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Young People and Gangs in New Zealand

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SUMMARY

- ▶ There have been youth gangs in New Zealand since the mid 1800s.
- ▶ Common features of youth gangs include a loose structure, involvement in crime, and identification as a gang.
- ▶ Youth gang membership is influenced by economic, community, cultural, family, peer, and school factors.
- ▶ Historically, suppression and intervention strategies have been used to combat New Zealand gang problems.
- ▶ The Wanganui District Council (Prohibition of Gang Insignia) Bill, Gangs and Organised Crime Bill, and the Children, Young Persons and their Families (Youth Court Jurisdictions and Orders) Amendment Bill could impact on young people involved in criminal gangs.

Introduction

This paper provides information on young people in gangs in New Zealand. It looks at the context of youth gangs by describing New Zealand's youth population, before outlining the general history of gangs. The development of youth gangs, their characteristics and links with crime are then examined. Youth gangs in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States are briefly discussed to provide an international perspective. Finally, responses to youth gangs and comments on their effectiveness are outlined.

Young people in New Zealand

This paper defines young people as those aged between 10 and 23. The same criterion is used in the Ministry of Social Development report *Youth gangs in Counties Manukau*.¹ As of 30 June

¹ Ministry of Social Development, *Youth gangs in Counties Manukau*, February 2008. Available from <http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/youth-gangs-counties-manukau/youth-gangs-report-full.doc> accessed 31 March 2009, p.55.

2008, New Zealand's estimated resident population aged 10 to 23 numbered 863,210 (20 percent of the total population). The New Zealand Maori resident population was comparatively young with 179,870 Maori aged 10 to 23 (28 percent of the total Maori population). The median age of the total resident population was 36 years compared with 23 for Maori, and according to the 2006 census, 21 for the Pacific population.²

Gangs in New Zealand

There have been youth gangs in New Zealand since the colonial period. In 1842 and 1843 there was publicity over a group of male juveniles transported from Parkhurst Prison in England committing crimes in Auckland, and in 1892 further concern expressed over 'larrikinism' and delinquency in that city.³ Later concern arose in the 1950s with youth groups called 'widgies' and 'bodgies' and 'milk bar cowboys'. In 1954 the Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents reported that problems with youth stemmed largely from a decline of traditional moral values and changing patterns of sexual practice.⁴ By the end of the 1950s, there were 41 reported gangs in Auckland and 17 reported gangs in Wellington. The Mongrel Mob, now the largest gang in New Zealand, was established informally under the name 'The Mongrels' around 1956.⁵

The New Zealand Chapter of Hell's Angels emerged in 1961 to become the first outside of California and first patched and fully organised motorcycle gang in New Zealand. In 1966 the gang that would later become Highway 61 was formed, and in 1967 the Head Hunters gang started.⁶ During the 1960s and into the 1970s youth were involved with the developing and established adult gangs such as the Mongrel Mob, Black Power (formed around 1970), and the Hell's Angels.⁷

In the early 1970s, the chairman of Auckland's District Maori Council estimated gang membership at 2,000.⁸ Violence between gangs during the early 1970s was widely reported and became a voting issue in the 1972 general election. A riot in the Northland town of Moerewa in August 1979 involved 40 or 50 members of the Storm Troopers, a gang active since the late 1960s. Police officers were injured, a Police van set alight, and a fire engine destroyed. Eventually 25 members were convicted on charges including causing grievous bodily harm and criminal damage.⁹

In 1981 a government committee on gangs reported a Police estimate that there were at least 80 different gangs or gang chapters in New Zealand with approximately 2,300 members. By this time three types of gangs were identified: outlaw motorcycle gangs; Maori and Polynesian

² Statistics New Zealand, 'Resident Population Estimates'. Available from <http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/2033CD39-36AD-4C97-9200-38FOAFED34F90/NatPopEstAt130Jun.xls>; 'Total Maori Estimated Resident Population of New Zealand'. Available from <http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/2F332199-1878-4C4B-A17F-F87E49DCF40A0/MaoriPopEstAt130Jun.xls>; and 'QuickStats About Pacific Peoples', 29 May 2008. Available from <http://www.stats.govt.nz/census/2006-census-data/quickstats-about-pacific-peoples/quickstats-about-pacific-peoples.htm>. All data accessed 31 March 2009.

