gang and nongang individuals. For example, street-level drug dealers have features making them appealing potential targets of robbers. They are often in possession of desired goods (e.g., drugs or money) and are less likely to report victimizations to authorities. Even if they do report the victimizations, police may not be particularly inclined to follow up.

Thus, the potential payoff of robbing a dealer, coupled with the reduced risk of being apprehended and sanctioned, makes robbers view street-level drug dealers as desirable targets.

Additionally, gang members may be targets of retaliation from rival gangs. Sanders (1994) suggests that an informal code exists among gang members regarding drive-by shootings. Targeting members of rival gangs for such shootings is an acceptable practice, although shooting at "innocents" deliberately is generally prohibited. These processes make violence a routine part of gang life (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996, p. 117), stark evidence of which is that of 99 gang members interviewed in the early 1990s in Decker and Van Winkle's St. Louis study, 28 had died a violent death by mid-year 2003 (Decker, 2003).

While prior research has focused primarily on the role of violent offending by gang members, we suggest several reasons why gang members should be at higher risk of victimization than their peers. To date, however, only one study has examined victimization rates among gang and nongang youths in a general sample of adolescents: Savitz, Rosen, and Lalli (1980) examined a sample of approximately 1,000 African American and white boys residing in Philadelphia. Their findings, contrary to the ethnographic studies and those examining homicide rates, showed no statistically significant differences between gang and nongang youths in terms of fear of victimization or actual victimization experiences. These findings, however, may be tied to period or cohort effects, because the study was conducted long before the late 1980s' and early 1990s' elevations in the rates of youth violence and gang involvement.

The majority of these studies suggest differences between gang and nongang youths in terms of victimization experiences. Specifically, research suggests that gang members are victimized more often than nongang members, despite frequent claims by gang youths that they joined their gangs for protection. In our study, we further the inquiry into youth gang membership and youths' victimization experiences with three questions. First, what is the nature of the relationship between being in a gang and being victimized? Second, do youths who are victimized seek out gangs for protection, or does gang membership increase risk of victimization? And, third, do youths who join gangs for protection get that protection?

CURRENT STUDY

Data to address these questions are drawn from two studies, one cross-sectional and one longitudinal, that were part of a

multisite evaluation of a school-based youth gang prevention program, the National Evaluation of the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program (see Esbensen & Osgood, 1999; Esbensen, Freng, Taylor, Peterson, & Osgood, 2002; or Esbensen, Osgood, Taylor, Peterson, & Freng, 2001). The primary goal of the original studies was to determine the effectiveness of the G.R.E.A.T. program. However, questions designed to elicit information about a wide variety of relevant issues, such as school environment, peer and family relationships, delinquency and victimization, as well as questions to allow for theory testing were also included.

The cross-sectional study was conducted in spring 1995; 5,935 8th-grade students in 42 public middle schools in 11 cities¹ across the United States filled out anonymous, group-administered, self-report questionnaires. For the longitudinal study, approximately 3,500 students (6th graders in one city, 7th graders in the other five) attending 22 public middle schools in 6 U.S. cities² were selected to complete confidential, group-administered pre- and post-test and annual surveys between 1995 and 1999.

Sites for both studies were chosen based on three criteria: (1) the existence of a viable G.R.E.A.T. program, (2) geographical and racial/ethnic diversity, and (3) cooperation of local law enforcement agencies and school districts. For more detailed information on the procedures used for sampling and survey administration, consult Esbensen et al. (2001 or 2002).

In all sites in the longitudinal study, active parental consent³ was obtained prior to the year-one follow-up survey.⁴ A modified Dillman (1978) method resulted in a total response rate of 67% ($n = 2,045$) from parents of the original 3,568 study participants, with 57% of all parents allowing their child's continued participation in the study.⁵

¹ Phoenix, Arizona; Torrance, California; Orlando, Florida; Pocatello, Idaho; Will County, Illinois; Kansas City, Missouri; Omaha, Nebraska; Las Cruces, New Mexico; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Providence, Rhode Island; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

² Phoenix, Arizona; Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska; Las Cruces, New Mexico; Portland, Oregon; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

³ Parents returned signed forms indicating whether or not their child could participate in the study, and only those students whose parents had indicated that their child was allowed to participate were included in future data collection efforts.

