Youth gangs in New Zealand

December 2019

Summary

- Youth gangs have been in New Zealand since the colonial period.
- Factors influencing youth gang membership and youth delinquency include those of an economic, community, cultural, and family nature along with peers and extended time outside the formal education system.
- Four types of youth gang are: wannabes; territorial gangs; unaffiliated criminal youth gangs; and affiliated criminal youth gangs. All of these have a criminal component.
- Multi-faceted approaches to addressing gangs have been the most successful.
- Historically, suppression and intervention strategies have been used to combat New Zealand gang problems.

Young people in New Zealand

Young people are defined in this paper as those aged between 10 and 23 years. The same criterion is used in the Ministry of Social Development report *Youth gangs in Counties Manukau*.¹ Youth gangs such as ‘LA-style street gangs’ noted later also often include older members.²

According to the 2018 Census, the total usually resident population aged 10 to 23 years numbered 859,905. Māori within this population numbered 201,822 with 106,833 Pacific peoples. The medium age for the total population was 37.4 years, the medium age for Māori was 25.4 and for Pacific peoples 23.4.³

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. In 1892 further concern expressed over ‘larrikinism’ and delinquency in that city was reported.⁴ Likewise, during the late 1920s Auckland youth gang crimes were reported.⁵ Concern arose in the 1950s with youth groups called ‘widgies’, ‘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

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¹ Ministry of Social Development *Youth gangs in Counties Manukau* (February 2008) at 55.
³ Statistics New Zealand “Age and sex by ethnic group, for census usually resident population counts, 2006, 2013, and 2018 Censuses”.
⁵ Gilbert, above n 2 at 3.
of traditional moral values and changing patterns of sexual practice.\textsuperscript{6} By the end of the 1950s, there were 41 reported gangs in Auckland and 17 reported gangs in Wellington (accurately obtaining statistics on gangs is difficult).\textsuperscript{7}

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. The Mongrel Mob, now the largest gang in New Zealand, formed during the 1960s and known as 'Mongrels' until around 1970.\textsuperscript{8} 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.\textsuperscript{9} During this time the gang that later became Highway 61 was formed, as was the Head Hunters gang.\textsuperscript{10}

In the early 1970s, the chairman of Auckland's District Māori Council estimated gang membership at 2,000.\textsuperscript{11} 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.\textsuperscript{12}

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; Māori and Polynesian ethnic gangs; and white ethnic gangs. In 1989 the Police estimated there were 5,356 gang members and associates.\textsuperscript{13}

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.\textsuperscript{14} 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 increasingly involved disputes over drug-dealing territory.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{6} Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 39.

\textsuperscript{7} Greg Newbold Crime in New Zealand (Dunmore Press Ltd, Palmerston North, 2000) at 204; and Dennehy and Newbold at 161.

\textsuperscript{8} The exact date the gang was established is unclear. See Gilbert, above n 2 at 37-39. Greg Newbold and Rāwiri Taonui, "Gangs" Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand (2018).

\textsuperscript{9} Eggleston, above n 4 at 2.

\textsuperscript{10} Dennehy and Newbold, above n 4 at 162 and 165-166; and Gilbert, above n 2 at 34 and 55.

\textsuperscript{11} Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 14; and Dennehy and Newbold, above n 4 at 167 and 169-170.

\textsuperscript{12} Dennehy and Newbold, above n 4 at 172-173.

\textsuperscript{13} Newbold, above n 7 at 205-206.

\textsuperscript{14} Newbold, above n 7 at 205-206; and Dennehy and Newbold, above n 4 at 178-181.

\textsuperscript{15} Dennehy and Newbold, above n 4 at 186-188; and correspondence with Jarrod Gilbert, 9 December 2019.
Pākehā street gangs with interests in neo-fascism and white power tendencies grew stronger, particularly in Christchurch, during the early and mid-1990s (they began to decline by the decade's end). 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.16