³ Glennis Dennehy and Greg Newbold, *The Girls in the Gang*. Reed Publishing (NZ) Ltd, Auckland, 2001, p.158; and Erin J. Eggleston, 'New Zealand Youth Gangs: Key Findings and Recommendations from an Urban Ethnography', *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, Issue 14, July 2000. Available from <http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/journals-and-magazines/social-policy-journal/spj14/14-nz-youth-gangs.doc> accessed 31 March 2009, p.2.

⁴ Ministry of Social Development, p.39.

⁵ Greg Newbold, *Crime in New Zealand*, Dunmore Press Ltd, Palmerston North, 2000, p.204; and Dennehy and Newbold, p.161.

⁶ Dennehy and Newbold, pp.162 and 165-166.

⁷ Eggleston, p.2.

⁸ Ministry of Social Development, p.14; and Dennehy and Newbold, pp.167 and 169-170.

⁹ Dennehy and Newbold, pp.172-173.

ethnic gangs; and white ethnic gangs. In 1989 the Police estimated there were 5,356 gang members and associates.¹⁰

In the 1980s gangs became increasingly involved in making money. Gangs used government employment incentive schemes until these ceased in 1987, and illegal drug dealing increased.¹¹ Gangs have had interests in, or ownership of, businesses such as bars and nightclubs since at least the mid 1980s, and much conflict between gangs has involved disputes over drug-dealing territory.¹²

Pakeha street gangs with interests in neo-fascism and white power tendencies grew stronger, particularly in Christchurch, during the 1990s. Gang involvement in crime also became deeper and more sophisticated. Gangs moved toward cooperation and were involved in drug importation, cultivation, manufacture, and selling. High-profile crimes continued, such as the 1996 killing by Black Power members of Christopher Crean who was due to testify against them on serious assault charges.¹³

In the late 1990s a new style of youth gang emerged based on modern American street gangs and influenced by hip-hop culture. These spread particularly in Maori- and Polynesian-dominated lower socio-economic areas. These gangs tended to be transient and disorganised, with loose membership and an undefined structure. Their activities, which included criminal behaviour, were motivated by the pursuit of excitement and fun. Asian youth gangs also grew with the influx of Asian migrants since the 1980s.¹⁴ By 1998 the Police estimated around 45 different gangs with approximately 5,000 members and 15,000 associates in New Zealand.¹⁵

The Mongrel Mob, Black Power and Nomad Gangs (established as a breakaway gang from Black Power in 1977) are currently the most prominent gangs in New Zealand. According to the Police Criminal Investigation Branch, their activities have included serious violence, selling drugs, and possessing weapons. Membership is dominated by Pacific Island and Maori people.¹⁶ Although the Mongrel Mob is not exclusively Maori, a 1993 survey of 40 members in the top half of the North Island found that all self-identified as Maori with 90 percent of them 26 years of age or older.¹⁷ Individuals from other ethnic groups are members of the 'outlaw motorcycle gangs' which are frequently involved in making and selling illegal drugs, violent crime and vice.¹⁸

Recorded apprehensions where the offender was recorded as gang affiliated at the time of offence declined from 4,711 in the 2002/03 fiscal year to 3,706 in 2004/05 but then increased to 6,392 in 2005/06.¹⁹ The Department of Corrections' Census of Prison Inmates and Home Detainees 2003 found that 62 percent of sentenced gang members were imprisoned for

¹⁰ Newbold, pp.205-206.

¹¹ Ibid., pp.205-206; and Dennehy and Newbold, pp.178-181.

¹² Dennehy and Newbold, pp.186-188.

¹³ Ibid., pp.185 and 187-188.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.189; and Ministry of Social Development, p.15.

¹⁵ Newbold, p.209.

¹⁶ New Zealand Police, Criminal Investigation Branch, 'Organised Crime'. Available from http://www.police.govt.nz/service/cib/organised_crime.html accessed 31 March 2009; and 'Nomads into violence, extortion, police officer says', *Evening Post*, 30 July 1998, p.3.

¹⁷ Kayleen M. Hazlehurst and Cameron Hazlehurst (editors), *Gangs and Youth Subcultures: International Explorations*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998, pp.256 and 265.

¹⁸ New Zealand Police.