⁴ Passive parental consent (i.e., parents returned consent forms only if they wanted their child excluded from the survey) was obtained in five of the sites covering the pre-tests. In one of the sites, active parental consent was required prior to the pre-test data collection efforts. Active parental consent was obtained prior to post-test data collection in a second site and prior to the first year follow-up surveys in the four remaining sites.

⁵ This attrition occurred in spite of rigorous attempts by the researchers to gain parental consent. Active consent efforts were based on a modified Dillman

Sample Limitations

This public school-based sample has the usual limitations associated with school-based surveys (e.g., exclusion of private school students; exclusion of truants, sick, and/or tardy students; and potential under-representation of "high-risk" youths). We also acknowledge that attrition in our sample presents additional limitations because the youths of interest (i.e., gang members) may be more likely to drop out of the sample over time. Our findings, therefore, can be considered a conservative estimate of the relationship between gang membership and violent victimization; that is, findings of a significant relationship among self-reported gang members still attending school may actually underestimate the true relationship between victimization and gang involvement, if "more serious" gang members tend to drop out of our sample.

The few other researchers who have examined similar questions about the relationship of gang status to gang member behaviors and experiences using quantitative data have faced similar limitations. Thornberry and his colleagues (2003), for example, in their analysis of data from the Rochester Youth Development Study, restricted many of their analyses to male gang members, given the limited number of female gang members in their sample; additionally, some analyses of gang membership and delinquency were conducted with respondents numbering as low as 10.

Our data, though limited, offer an opportunity to explore questions of gang membership and victimization that is not present in many other extant data sets. With the cautionary note that some findings reported in this paper may be considered exploratory, we present intriguing information that we hope can be the starting point for more detailed analyses using larger samples of youth gang members.

MEASURES

Gang Definition

The debate over how to define gangs and how to determine who is a gang member has a long and ongoing history

(1978) method and included three direct mailings to parents of the selected students, with phone calls made after the second mailing to encourage parents to return the forms. Researchers collaborated with the schools involved, having teachers distribute and collect forms in their classrooms and offering incentives such as pizza parties for any classroom in which 70% or more of the students returned their forms. Some teachers offered incentives of their own, such as extended lunch periods or extra credit points. See Esbensen, Miller, Taylor, He, and Freng (1999) for a discussion of the effects of attrition on the sample.

(Bjerregaard, 2002; Decker & Kempf-Leonard, 1991; Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001; Klein, 1995; Maxson & Klein, 1990; Winfree, Fuller, Vigil, & Mays, 1992). Recent work by Esbensen and his colleagues (Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001) compared attitudes and behaviors of nongang and gang youths using several increasingly restrictive definitions of gang status. While attitudes and behaviors became more antisocial as the gang definition moved from least restrictive (self-definition only) to most restrictive (a core member of an organized, delinquent gang), the largest differences were found between those who ever claimed gang status and those who never did. Based on these findings and to maximize our gang member sample, we chose a single item ("are you now a gang member?") to identify gang members, recognizing that by using this method, we may conservatively underestimate the level of victimization in the gang member sample.

Reasons for Joining the Gang

Respondents were presented a list of reasons commonly given by gang members for joining their gangs. Youths were asked to indicate, by "selecting all that apply," whether they had joined their gangs for fun, for protection, for money, because a friend was in the gang, because a sibling was in the gang, to get respect, to fit in better, or because they were forced to join. They were also given the opportunity, in an open-ended response, to provide any additional reasons for joining (these responses were few and are not presented here).

Violent Victimization

Violent victimization was measured by asking youths to report the number of times during the previous 6 months (previous 12 months in the Year 1 survey) they had been hit by someone trying to hurt them (simple assault), had someone use a weapon or force to get money or things from them (robbery), and been attacked by someone with a weapon or by someone trying to seriously hurt or kill them (aggravated assault).

