

# Girl Gangs: The Factors Affecting Participation

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# Hypothesis:

This study aims to research what factors affect young girls involvement in gangs. From a feminist perspective, I aim to research what entices young girls to join gangs and what kind of gangs they are joining. I aim to be able to conclude if there is any one factor that has a greater significance over the participants decision to join a gang and finally, I aim to be able to identify any patterns in which type of females join a particular gang and if they can be categorised.

I will conduct a longitudinal study, in order to monitor the target participants behaviour and development every 6 months until they leave secondary school, in order to see if their involvement in a gang can be influenced by various life experiences, for example relationships, school, peer pressure, social media etc.

# Factors That Would Be Tested and Why:

Factors would include:

- Educational achievement: If achievement is low it could be a result of negative labelling and therefore could result in the person feeling dejected, useless, marginalised therefore, accepting their label [self fulfilling prophecy], which could influence them to find that sense of belonging within a gang.
- Friendships/Relationships: Peer pressure could influence a person to join a gang, in fear of rejection from the group/individual.
- Home life: Strict parents or parents that show a lack of interest or are already involved in criminal behaviour or parents who are not at home often because of work, could influence a person to join a gang because it could be in retaliation to overbearing rules that restrict freedom, or it could be their role models are involved in gangs so it is the norm, or it could be the loneliness felt when home alone could encourage a person to find company elsewhere and could result in joining a gang.
- Where the person stands within the school 'hierarchy': If a person feels out of place within a system they could go searching for that belonging elsewhere [similar to educational achievement]. Or to seem 'cool' in order to impress their peers they may join a gang.

# Target Sample:

The research aims to study and monitor females aged 13-17. In order to achieve a representative sample I would choose a stratified random sample, because the participants can be grouped and then I can choose one person at random from the stratified groups which would ensure the sample would be representative.

Potential participants would be stratified into groups depending on:

- Similar demographic
- Similar social class
- Family structure [single parent households, blended family, nuclear family]
- Type of school [Public/Private]
- Location [Urban, Deprived, Suburban, Countryside]
- Ethnicity

Then I'd randomly select participants based on the groups, which would ensure a representative sample, so my findings can be generalised to the wider population.

# Primary Research Method: Semi Structured Interviews

I would conduct semi structured interviews, as it is a longitudinal study, I can ask the same close ended questions which would be asking directly about the factors I intend to study. However, it also allows the interviewer to build rapport and verstehen with the interviewee, which would help build trust with the interviewee which is essential for my study as I would be relying on the participants honesty. It also allows the interviewer to ask the interviewee questions that would explore the participants thoughts, feelings and beliefs, which would identify and explain the reasons why females join gangs.

In my research there would be certain set questions that the interviewer must ask such as:

- Are you in a relationship?
- Are there any particular rules that you deem 'unfair'?
- How are you finding school?

These questions would identify potential factors that could influence participants involvement in gangs, whilst also allowing the participant to elaborate on certain answers. The set questions would also be able to help compare different participants answers, in order to help generalise findings.

# Secondary Sources of Data:

## Rochester Youth Development Study [1986]:

- Family: Children more involved with parents were less likely to be involved with delinquency. Poor parenting increased the probability of being involved with delinquency.
- School: Weak school commitment increased involvement with delinquency and further reduced school commitment. School success was associated with resilience, students with closer attachment to school/teachers less likely to be involved with delinquency.
- Peer influence on behaviour: Associating with delinquent peers was strongly and consistently related to delinquency as peers provide positive reinforcement for delinquency.

<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/fs99103.pdf>

## Youth.Gov: Girls, Juvenile Delinquency and Gangs:

- Research showed that  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of gang members in younger adolescent gangs are girls. [Shows that it is unrepresented in stats].

### Key Factors:

- Lack of family supervision/monitoring, ineffective parenting, family conflict, growing up in poverty, lack of consistent caregivers, frequent family moves, affect chances of involvement with delinquency.
- Lack of engagement and connection with school increased chances of delinquency.

<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/preventing-gang-involvement/girls-juvenile-delinquency-and-gangs>

# Possible Ethical Issues:

## Interviewer Integrity:

- The interviewee may disclose/ recount information detailing illegal activity, so the interviewer may be obligated to report any crime to the police, which would arise issues regarding the participants anonymity and confidentiality.
- It may also have a negative effect on the interviewee trusting the interviewer, which could jeopardize the study's validity if the interviewee isn't honest with the interviewer as it wouldn't be the truth.

## Deception:

- The study's objective would have to be covert, as you are essentially monitoring young girls to see if they will join a gang and possibly commit a crime.
- Parents may not consent to their child participating in a study that monitors whether or not their child is susceptible to being involved in a gang. They may also feel offended if they knew one of the factors being tested is family life and how they have raised their child.