¹⁹ This is the number of apprehensions, not the number of offences or offenders. One offender may be apprehended for multiple offences, or multiple offenders may be apprehended for one offence. New Zealand Parliament, Question for Written Answer 623, 15 February 2007.

violence or sexual violence. This was slightly higher than for those without gang connections (58 percent).²⁰

As at 16 May 2007 a total of 1,471 prisoners were identified as actively affiliated with gangs. The largest numbers were affiliated with the Mongrel Mob (523) and were Black Power (426).²¹ This compares to a total prison population at 30 June 2007 of 8,083.²² In June 2008 the Minister of Police Hon Annette King said Police estimated the total number of patched gang members and associates was between 3,000 and 3,500.²³ Police Association President Greg O'Connor thought the figure was higher – probably over 3,500.²⁴

Youth gangs

The Ministry of Social Development Counties Manukau Project has defined youth gangs as

A group of youths, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a loose structure, a common identifier (colours, a name, hand signals, etc), whose activities are not primarily criminal but involve (mostly) petty crimes, and who see themselves as a gang and are identified as such by others in the community.²⁵

Some regional estimates regarding youth gang numbers are available but precise figures, as with those for adult gangs, are difficult to ascertain. Many exist for only short periods and members often do not wear easily recognised patches. In November 2005 there were 53 youth gangs with 245 members estimated in Mangere, Otahuhu and Papatoetoe.²⁶ In January 2006, Police intelligence estimated 73 youth gangs with approximately 600 members in Counties Manukau.²⁷ The following year an estimated 2,000 street gang members were in Auckland – 1,000 in South Auckland, 700 in Auckland City, and 300 in North Shore and Waitakere. In February 2009 concern was expressed over an estimated 13 to 15 youth gangs in a population of 10,300 residents in Flaxmere, Hastings.²⁸

Reasons for youth gangs

The Ministry of Social Development has identified factors influencing youth gang membership and youth delinquency. These include

Economic, community, cultural, and family

Youth gangs and youth delinquency appear to be related to economic deprivation with gangs more likely to grow in depressed or disorganised communities lacking a sense of pride. In such communities the parents' engagement with their children can be limited by their long work hours and financial pressures. Parental unemployment might also be a factor. Gangs can provide a

²⁰ Department of Corrections, *Census of Prison Inmates and Home Detainees 2003*, 2003. Available from <http://www.corrections.govt.nz/research/census-of-prison-inmates-and-home-detainees/census-of-prison-inmates-and-home-detainees-2003/introduction.html> accessed 31 March 2009.

²¹ Question for Written Answer 7206, 30 April 2007.

²² Department of Corrections, *Annual Report 1 July 2006-30 June 2007*, 2007. Available from http://www.corrections.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/176046/ar2007-complete.pdf accessed 31 March 2009, p.29.

²³ New Zealand Parliament, Question for Oral Answer 9, 19 June 2008.

²⁴ 'Working out gang numbers not an exact science', *New Zealand Herald*, 30 June 2008, p.2.

²⁵ Ministry of Social Development, p.4.

²⁶ New Zealand Police; 'Youth gangs take up weapons', *Dominion*, 20 February 2009, p.3; and Ministry of Social Development, p.24.

²⁷ Ministry of Social Development, p.24.

²⁸ 'Wanna-be' gang killed teen', *New Zealand Herald*, 11 September 2007, p.1; and 'Youth gangs take up weapons'.

source of financial and material gain. Pacific youth can be negatively affected by the loss of village support by first- and second-generation immigrants. Likewise, Maori parenting practices have been influenced by the loss of wider whanau networks and supportive structures.²⁹

In addition, the influence of American culture has been linked to gang membership. Since the late 1970s youth have been increasingly influenced by American movies, television programmes, and music. For instance, the gang movie 'Colors' (1988) inspired some youth to emulate the gang life portrayed.³⁰

Peers

Gangs often provide a proxy family unit, giving support and a social focal point.³¹ A study by the Department of Corrections published in 2000 found this factor to be particularly important. According to the study, overriding most gang activity seemed to be a desire for affiliation and belonging.³² Gangs can also provide a sense of status, recognition, alleviate boredom with excitement associated with crime, and provide protection. Peer pressure combined with recruitment by adult gangs and the desire to associate with such gangs, further influence membership in youth gangs.³³

Schools

Extended time outside the formal education system appears to be strongly related to engaging in criminal activity.³⁴