Analyses were conducted using each of the individual victimization items and a composite violent victimization index comprised of the three violent victimization experiences.⁶ The skewness of self-reported frequency data presents analysis problems, but various approaches can be used to remedy this problem, including transforming the data using the natural log,

⁶ Results from the composite measure analyses are reported in this paper; for individual item analyses, similar results were obtained.

truncating at the 90th percentile (Nagin & Smith, 1990), or truncating the high-frequency responses according to some conceptual reasoning. We chose to truncate scores on individual victimization items and the composite measure at 12. Our premise is that experiencing these types of victimization numerous times in a 6- or 12-month period constitutes high-frequency victimization. In support of this, frequency data indicated that few respondents experienced more than 12 of each type of victimization during the designated period. By truncating at 12, we are able to examine these high-frequency victimization experiences without sacrificing the detail of open-ended self-report techniques.

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Sample Descriptions

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the cross-sectional and the longitudinal study samples. In both, males made up a larger proportion of the gang than nongang youths, but females were still a fairly significant proportion of gang members in both samples (38% of the cross-sectional and 35% of the longitudinal samples). Gang members in both samples were racially diverse, with whites comprising one-quarter of the cross-sectional gang member sample and almost one-third of the longitudinal gang member sample.

Table 1. Characteristics of Samples

	Cross-sectional Sample		Longitudinal Sample*	
	Gang N=522	Nongang N=5205	Gang N=51	Nongang N=1666
Sex ^a				
Female	38%	54%	35%	53%
Male	62%	46%	65%	47%
Mean Age ^a	14.11	13.79	12.50	12.12
(SD)	(.90)	(.66)	(.58)	(.61)
Race/Ethnicity ^a				
White	24%	42%	31%	56%
African American	31%	26%	20%	14%
Hispanic	25%	18%	31%	17%
Other	19%	14%	18%	14%
Family ^a				
Two-parent	47%	64%	45%	66%
One-parent	41%	30%	49%	29%
Other	13%	6%	6%	6%

*Sample description for Time 1 is presented. Sample characteristics varied slightly across the 5 study years due to attrition; likewise, gang member characteristics also varied due to the changing composition of membership across the study period.

^a $p < .05$, comparison between gang and nongang youths in both samples

The average age of students (8th-grade) in the cross-sectional sample was almost 14, while the longitudinal sample averaged 12 years old during the first survey collection period (7th-grade in five sites, 6th-grade in the sixth) and 16 years old during the final survey. In both samples, gang members were slightly older than nongang youths, and a greater proportion of gang than nongang youths reported living in single-parent homes.

Cross-sectional Sample Results

Prevalence rates lay the groundwork for the subsequent longitudinal analyses. We first examined a cross-section of 8th-grade youths residing in 11 U.S. cities. Using t-test of means comparisons of victimization rates for gang and nongang youths, our findings reveal that gang members reported more extensive victimization experiences than nongang youths for measures of assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and total victimization. The magnitude of these differences, however, varies substantially with the type of victimization examined. For example, while a majority of all youths reported having experienced some type of victimization in their lives (i.e., ever-prevalence), only 9% and 7% of nongang members reported ever having been the victim of aggravated assault and robbery, respectively (see Figure 1). In comparison, 43% of gang members reported having been the victim of aggravated assault and 25% reported having been the victim of robbery. Smaller differences were found between the two groups in terms of simple assault (48% of nongang members, 66% of gang members) and total violent victimization (51% of nongang members, 75% of gang members).

These differences held when victimization was measured in terms of annual prevalence and annual frequency as well. As shown in Figure 2, a much lower proportion of nongang than gang youths, for example, reported having been victimized in the past year by assault (43% compared to 60%, respectively), robbery (7% vs. 21%), and aggravated assault (8% compared to 38%).

While these descriptive data conclusively point to differences in victimization between gang and nongang youths, cross-sectional data are inadequate for exploring the temporal relationships between victimization and gang membership. Does victimization, for example, push a youth into gang membership (e.g., for protection)? Does gang membership expose a youth to greater risk for victimization? Or does some combination of these two occur? To answer these questions, we turn now to the longitudinal data that allow for correct temporal ordering in the analyses.