Concerns regarding South Auckland youth groups dressing like US gangs and calling themselves names such as ‘The Tongan Crip Gang’ were expressed in 1990. During the decade a new style of youth gang emerged based on modern American street gangs and influenced by hip-hop culture and Hollywood movies (sometimes called ‘LA-style street gangs’). These spread particularly in Māori- and Polynesian-dominated lower socio-economic areas. The 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. The Crips and Bloods have been termed ‘LA-street gangs’. Asian youth gangs also grew with the influx of Asian migrants since the 1980s.17 Asian gangs became a high-profile political issue in the late 1990s, but have a limited presence.18 Youth gangs grew as a 'niche market' with an increasing restraint or 'age-related inertia' and move toward more family-oriented approaches to gang life evident among traditional gangs.19 By 1998 the Police estimated around 45 different gangs with approximately 5,000 members and 15,000 associates were in New Zealand.20

The percentage of sentenced males who were patched gang members declined slightly from 9.8 percent in 1991 to 8 percent in 1999, as did associates, which fell from 10.6 percent to 8.3 percent.21 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 3,500.22 Police Association President Greg O’Connor thought the figure was higher – probably over 3,500.23 The 2011 arrival of the Rebels gang in New Zealand made gangs more appealing to younger members, which led to more recruitment.24 In 2019 the Minister of Police also referred to the Rebels’ arrival “as something of a starting point to this latest growth in organised crime

16 Dennehy and Newbold, above n 4 at 185 and 187-188; and Gilbert, above n 2 at 146.
17 Dennehy and Newbold, above n 4 at 189; Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 15; Gilbert, above n 2 at 256-260; and Alex Baird and Emma Hurley “LA street style gangs surging in New Zealand prisons” Newshub (7 August 2018).
18 Gilbert, above n 15.
19 Gilbert, above n 2 at 252.
20 Newbold, above n 7 at 209.
23 Elizabeth Binning “Working out gang numbers not an exact science” New Zealand Herald (30 June 2008) at 2.
24 Yvette McCullough “Gang recruitment spike ‘homegrown’ issue – Bridges” Radio New Zealand (7 October 2019). Also see Gilbert, above n 2 at 249.
and methamphetamine flooding our communities”.25 There were 4,420 patched and prospect members on the National Gang List (NGL) on 30 June 2016, and 6,735 on 30 August 2019.26

According to the Department of Corrections, the number of sentenced active gang members increased from 290 in 2003 to 2,454 in 2017.27 The number of prisoners with a recorded affiliation increased from 3,268 in January 2017 to 3,811 in March 2019, while in September 2019 there were 3,780 affiliated prisoners.28

An increasing gang presence has been publicised. In 2018 the Economist reported that New Zealand had one of the world’s highest gang membership rates.29 In 2019 the Police said that the deportation of Australian gang members to New Zealand with a more sophisticated social media approach had contributed to increased gang membership. With greater numbers the threat of inter-gang violence, use of firearms and corrupting of officials increased.30 Likewise, the New Zealand Police Association President Chris Cahill said his “biggest concern” was the rapid growth in gang numbers, and their effect on New Zealanders.31 Gang expansion has been linked to the profitability of providing illegal drugs. In 2019 it was estimated that gangs made around $500 million in profit from the methamphetamine trade every year.32 The Minister of Police in 2019 referred to gangs becoming “a more sophisticated criminal business enterprise”.33 Gangs such as the Mongrel Mob were seeking to legitimise themselves, and engender public sympathy, while a planned chapter for women was announced in 2019.34

**Youth gangs**

The 2008 Ministry of Social Development Counties Manukau Project using sociologist Jarrod Gilbert’s research has defined youth gangs as:

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25 Hon Stuart Nash “Police Association Annual Conference” Beehive (15 October 2019).

26 New Zealand Police Official Information Act response (25 November 2019) and Parliament Question for Written Answer 35310 (11 October 2019). Note: Methodological issues with the Police figures have been identified. Gilbert, above n 15.

27 Department of Corrections Corrections Volumes Report 2016/17 at 130.

28 Question for Written Answer 10959 (14 March 2019) and Question for Written Answer 34529 (4 October 2019).

29 “Why New Zealand has so many gang members” Economist (14 February 2018). Note: There is a lack of definitive data here. Gilbert, above n 15.

30 “The devil: Top cop outlines gang warfare fears” Otago Daily Times (16 October 2019). Also see Collette Devlin “What’s going on with gangs? Influx of organised criminals is ‘destroying families’” Stuff (16 October 2019); Donna-Lee Biddle “Deported bikie outlaws are threatening to inflame gang violence in small town NZ” Stuff (21 July 2019); and “Top cop calls out gangs’ PR offensive to generate public sympathy” Stuff (17 October 2019).