Youth gang characteristics

The Police refer to 'local street gangs' that typically consist of urban youth. Much of the trouble in which they become involved imitates what they know of gangs in American cities. This can include knowledge of serious crimes such as robbery and aggravated burglary. Many gangs rely on leaders who either decide to change their lifestyles or are imprisoned, ending the existence of the gang. Tagging is often used to express the presence of certain individuals or gangs in a neighbourhood.³⁵ According to the Police, youth gangs differ from other gangs in that they are more racially diverse and less well-organised.³⁶

The Ministry of Social Development Counties Manukau Project recognises four types of youth gang

1. **Wannabes** who are not actually gang members, although they have a similar dress code and shared signs. There may be some petty crime associated with adolescent crime but with less formality and group organisation than a gang.
2. **Territorial Gangs** who are slightly more organised than wannabes. They are characterised by territorial boundaries, and commit opportunistic crime.
3. **Unaffiliated Criminal Youth Gangs** whose members are not under an adult gang and are criminally active for their own benefit only.

²⁹ Ministry of Social Development, pp.28-31.

³⁰ Eggleston, p.2.

³¹ Ministry of Social Development, p.32.

³² Eggleston, p.8.

³³ Ministry of Social Development, pp.32-34.

³⁴ Ibid., pp.34-35.

³⁵ New Zealand Police.

³⁶ 'The 'gangsta gangs', *Press*, 29 March 2008, p.2.

4. **Affiliated Criminal Youth Gangs** which have relationships to an adult gang and are organised around criminal intent. Members often act on behalf of adult gangs.³⁷

Youth gang membership has been identified as primarily male-centred but the Counties Manukau Project noted two all-female youth gangs with a reputation for extreme violence and carrying weapons. The issue of youth gang membership based on ethnicity is unclear with gangs of mixed ethnicity identified and the project finding little evidence of violence between ethnic groups. In February 2009 Inspector Dean Clifford said that Flaxmere gangs were divided ethnically into two main groups: the largely Maori 'Bloods' and mainly Pacific Island 'Crips'.³⁸

Youth gangs and crime

All the youth gang classifications in the Counties Manukau Project have a criminal component, although for 'wannabes' this may be at the level of petty crime. Youth gang members interviewed by the Department of Corrections said 'trouble' – illegal activity such as car theft and aggravated robbery – was part of the gang scene and provided a way to have fun, and to obtain money, commodities and status. Membership was also about 'being bad', and using alcohol and drugs.³⁹

The 2003 Department of Corrections census found that 25.3 percent of sentenced inmates were between the ages of 14 and 24 years. The total number of those aged 10 to 24 convicted of charges involving violent offences resulting in a custodial sentence was 2,006 in 2006.⁴⁰ According to the Police in 2008, youth were over-represented in total apprehension statistics (youth represented 4.6 percent of the population but 15 percent of total apprehensions).⁴¹

Under current New Zealand law a child aged 10 to 13 can not be prosecuted for any crime other than murder or manslaughter. Other offending by children may be dealt with by the Police through a warning or diversionary action. More serious offending can result in a Family Group Conference (FGC) and may be referred to the Family Court. Between the ages of 14 and 16 an apprehended young person can be warned by Police, referred to the Police Youth Aid division for alternative action (diversion), referred for a youth justice FGC to decide whether a charge should be laid, or arrested and charged in the Youth Court. For very serious offences the young person may be transferred to the adult court system. Where a young person is charged with murder or manslaughter they are automatically dealt with in the High Court. Alleged offenders aged 17 years and over are dealt with in the adult court system.⁴²

In October 2007 Greg O'Connor said Los Angeles-style gangs of Polynesian youths are the main threat to public safety, with young people most likely to be victims. However, criminologist Greg Newbold believes such gangs are more threatening within their own neighbourhoods than to New Zealanders in general.⁴³ It was reported in January 2008 that street gang and youth violence had led to 11 killings in Auckland since October 2005, and the Police in 2008 said youth gangs were a "significant" issue in South Auckland/Counties Manukau.⁴⁴ In February

³⁷ Ministry of Social Development, p.20.

³⁸ Eggleston, p.10; Ministry of Social Development, p.22; and 'Youth gangs take up weapons'.

³⁹ Eggleston, pp.10-11.

⁴⁰ Department of Corrections; and Question for Written Answer 17956, 26 October 2007.

⁴¹ New Zealand Police, *Briefing to the Incoming Minister 2008*, 2008. Available from http://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/all/files/Police_BIM.pdf accessed 31 March 2009, p.2.