Figure 1. Self-Reported Violent Victimization (Ever-Prevalence) by Gang Membership (Cross-sectional Data Sample)

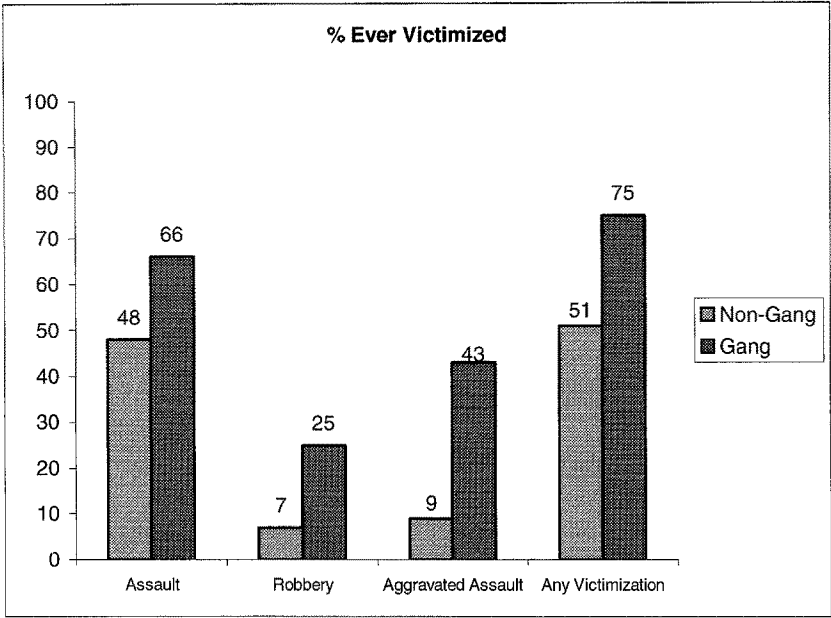
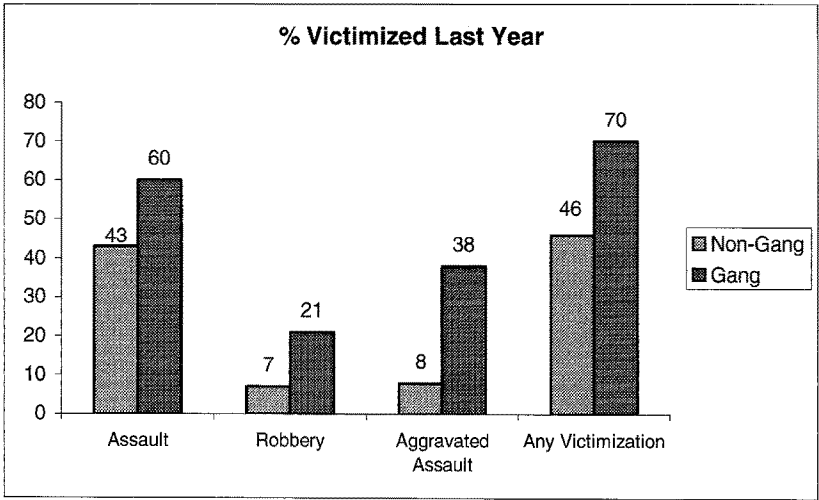


Figure 2. Self-Reported Violent Victimization (Annual Prevalence) by Gang Membership (Cross-sectional Data Sample)



Longitudinal Sample Results

Using data from the longitudinal study, we compare victimization rates of gang and nongang youths over time to test the selection, social facilitation, and enhancement models that have been applied to the gang membership-delinquency relationship. We then explore whether gang members' reasons for joining their gangs are related to their levels of victimization.

Length of gang membership is an important factor in the feasibility of these analyses; in a 5-year study of adolescents aged 12 to 17, for example, it would not be possible to examine how gang membership influences youths' victimization or how victimization may be related to gang joining if adolescent gang members tend to remain members throughout a majority or all of their teen years. Consistent with the findings of other contemporary gang researchers using similar adolescent samples (e.g., Thornberry et al., 2003), the majority of gang members (69%) in our sample reported being gang affiliated for one year only (results not shown in table format).⁷ The next most consistent pattern was gang membership for two consecutive years (22%). Very few youths (7%) were gang members for more than two consecutive years, and only one reported membership in all five years of the study.

These findings indicate that our data allow our next sets of analyses, in which we examine the relationship between gang membership and violent victimization by comparing victimization rates of gang and nongang youths across the study period. In each of the five study years, the comparison is between youths who were gang members in the current year and those who never were during the study's five years; victimization rates in the years preceding and following the year of gang membership are reported.