31 Devlin, above n 30.

32 Hon Stuart Nash, above n 23. Also see “Drugs a main factor in rise of gangs in New Zealand, police say” One News (6 October 2019).

33 Hon Stuart Nash, above n 25.

34 “The devil: Top cop outlines gang warfare fears”, above n 30; and Jamie Ensor “Female Mongrel Mob chapter members won’t wear back patches” Newshub (1 October 2019).
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.

Some regional estimates regarding youth gang numbers are available but precise figures, as with those for adult gangs, are difficult to ascertain. In 2017 the Minister of Police said that the Police did not collate figures for youth gang members as they had "little structure" and an "extremely fluid membership".

With regard to regional estimates, in late 2005 there were 53 youth gangs with 245 members estimated in Māngere, Ōtāhuhu and Papatoetoe. In January 2006, Police intelligence estimated 73 youth gangs with approximately 600 members in Counties Manukau. 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. Approximately five Invercargill youth gangs were reportedly active in March 2011 with one comprising of about 30 members aged 14 to 17, and in February 2012 a Whangārei youth gang claimed about 40 members mainly aged between 12 and 15, including girls. During 2018 about 70 youth gangs with around 1,000 members were active in South Auckland. However, many of these gangs had nebulous memberships and brief existences.

The high-profile Killer Beez (KB), an affiliated criminal youth gang, was originally formed in Ōtara in 2003 to provide recruits to the Tribesmen gang. In 2007 the Police described it as South Auckland’s “most visible” gang, while in 2015 Gilbert said the gang was a “significant force”, and that such gangs in some ways were “much more important to youth than traditional gangs”. More recently, in April 2019 tensions were reported between the KB and Tribesmen with Gilbert saying that the gang had "grown into a force of their own right and potentially that creates some tensions".

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35 Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 4.
36 Question for Written Answer 4676 (23 May 2017).
37 Simon Collins “Zero tolerance on youth gangs” New Zealand Herald (27 October 2005); Marty Sharpe “Youth gangs take up weapons” Dominion (20 February 2009) at 3; and Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 24.
38 Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 24.
39 Beck Vass and Patrick Gower "Wanna-be' gang killed teen" New Zealand Herald (11 September 2007) at 1. Note: Issues with the accuracy of figures, such as overestimates, have been acknowledged. See Gilbert, above n 2 at 263-264.
40 Sharpe, above n 37.
41 Evan Harding “Youth gangs problem growing” Southland Times (3 March 2011) at 3; and Kristin Edge “Youth gangs: make parents responsible” Northern Advocate (24 February 2012) at 1.
44 “Gang expert: Concern as tension rises between Killer Beez and Tribesmen” New Zealand Herald (28 April 2019).
Reasons for youth gangs
The Ministry of Social Development in 2008 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 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, Māori parenting practices have been influenced by the loss of wider whanau networks and supportive structures.45 Children of gang-involved parents are more likely to join a gang, and often describe a fatalism about their own gang involvement.46 It was reported in June 2018 that 7,000 children lived in gang-connected families.47 Moreover, Cahill in 2019 said “What does it say when young people are increasingly considering gang membership as their future? Our members see disconnected, angry, confused and unloved young people turning to gangs as a ‘family’”.48

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.49 According to Gilbert, “Glamorised violence and an emphasis on ostentatious wealth – typically achieved via crime – is a potential driver of New Zealand’s developing youth gang culture; and something that sets these gangs apart from the early formation of the traditional patched street gangs”.50

Peers

Gangs often provide a proxy family unit, giving support and a social focal point.51 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.52 Gangs can also provide a sense of status, recognition, alleviate boredom with excitement associated with crime, and provide protection. Peer pressure

45 Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 28-31.
46 Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit improving outcomes for children of gang-involved parents (June 2015), at 1 and 6-7.
47 “Which is New Zealand’s biggest gang?” Newshub (8 June 2018).
48 Devlin, above n 30.
49 Eggleston, above n 4 at 2.
50 Gilbert, above n 2 at 257.
51 Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 32.
52 Eggleston, above n 4 at 8.
combined with recruitment by adult gangs and the desire to associate with such gangs, further influence membership in youth gangs. Many young people join gangs in prison for protection, especially if they have no support networks.