⁴² Ministry of Justice, Youth Justice – How the System Works. Available from <http://courts.govt.nz/youth-justice/system.html> accessed 31 March 2009.

⁴³ 'LA-style gangs a threat, say police', *Dominion*, 3 October 2007, p.5.

⁴⁴ 'Savage attacks linked to gang expansion bid', *New Zealand Herald*, 19 January 2008, p.1; and New Zealand Police, *Briefing to the Incoming Minister 2008*, p.2.

2009 the Police in Flaxmere said that the danger of serious youth violence was increasing with juvenile gangs frequently using weapons.⁴⁵ A March 2009 newspaper article reported that some New Plymouth teenagers feared for their physical safety as a result of intimidation by a gang of other young people.⁴⁶

Publicity has surrounded the Killer Beez (KB), an affiliated criminal youth gang. Originally formed in Otara in 2003 to provide recruits to the Tribesmen gang, the KB identifying colours are yellow and black. In 2007 Otara Senior Sergeant Andrew Berryman described the KB as the “most visible” gang in South Auckland whose burglary, dishonesty and drug offending had created a “significant problem”.⁴⁷ In May 2008 Police Operation Leo in the Auckland region and in Waikato targeted the KB and Tribesmen, resulting in drugs, money and stolen property being seized. Detective Inspector John Tims, the officer in charge of the operation, said that based on the evidence secured “in simple terms they are drug dealers who are causing destruction and chaos in our community by their actions”.⁴⁸

Youth gangs in other countries

Australia

There has been publicity in Australia over crime committed by youth gangs, particularly violence.⁴⁹ In 2008 Inspector Greg Carey, the crime manager for the Tweed-New South Wales Police, expressed concern over the growth of youth gangs.⁵⁰ A Perth study of students aged between 14 and 18 years found that gang members were far more frequently engaged in underage drinking, drug use (mainly cannabis) and fighting than non-gang members. The proportion of gang members trying ‘harder’ drugs such as amphetamines was significantly higher than non-gang members.⁵¹ Within the school community, gang members were antisocial, not academically inclined, and alienated from teachers and other students. They were also much more likely to have missed several school classes or days.⁵²

United Kingdom

Considerable public discussion about youth gangs and violence occurred in the UK following the August 2007 murder of 11-year-old Rhys Jones by a gang member.⁵³ The 2004 Offending,

⁴⁵ ‘Minister alarmed at reports of youth violence’, Hon Dr Pita Sharples, Minister of Maori Affairs, 20 February 2009; and ‘Youth gangs take up weapons’.

⁴⁶ ‘Teens ‘don’t feel safe’ after gang attacks’, *Taranaki Daily News*, 30 March 2009, p.1.

⁴⁷ ‘Who are the Killer Beez?’ *Sunday Star Times*, 17 February 2008, p.4.

⁴⁸ ‘Operation Leo nets more’, New Zealand Police, 7 May 2008; ‘Gang sting ‘good day for community’, *New Zealand Herald*, 6 May 2008, p.3; and ‘The ‘gangsta gangs’.

⁴⁹ ‘Violent youth gangs take control of streets’, *Courier Mail*, 1 August 2008. Available from <http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,24113682-3102,00.html> accessed 31 March 2009; and ‘Violent youth gangs: youth gangs a community problem’, ABC, 24 September 2008. Available from <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/09/24/2373385.htm> accessed 31 March 2009.

⁵⁰ *Courier Mail*.

⁵¹ Rob White and Ron Mason, ‘Youth Gangs and Youth Violence: Charting the Key Dimensions’, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 39 (1), 2006. Available from <http://www.atypon-link.com/AAP/doi/pdf/10.1375/acri.39.1.54?cookieSet=1> accessed 31 March 2009, pp.60-61.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.62.

⁵³ ‘Rhys Jones’ killer Sean Mercer appeals against conviction and sentence’, *Telegraph*, 14 January 2009. Available from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/politics/lawandorder/4241486/Rhys-Jones-killer-Sean-Mercer-appeals-against-conviction-and-sentence.html> accessed 31 March 2009.