Victimization of Gang and Nongang Youths

We used t-test of means comparisons to explore differences between gang and nongang youths' levels of violent victimization in each of five years (see Table 2). Each row of Table 2 represents a comparison between current gang members and nongang youths. In the entire first row of Table 2 (Year 1), the comparison is between youths who were gang members in Year 1 and youths who were not (in that or any subsequent year). Each cell across that

⁷ Although the pattern held for the whole sample, the percentages reported here are based on analysis of the "complete data" sample, those youths who had completed a questionnaire in each of the five study years ($n = 965$). Of these, 59 reported membership at some time during the 5-year period.

row is the comparison of Year 1 gang members' to Year 1 nongang members' victimization rates in each study year. Thus, the cell representing row "Year 1" and column "Year 5" compares the victimization rates in Year 5 (1999) of youths who reported current gang membership or nongang membership in Year 1 (1995). Row two of the table represents the yearly victimization rates of youths who were gang members in Year 2 compared to youths who were not in Year 2 (or any other year), and so on. The means reported on the diagonal of the table represent the comparison of current gang members to nongang members during the year of gang membership. Means in cells to the left and right of the diagonal are victimization rates in the year(s) before and after gang membership.

Table 2. Violent Victimization Rates of Gang and Nongang Youths (*n* in parentheses)

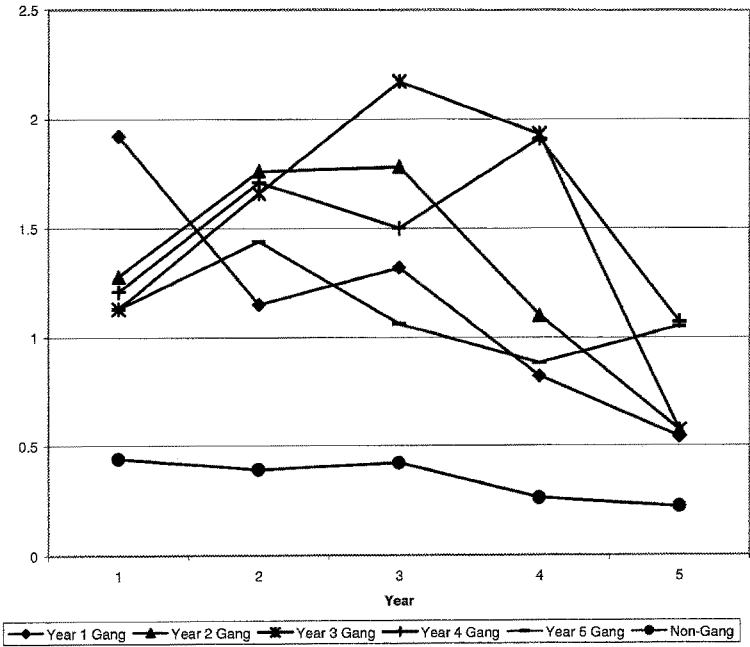
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Year 1	Gang	1.92* (44)	1.15* (34)	1.32* (29)	.82* (29)	.54* (27)
	Nongang ^a	.44 (760)	.39 (790)	.42 (798)	.26 (804)	.22 (801)
Year 2	Gang	1.28* (56)	1.76* (65)	1.78* (46)	1.10* (39)	.57* (36)
	Nongang	.44 (760)	.39 (790)	.42 (798)	.26 (804)	.22 (801)
Year 3	Gang	1.13* (37)	1.66* (42)	2.17* (45)	1.93* (32)	.57* (28)
	Nongang	.44 (760)	.39 (790)	.42 (798)	.26 (804)	.22 (801)
Year 4	Gang	1.21* (21)	1.71* (21)	1.50* (22)	1.91* (26)	1.07* (15)
	Nongang	.44 (760)	.39 (790)	.42 (798)	.26 (804)	.22 (801)
Year 5	Gang	1.13* (15)	1.44* (16)	1.06* (16)	.88* (14)	1.05* (20)
	Nongang	.44 (760)	.39 (790)	.42 (798)	.26 (804)	.22 (801)

* $p < .05$

^a Nongang youths are those who never reported gang membership during the study period.