According to Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki), “youth gangs are a concern for the whole community”. Furthermore:

We all need to understand why our rangatahi are drawn to and join gangs. Gang membership or similar anti-social behaviour is often quite transient and depends on relationships built and friendships or connections made between young people. We know that a transition to a supportive community delivers the best outcomes for young people and is more likely to see an end to their association with anti-social peers – keeping in mind that not all anti-social peers are gang members.

Youth gangs have used social media to publicise their activities, including violent crimes and their reputed ‘loot’. The Police in 2018 labeled this “an absolute tragedy”, and have warned of gangs recruiting members online. Likewise, concern has been expressed over gang members deported from Australia recruiting youths, who are attracted by expensive bikes and jewelry shown on their social media.

Schools

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

Youth gang characteristics

The Ministry of Social Development Counties Manukau Project classified 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.
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.

53 Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 32-34.
54 Georgia-May Gilbertson, "Growth in numbers a major driver of latest gang tension in Hawke’s Bay" Stuff (23 November 2019).
56 Sam Sherwood, "Kiwi youth gangs bragging about their crimes on social media" Stuff (9 May 2018).
57 Sam Sherwood, "Youth gangs bragging about violent crimes ‘an absolute tragedy’ - top cop" Stuff (9 May 2018); Phillipa Yalden, "Online gang hooks ‘good kid’" Waikato Times (17 August 2018) at 1; and Biddle, above n 30.
58 Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 34-35.
59 Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 20. These gang categories, which are not definitive, continue to be referenced by academics. See Newbold and Taonui, above n 42.
According to the Police, youth gangs differ from other gangs in that they are more racially diverse and less well-organised. Many gangs rely on leaders who either decide to change their lifestyles or are imprisoned, ending the gang’s existence. Tagging is often used to express their presence in a neighbourhood.

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. Counties Manukau Police in 2016 said that they were “very well represented” by female youth gangs. 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 the Police said that Flaxmere gangs were divided ethnically into two main groups: the largely Māori ‘Bloods’ and mainly Pacific Island ‘Crips’.

**Youth gangs and crime**

All the youth gang classifications in the 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. According to Gilbert, younger gang members cannot be controlled by older ones, because the older membership does not exist in the same way that it does with traditional patched gangs.

The 2003 Department of Corrections census found that 25.3 percent of sentenced inmates were between the ages of 14 and 24 years. 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). In December 2009, approximately 7 percent of prisoners were 15 to 19 years old (4 percent in March 2016) with approximately 19 percent in the 20 to 24 age bracket (15 percent). In June 2019, 2.4 percent of prisoners

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61 Sharpe, above n 37; and Newbold and Taonui, above n 42.

62 Eggleston, above n 4 at 10; Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 22; Sharpe, above n 37; and Jeremy Olds “Girl gangs: When young girls turn to crime” Stuff (4 August 2016).

63 Eggleston, above n 4 at 10-11.

64 Baird and Hurley, above n 17.

65 Department of Corrections “Census of Prison Inmates and Home Detainees 2003” (2003); and Question for Written Answer 17956 (26 October 2007). Department of Corrections prison statistics are available here.


67 "Department of Corrections "Prison facts and statistics - December 2009"; and Department of Corrections “Prison facts and statistics - March 2016".
were under 20 years (3.4 percent in March 2017) and 11.8 percent aged 20 to 24 (14.3 percent).  

Following one killing in October 2005 there were an additional nine deaths related to or associated with ‘LA-style street gangs’ in wider Auckland during 2006 that highlighted their violence.  

In October 2007 O’Connor said LA-style gangs of Polynesian youths were the main threat to public safety, with young people most likely to be victims. However, criminologist Greg Newbold believed such gangs were more threatening within their own neighbourhoods than to New Zealanders in general. The Police in 2008 said youth gangs were a “significant” issue in South Auckland/Counties Manukau. In 2009 the Police in Flaxmere said that the danger of serious youth violence was increasing with juvenile gangs frequently using weapons. That same year the media reported some New Plymouth teenagers feared for their physical safety as a result of intimidation by a gang of other young people.