Crime and Justice Survey collected data on delinquent youth groups.⁵⁴ Overall, an estimated six percent of young people aged ten to 19 were classified as belonging to a delinquent youth group. The factors most strongly associated with membership were: having friends in trouble with the police; running away from home; commitment to deviant peers; expulsion or suspension from school; and frequent drunkenness. Forty-five percent of young people in delinquent youth groups had used an illegal drug in the last year and 11 percent had used a Class A substance. This was significantly higher than for non-members (15 percent for any drug and 3 percent for Class A drugs). Sixty-three percent of members committed at least one 'core offence' in the previous year, much higher than for non-members (26 percent).⁵⁵

United States

In the US, the 2006 National Youth Gang Survey of law enforcement agencies reported an estimated 785,000 gang members and 26,500 active gangs. Over half the agencies reported that inter-gang conflict and drug-related factors directly affected levels of gang-related violence in their jurisdictions. Somewhat frequently reported (25–50 percent of the agencies) were: gang-member migration across US jurisdictions, the emergence of new gangs, and the return of gang members from secure confinement.⁵⁶ According to the National Youth Gang Centre, risk factors predictive of gang membership include: prior and/or early involvement in delinquency, especially violence and alcohol/drug use; poor family management and problematic parent-child relations; low school attachment and achievement and negative labelling by teachers; association with aggressive and delinquent peers; and neighbourhoods with many youths in trouble and drugs and firearms readily available. Nearly half (49 percent) of all youth gang members were Hispanic/Latino and 34 percent African American/black in 2001.⁵⁷

Responses

Strategies to reduce or eliminate problems associated with youth gangs have historically been grouped into three categories: prevention, intervention and suppression. Prevention programmes seek to discourage individuals joining gangs and include strategies such as improving conditions for youth, early childhood and school education programmes, and after school programmes. Intervention programmes work to move existing or fringe gang members away from crime and toward more positive pursuits. They have focused on education and work opportunities, counselling and health services. Suppression has been the most common international approach since the 1980s. Gang problems have become treated as law enforcement matters rather than as issues for social agencies or communities.

Multi-faceted approaches – the Spergel model

The Comprehensive Community-Wide Approach to Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression evolved from research directed by Irving Spergel, and is now known as the Spergel model. The model has five components:

⁵⁴ A delinquent youth group was: young people who spent time in groups of three or more (including themselves); the group spent a lot of time in public places; has existed for three months or more; has engaged in delinquent or criminal behaviour together in the last 12 months; and has at least one structural feature (either a name, an area, a leader, or rules). Home Office, *Online Report 14/06 Delinquent youth groups and offending behaviour: findings from the 2004 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey*, 2006. Available from <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/rdsolr1406.pdf> accessed 31 March 2009, p.V.

⁵⁵ 'Core' criminal offences included robbery, assault, burglary, criminal damage, thefts of and from vehicles, other miscellaneous thefts and selling drugs. Home Office, pp.V-VI.

⁵⁶ United States Department of Justice. *OJJDP Fact Sheet Number 5: Highlights of the 2006 National Youth Gang Survey*, July 2008. Available from <http://www.iir.com/nygc/publications/fs200805.pdf> accessed 31 March 2009, pp.1-2.

⁵⁷ National Youth Gang Centre, 'Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Gangs'. Available from <http://www.iir.com/nygc/faq.htm#q10> accessed 31 March 2009.

1. Organisational development and change – creating specialised service delivery strategies targeting gang issues.
2. Community organisation – using a community-based approach, improvements in community problems or social needs are sought.
3. Social intervention – developing youth outreach programmes and frontline counselling.
4. Opportunities – large-scale resourcing of efforts to create educational and job-related opportunities, increasing political participation, and developing new relationships between governments and local neighbourhoods to find solutions to delinquency and poverty.
5. Suppression – techniques include arrests, prosecution and imprisonment.

In a review of literature on youth gangs for the Ministry of Social Development, Jarrod Gilbert and Greg Newbold found the bulk of research indicating that multi-faceted approaches are the most successful.⁵⁸ Similarly, an evaluation of comprehensive gang programmes in the US concluded that, when properly implemented, a combination of prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies was successful in reducing the gang problem.⁵⁹

The New Zealand response

Historically, suppression and intervention strategies have been used to combat New Zealand gang problems. During the 1950s there was a focus on prevention with legislative attempts to address the problem of youth delinquency. With the growth of gangs in the 1960s and violence of the 1970s, gangs were increasingly viewed as a law and order issue. In 1972 legislation aimed at gangs was introduced to prohibit unlawful assembly, and four years later legislation allowed for the confiscation of vehicles used in the commission of offences. Intervention efforts in the mid-1970s included the targeting of work co-operatives to adult gang members and a detached youth workers programme for gangs. After the 1979 Moerewa riot the Police were given new powers, such as to stop and search any vehicle suspected of carrying an offensive weapon.