For youths who were gang members in Year 1, violent victimization rates were significantly higher than those for nongang youths in that year and in each of the following years. Youths who were gang members in Year 2 also had significantly higher victimization rates than nongang youths in the year prior to joining their gang, in the year of gang membership, and in the 3 years following gang membership. This same pattern is present for youths who were gang members in Years 3, 4, and 5: Gang members were victims of violence at a higher rate than were youths who were never gang affiliated in each of the years preceding and in the year(s) following gang membership, and they tended to experience the most victimization in the year of membership. Figure 3 clearly depicts these relationships over the five study years.

Figure 3. Violent Victimization Rates of Gang and Non-gang Youths (Longitudinal Data Sample)



Consistent with prior findings regarding delinquent behavior, this group of findings provides evidence for an enhancement effect of gang membership on victimization. Rates of violent victimization are higher for gang members than for nongang youths both before and after their gang membership, and, as with offending patterns found in other research, it is (with the exception of Year 5 gang members) during the period of gang membership that victimization rates are at their peak (for Year 2 gang members, victimization levels in Years 2 and 3 are nearly identical).

Given the ties between delinquency and victimization and the finding of an enhancement effect of gang membership on offending, these results were expected. But what about the notion of protection some youths articulate as a reason for joining their gangs? Are there differences among gang youths in levels of victimization and, if so, are these tied to youths' reasons for joining gangs? We address these questions in the next section.

Victimization by Reasons for Joining Gangs

Gang members often purport to have joined their gangs for protection from various types of personal victimization. Here we explore the possibility that those who join "for protection" have higher rates of victimization before joining and lower rates once actually in their gangs compared to those who report joining for

other reasons. If this hypothesis is correct, youths who joined their gangs for protection should have experienced high rates of victimization prior to gang membership, propelling them into gangs; if gangs indeed offer the protection these youths seek, then these youths' rates of victimization should drop once they join their gangs.

A descriptive account of reasons gang members in this sample gave for joining is presented in Table 3. Reasons offered appear fairly stable over time, with an interesting exception in Year 5, when only 28% reported joining their gangs for protection. These percentages were much higher in all previous waves; in fact, approximately half of all gang members in Years 1 through 4 cited protection as a reason they had joined their gangs.

Table 3. Reasons for Joining Gang (Percent of Gang Members)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Protection	47%	44%	57%	43%	28%
Forced	9	11	17	7	0
Fun	42	44	50	50	56
Friend in	51	52	62	43	33
Brother/sister in	19	29	31	36	28
Respect	51	37	45	39	39
Money	23	41	57	43	22
Fit in	26	35	36	29	22
N =	43	63	42	28	18

To assess the extent to which reasons for gang joining were related to victimization rates, we compared gang members who reported joining for protection to those who did not. Our results indicate that it appears not to be the case that youths who join for protection have higher victimization rates prior to gang joining than youths who do not join for this reason, nor are their victimization rates lower once in the gang compared to youths who join for other reasons (see Table 4).

As shown in Table 4, our t-test of means comparisons revealed no stable pattern of differences between these two groups of gang members. Only one significant difference (at $p < .10$) between the groups was found on either the individual victimization items (results not shown) or on the composite violent victimization measure: Of youths who reported gang membership in Year 3, significant differences in victimization between those who joined for protection and those who did not were found for Year 1.⁸

⁸ In another analysis, gang members who had ever reported joining their gangs for protection across the five study years were compared to gang youths who never reported protection as a reason for gang joining. Again, only one significant

Table 4. Gang Members' Violent Victimization Rates by Joining for Protection (*n* in parentheses)^a

		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Year 1	Yes	2.25 (12)	1.38 (13)	1.08 (13)	1.03 (13)	.64 (14)
	No	1.07 (15)	1.11 (15)	.77 (16)	.53 (17)	.98 (15)
Year 2	Yes	1.71 (17)	1.63 (17)	1.00 (17)	.57 (18)	.39 (18)
	No	1.33 (21)	1.07 (25)	.91 (22)	1.06 (23)	.74 (23)
Year 3	Yes	1.33 (16)*	2.00 (15)	1.50 (16)	1.56 (15)	.71 (15)
	No	.11 (6)	.95 (7)	1.67 (7)	.56 (6)	.81 (7)
Year 4	Yes	1.33 (5)	1.67 (4)	1.28 (6)	.72 (6)	1.47 (5)
	No	.61 (6)	1.50 (8)	2.00 (9)	2.05 (7)	1.04 (9)
Year 5	Yes	.67 (3)	.89 (3)	.78 (3)	.33 (3)	.89 (3)
	No	.33 (7)	.48 (7)	.29 (8)	.67 (9)	.59 (9)