Crimes by youth gangs have been widely reported in recent years. These have included a 2012 aggravated robbery of a tourist in Wairoa involving nine youths, some as young as 12 and dressed in gang colours, and in 2018 a 15 year old attempted to commit robbery to join a youth gang he met online. In August 2019 a youth gang was also believed to be behind Christchurch robberies and ram raids. With regard to girl gangs, the Counties Manukau Police in 2016 said that “What we are seeing is groups of girls who are committing much more serious crimes – what we would normally associate with boys”. Their crimes lacked cohesion and proper planning, and tended to be spurred on by impulse, intoxication, a sense of swagger and entitlement.

Publicity has surrounded the KB. In 2007 Ōtara Police said that the gang’s burglary, dishonesty and drug offending had created a “significant problem”. In 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. The officer in charge of the operation, said that based on the evidence secured “in simple terms they are drug dealers

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68 Department of Corrections “Prison facts and statistics - March 2017” and Department of Corrections “Prison facts and statistics - June 2019”.
69 Gilbert, above n 2 at 257.
70 “LA-style gangs a threat, say police” Dominion (3 October 2007) at 5.
71 Patrick Gower “Savage attacks linked to gang expansion bid” New Zealand Herald (19 January 2008) at 1; and New Zealand Police Briefing to the Incoming Minister 2008, above n 66 at 2.
72 Hon Dr Pita Sharples, Minister of Māori Affairs “Minister alarmed at reports of youth violence” (20 February 2009); and Sharpe, above n 37.
73 Leighton Keith “Teens ‘don’t feel safe’ after gang attacks” Taranaki Daily News (30 March 2009) at 1.
74 “Tourist robbed by youths in gang colours” Otago Daily Times (5 January 2012); and Yalden, above n 57.
75 Sam Sherwood “Youth gang behind series of Christchurch robberies” Stuff (29 August 2019).
76 Olds, above n 62.
77 Hume, above n 43.
who are causing destruction and chaos in our community by their actions".78 The gang’s President Joshua Masters was released from prison in 2018 after being sentenced to 10 years jail in 2012 for drug dealing and money laundering. He had been denied parole after allegedly continuing to run the Killer Beez from behind bars.79

The number of prisoners affiliated to the KB increased from 153 in 2013 to 342 in 2019. Prisoners affiliated with the Crips and Bloods youth gangs also increased during this period (see Table 1).80 Youth gangs have committed violence in prison with members wanting to make a name for themselves, such as by assaulting staff and other prisoners. Gilbert has noted that youth gangs have “gained a longevity and so with that longevity they’ve got numbers within prison and with those numbers they’ve now got influence”.81

Table 1: Number of prisoners affiliated to the Killer Beez, Bloods and Crips, 2013-2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year (As at 30 June)</th>
<th>Killer Beez</th>
<th>Bloods</th>
<th>Crips</th>
<th>Total prison population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>8,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>8,606</td>
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<td>2015</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>8,894</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>9,532</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>10,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>10,435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>9,969</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Corrections Official Information Act response to author (1 November 2019).

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

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78 New Zealand Police “Operation Leo nets more” (7 May 2008); Beck Vass and Juliet Rowan “Gang sting ‘good day for community” New Zealand Herald (6 May 2008) at 3; and “The ‘gangsta gangs’”, above n 60.


80 Also see Anna Leask “Gangbusters: Patches on the rise as NZ gang scene ‘revitalised” New Zealand Herald (14 August 2019).

81 Baird and Hurley, above n 17.
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 (2005). The model has five components:

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.82

A review of literature on youth gangs for the Ministry of Social Development found the bulk of research indicated that multi-faceted approaches were the most successful.83 Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit work in 2015 on improving outcomes for children of gang-involved parents noted that comprehensive multi-faceted approaches were most likely to be effective.84 In 2017 research exploring community approaches to gang member reintegration indicated that addressing gangs was likely to be a multi-level all-of-community issue.85 Likewise, the need to recognise the wider social context within which gangs operated, such as social, economic and health problems, and the limitations of simply ‘cracking down’ on gangs has been acknowledged.86 More specifically, a study of Sāmoan young people's associations with South Auckland youth gangs found that the parents’ practice of sending troubled young people to extended family in Sāmoa, in the hope it would transform them into ‘well-behaved’ individuals, often fell short of expectations and could, in some cases, have the opposite effect. Instead, a more formal and multi-faceted policy approach was recommended.87 Indeed, adolescent gang members and prospects have been identified as the most difficult sub-group to engage and motivate to change. “This is not surprising given that many men join