The 1981 Committee on Gangs acknowledged the social causes of gangs with the Community Education Initiative Scheme (CEIS) established in 1981 and the Group Employment Liaison Scheme (GELS) the following year. The CEIS sought to reduce youth gang recruitment through responding positively to the needs of underachieving students who had difficulty moving from school to employment. It also provided children and young people with constructive recreational and sporting activities outside of school. The main goal of the GELS was to engage disadvantaged groups, including gangs, into various government-funded schemes. In 1987 the Committee of Inquiry into Violent Offending concluded that many of the schemes “had positive results in reducing the offending and anti-social behaviour of those who participated in them”. However, controversial incidents, such as a gang robbery reportedly using a vehicle brought with government money, made the GELS increasingly unpopular and it ceased in 1987.

During the 1990s legislation included the provision of greater Police powers of interception and strengthened non-association orders. In 1997 the Justice and Reform Committee said that “A longer-term broader strategy to deal with gangs and their offending needs to be developed. This is likely to involve action on a number of fronts and to include measures that will not require legislation”. Despite this, such an approach was not developed.⁶⁰

In 2006 a four-year action plan, Improving Outcomes for Young People in Counties Manukau, was developed. The plan has 26 action points with three work streams – crisis; intervention; and prevention. To implement the plan the Government invested an additional \$10 million over four

⁵⁸ Ministry of Social Development, pp.37-39.

⁵⁹ United States Department of Justice, *Best Practices to Address Community Gang Problems – OJJDP's Comprehensive Gang Model*, June 2008. Available from <http://www.iir.com/nyqc/publications/gang-problems.pdf> accessed 31 March 2009, p.44.

⁶⁰ Ministry of Social Development, pp.39-41.

years for youth workers, services for high-risk young people and families, and parenting information and support programmes in Counties Manukau.⁶¹ These initiatives were in addition to government agency activity funded through baselines. These included Police Youth Action Teams and improved Police facilities. Since March 2008 the framework has been used in other parts of New Zealand, and action plans to deal with youth gangs are currently being developed outside Counties Manukau.

The Wanganui District Council (Prohibition of Gang Insignia) Bill was introduced in November 2007 and, as reported by the Law and Order Committee in September 2008, has the purpose of prohibiting the display of gang insignia in specified places in the District. The Bill was read a second time in March 2009. Corrections Minister Hon Phil Goff said in September 2008 that if South Australian legislation on non-association orders against people involved in organised crime proved effective adopting a similar approach would be examined for New Zealand.⁶²

In February 2009 the Gangs and Organised Crime Bill was introduced in Parliament. This doubles the penalty for participation in a criminal gang to a maximum of ten years' imprisonment; makes involvement in a criminal gang an aggravating factor in sentencing; gives the Police authority to apply for interception warrants to investigate the offence of participation in a criminal gang, and lowers the threshold for offences that can be used as the basis for warrants from those attracting ten years in prison to those attracting seven years or more. It also enables removal orders to be sought from a court to remove gang forts.⁶³

In February 2009 the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families (Youth Courts Jurisdiction and Orders) Amendment Bill was introduced and read the first time. According to the Minister of Social Development and Employment, it gives the Youth Court the power to issue a new range of compulsory orders including parenting, mentoring, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation programmes; extends the jurisdiction of the Youth Court to include 12 or 13 year olds accused of serious offences; and creates tougher, more effective sentences.⁶⁴

Suggestions for further reading/links

Dennehy, Glennis and Newbold, Greg. *The Girls in the Gang*. Reed Publishing (NZ) Ltd, Auckland, 2001.

Eggleston, Erin J. 'New Zealand Youth Gangs: Key Findings and Recommendations from an Urban Ethnography', *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, Issue 14, July 2000. Available from <http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/journals-and-magazines/social-policy-journal/spj14/14-nz-youth-gangs.doc>.

Ministry of Social Development. *Improving Outcomes for Young People in Counties Manukau*, January 2006. Available from <http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/planning-strategy/improving-outcomes-young-people/improving-outcomes-action-plan.pdf>.

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⁶¹ Question for Written Answer 6027, 23 June 2008.

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⁶³ Hon Simon Power, Minister of Justice, 'Government targets gangs in hard-hitting bill', 10 February 2009.

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