* $p < .10$ ^a Given low *ns*, these results should be considered exploratory in nature.*Delinquency, Gang Membership, and Victimization*

Given the empirically supported relationship between delinquency involvement and victimization experiences, it is possible that the relationships we have reported here between gang membership and victimization are conditioned by delinquency involvement.⁹ That is, it may be the greater involvement of gang than nongang youths in delinquency, rather than gang member status itself, that is the reason for their greater levels of victimization. We addressed this possibility in two ways: first, we conducted a series of OLS regression analyses, regressing violent victimization on gang membership, controlling for a composite measure of violent delinquency (the same items that appear in the violent victimization index). Next, we grouped our sample into four categories to compare levels of victimization among them. We created the groups using current gang membership (no, yes) and past 6-months' violent delinquency (no, yes); the resultant groups were (1) gang-violent, (2) gang-nonviolent, (3) nongang-violent, and (4) nongang-nonviolent. Similar to Battin and her colleagues' (1998) work on delinquency rates among groups of youth, we then examined violent victimization rates in each year for these four groups using one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Bonferroni post-hoc tests were conducted to determine whether significant differences in victimization were present between specific pairs of groups.

difference was found, and this was in Year 3 in which youths who had joined for protection had higher rates of victimization than other gang members (results not shown in table format).

⁹ We thank the anonymous reviewer who queried us about this possibility.

Regression analyses indicated that within each year of gang membership, gang member status had an independent main effect on violent victimization, and these effects held when controlling for youths' involvement in violent delinquent behavior (results not reported in table form). Standardized coefficients revealed that delinquency was the more powerful predictor in each model (except in Year 3), but gang membership remained a significant contributor to the explained variance in violent victimization. In Year 3 (the year in which most of the sample had transitioned from middle to high school), gang membership was the greater influence on victimization.

For the second set of analyses, victimization in each of the five years was examined for each year's current gang member-violence grouping. Table 5 presents victimization means by group for each year and post-hoc significance tests results. In each study year, the pattern of victimization across the groups is the same. Gang members who were also violent offenders experienced the highest levels of violent victimization; next were nongang youths who were violent, followed by gang members who were not violent, and, finally, by nongang, nonviolent youths. In the first two years, statistically significant differences were found between all pairs except between gang-nonviolent and nongang-violent. In Years 3 and 4, differences were significant between all pairs except gang-nonviolent/nongang-violent and gang-nonviolent/nongang-nonviolent.¹⁰ It appears, thus, that both violence and gang membership are important contributors to youths' victimization, but it is the combination of the two that is most dangerous.

Table 5. Victimization by Gang Membership and Violent Delinquency

	Year 1 ^{a,b,c,e,f}	Year 2 ^{a,b,c,e,f}	Year 3 ^{a,b,c,f}	Year 4 ^{a,b,c,f}	Year 5 ^{d,f}
Gang-violent	2.67 (3.55) n=17	2.48 (2.70) n=31	2.85 (3.30) n=25	2.97 (3.20) n=13	2.20 (2.22) n=5
Nongang-violent	1.44 (1.51) n=33	1.37 (1.72) n=52	1.09 (1.46) n=44	1.28 (1.80) n=41	1.70 (1.99) n=23
Gang-nonviolent	1.51 (1.86) n=25	.96 (1.13) n=33	.83 (1.47) n=18	.39 (.49) n=11	.67 (1.15) n=15
Nongang-nonviolent	.41 (.84) n=803	.33 (.74) n=844	.37 (.93) n=862	.24 (.69) n=883	.21 (.63) n=912