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82 Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 6 and 38.
83 Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 37-39.
84 Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit, above n 46 at 1 and 9.
86 Laura Walters “Gang crackdown' wins votes, doesn't solve problems” Newsroom (19 October 2019).
87 Moses Ma'aloo Faleolo “From the Street to the Village: The Transfer of NZ Youth Gang Culture to Sāmoa” (2016) New Zealand Sociology 31 (2) at 48.
gangs in their adolescence and are likely to have a vested interest in creating (or furthering) their reputations and/or joining a collective that supports their behaviour and beliefs.\footnote{Armon J. Tamatea “I know our people”: Exploring community approaches to gang member reintegration II” (2018) Practice: The New Zealand Corrections Journal 6 (1).}

**New Zealand’s 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 bought 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.\footnote{Ministry of Social Development, above n 1 at 39-41.}

In 2006 a four-year action plan, Improving Outcomes for Young People in Counties Manukau, was developed. The plan had 26 action points with three work streams – crisis; intervention; and prevention. To implement the plan the Government invested an additional $10 million over four years for youth workers, services for high-risk young people and families, and parenting information and support programmes in Counties Manukau. These initiatives were in addition to government agency activity funded through baselines. These included
Police Youth Action Teams and improved Police facilities. A 2010 review said the Plan appeared to be making a difference in reducing youth offending and youth gang involvement.

Under current New Zealand law a child aged 10 to 13 years cannot be prosecuted for any crime other than murder or manslaughter. 70 to 80 percent of young people in trouble with the law are dealt with by the Police in the community. This can involve a Police warning or referral to Police Youth Aid for Alternative Action. Here the young person, their family and the Police decide on a plan to deal with the offending. A family group conference occurs in more serious circumstances and involves a meeting for a child or young person, their family or whānau and the victim.

The Youth Court deals with all serious offending committed by a young person other than murder and manslaughter. Most young people in the Youth Court are 14 to 17 years old (charged 17 year olds have been included since 1 July 2019). However, 12 and 13 year olds are included if charged with particularly serious offences, such as aggravated robbery. The Court is governed by the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 which promotes the well-being of children, young persons and their families, whānau, hapū, iwi and family groups. In 2010 the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 was amended to expand the jurisdiction of Youth Courts, and to strengthen and expand the orders available to Youth Courts. The Youth Court’s responses if a charge against a young person is proved may include ordering them to pay reparation, attend an alcohol or drug rehabilitation programme, undertake community work, and reside at a specified address (such as a youth justice residence).

Oranga Tamariki was established in 2017. It aims to work in partnership with others to address the underlying factors that contribute to offending as early as possible to reduce the potential for lifelong offending. The Ministry has four youth justice residences that aim to help young people and improve their prospects for the future.

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90 Question for Written Answer 6027 (23 June 2008).
92 Ministry of Justice “Youth Court overview”; and Ministry of Justice “Victims Information” (2019).
93 Ministry of Justice “Youth Court/Te Köti Taiohi o Aotearoa” (2019).
94 Ministry of Justice “Youth Court overview”, above n 92; and Ministry of Justice “Victims Information”, above n 92.
95 Ministry of Justice “Youth justice principles and processes” (17 September 2019).
96 Children, Young Persons, and Their Families (Youth Courts Jurisdiction and Orders) Amendment Bill.
97 Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, Children’s and Young People’s Well-being Act 1989 s.283.
98 Oranga Tamariki “Youth Justice Residences” (2019).
Oranga Tamariki is a key partner of the Youth Crime Action Plan 2013-2023. This Plan identifies three overarching strategies shaping how youth crime will be ‘tackled’ over the next decade:

- Partnering with communities: Improving the way government agencies engaged with and supported communities to prevent offending and reoffending.
- Reducing escalation: Ensuring children and young people were dealt with at the lowest appropriate level of the youth justice system.
- Early and sustainable exits: Providing young people who offended with the best type of intervention at the right time.

Hon Amy Adams, the Minister of Justice, in 2016 noted that youth in court had declined. Within this context the Minister said that the Plan “underpinned a concerted effort to address offending by children and young people”.

More generally, the Criminal Proceeds (Recovery) Act 2009 established a regime for the forfeiture of property that was derived directly or indirectly from significant criminal activity; or that represented the value of a person’s unlawfully derived income. In June 2019 over $645 million worth of real estate, cash and other property was reported to have been targeted by Police since 2009. The Prohibition of Gang Insignia in Government Premises Act 2013 prohibited the display of gang insignia on premises of departments of the Public Service, the Police, Crown entities, local authorities, and schools.

In 2014 the Government announced the Gang Action Plan. This consisted of four initiatives:

- A multi-agency Gang Intelligence Centre led by Police to collect and combine intelligence on real-time gang activity to support investigation, prevention and enforcement, while identifying vulnerable children and family members who may need social service support. It would also identify young people at risk of joining gangs, so that agencies could target interventions to help steer them away from gang life. This became operational in 2016.
- Start at Home: Work to refocus existing social initiatives, and develop new programmes, to address intergenerational gang life, to support families and members turn away from the gang lifestyle, and to help support communities with a large gang presence, by reducing gang tension. These were supported by time-limited funding of one year from Budget 2017. While they were found to have a number of positive results the Ministry of Social Development did not secure further funding beyond 30 June 2018. Department of Corrections rehabilitation programmes

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99 Oranga Tamariki *Youth justice* (2019); and Oranga Tamariki *Who we are*.

100 Associate Justice Minister Hon Chester Borrows *Action Plan the next step forward for youth justice* Beehive (31 October 2013). Also see Ministry of Justice *Youth Crime Action Plan*.

101 Justice Minister Hon Amy Adams *Youth in court down 61 per cent since 2007/08* Beehive (4 March 2016).

102 See *Criminal Proceeds (Recovery) Act 2009*.

103 Melissa Nightingale *Police seize $645 million worth of assets in 10 years* New Zealand Herald (25 June 2019).

104 See *Prohibition of Gang Insignia in Government Premises Act 2013*. 
targeted at gang members, and assistance for women with gang connections at risk of family violence on release from prison were also included.

- Establishment of two multi-agency Dedicated Enforcement Taskforces (the Outlaw Motorcycle Gang Border Protection Taskforce and Criminal Asset Confiscation Taskforce).
- Strengthen legislation: The Sentencing Act 2002 would be amended to allow courts to stipulate 24-hour GPS monitoring on high-risk gang affiliates following release from a prison sentence of two years or less, as part of their conditions of release or sentence.\(^{105}\)

The Department of Corrections in 2017 launched its Gang Strategy 2017-2021. The Strategy's aim is to:

- Contain the negative influence of gang members in the custodial environment.
- Disrupt the efforts and capabilities of gang members under its management to organise and commit crime from within prisons and in the community.
- Reduce the reoffending rates of gang members and the harm caused by gangs in prisons and in the community.

In the Strategy's first year Corrections progressed the three key objectives. In 2018/2019 the Strategy's scope was expanded to incorporate rehabilitation and reintegration.\(^{106}\)

In 2019 the Minister of Police said that the Government was “taking a whole-of-government approach to organised crime. Police will lead the process, but we will partner with mental health and addiction services, Ministry of Social Development, Oranga Tamariki, Housing and other service providers that can be part of the solution”. It was also considering amending the Crimes Act 1961 “making it easier to go after gang leaders”, and 700 new Police were “earmarked for organised crime”.\(^{107}\)

**Suggestions for further reading/links**


Faleolo, Moses Ma’alo. *“From the Street to the Village: The Transfer of NZ Youth Gang Culture to Sāmoa”* (2016) *New Zealand Sociology* 31.


\(^{105}\) Police and Corrections Minister Hon Anne Tolley *“Whole of Government action plan on tackling gangs”* Beehive (5 August 2014); Police Minister Hon Judith Collins *“New Gang Intelligence Centre will reduce gang harm”* Beehive (2 March 2016); and Ministry of Social Development *Official Information Act response* (15 March 2019) at 2.

\(^{106}\) Department of Corrections *Official Information Act response* to author (1 November 2019).

\(^{107}\) Hon Stuart Nash, above n 25.
Ministry of Social Development. *Improving Outcomes for Young People in Counties Manukau* (January 2006).

Ministry of Social Development. *Youth gangs in Counties Manukau* (February 2008).


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