^a $p < .05$, comparison between gang-violent and gang-nonviolent

^b $p < .05$, comparison between gang-violent and nongang-violent

^c $p < .05$, comparison between gang-violent and nongang-nonviolent

^d $p < .05$, comparison between gang-nonviolent and nongang-violent

^e $p < .05$, comparison between gang-nonviolent and nongang-nonviolent

^f $p < .05$, comparison between nongang-violent and nongang-nonviolent

¹⁰ Means are reported for all groups in Year 5, but because there were only five gang-violent youths, significance tests are not reported for comparisons with this group.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our data produced similar results about youth gang membership stability—or rather, the lack thereof—as reported in two other longitudinal studies of adolescents, the Denver Youth Survey (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993) and the Rochester Youth Development Study (Thornberry et al., 1993): The majority of gang members in our sample reported membership for only one year. Because youths move in and out of gangs quickly, we are able to make comparisons of victimization rates of gang to nongang youths before, during, and after gang membership. Our 5-year panel data thus allow a test of whether a selection, social facilitation, or enhancement model best fits the relationship between the period of youth gang membership and youths' experiences of violent victimization (simple assault, aggravated assault, and robbery).

We found that an enhancement model best fits the pattern of the relationship between violent victimization and gang membership for youths aged 12 to 16. Gang members had higher levels of victimization than nongang youths prior to their gang involvement, their level of victimization generally was greatest during their gang membership, and, while victimization decreased after youths left the gang, their levels of victimization remained significantly higher than those of nongang youths (differences between gang and nongang youths' victimization rates were statistically significant in all years).

We were also interested in determining whether gang members who joined their gangs for protection (approximately half of all gang members in each year but Year 5) actually received that protection, as evidenced by lower rates of victimization after joining the gang. Victimization rates across the study years (including before, during, and after gang membership) were similar among gang members regardless of their reasons for gang joining. Thus joining for protection does not appear to be linked to higher rates of violent victimization prior to joining for youths who cite protection as a reason compared to other gang youths, nor does joining for protection offer any clear reduction in subsequent violent victimization.

Prior work in this area has focused on the relationship between homicide victimization and gang affiliation and/or has been based on qualitative research. The research reported here provides an additional dimension to this body of knowledge, by replicating earlier work with quantitative analyses and by expanding the population to which these findings hold through the use of a general sample of youths in public schools. We recognize

the limitations that attrition poses in our sample and accordingly offer our findings as exploratory but not without merit.

Our findings on gang membership's relationship to victimization provide strong evidence that prevention efforts are necessary to lessen youths' experiences as victims (and as perpetrators) of violence. General prevention programs, offered prior to middle school, may heighten adolescents' awareness of the increased victimization risks they would face as gang members. Equally important, given the elevated rates of victimization among youths who join gangs compared to those who do not, is the need to reduce violence against youths and to intervene promptly with youths who have been victimized to provide alternatives to gang joining.

In conjunction with those reported by qualitative researchers, the findings reported here emphasize the need to dispel the myth that gangs provide a safe haven. Gangs do not provide protection for their members. In fact, youths who join gangs experience greater violent victimization while in their gangs than they do either before they join or after they leave. Not only does this have implications for prevention of youth gang involvement, as stated above, but it also highlights important junctures for assisting youths to leave gangs. Decker and Lauritsen (1996, p. 114) note that the experience of violence was cited by current and ex-gang members in St. Louis as the top reason for gang members leaving the gang. These authors suggest, then, that a critical intervention point is when gang members themselves or their friends or family members have just been victimized by gang-related violence (for example, contacting youths in hospital emergency rooms or police stations). If adolescents are most likely to be victimized by violence during gang membership, it is worthwhile to confront them with this reality at the time of their victimization and to provide them with an avenue by which to leave their gangs. Additionally, our finding that gang members' victimization rates remain elevated after they leave the gang suggests that we should devote attention to assisting ex-gang members in making safe choices about their behaviors and in avoiding what might be considered "residual victimization" connected to their prior gang member status.

Finally, the connection between victimization and delinquency cannot be ignored. The extant literature has established that delinquents and victims are often one and the same. We too find violent delinquency to be associated with violent victimization (for both nongang and gang youths); adding gang membership to the equation, however, exacerbates the situation: Gang members who engage in violent offending experience higher levels of violent

victimization than all other youths, even nongang youths who engage in violence. This link suggests that general delinquency prevention and intervention efforts can also serve to reduce both violent victimization and youth gang membership.

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