
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Live Experiences of Former Gang Members in Cebu City, Philippines

Albofera Anthony¹ ✉ Dodelon F. Sabijon², Yolanda Sayson³, Esmiraldo Damuag⁴ and Rover Nillama⁵

¹²³⁴⁵Faculty, University of Cebu, Philippines

Corresponding Author: Albofera Anthony, **E-mail:** anthonyalbofera15@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

This paper explores the lived experiences of former gang members in Cebu City. Specifically, it determined the following: experiences of the informants as former gang members, including the reasons why they join, stay and leave the group and the impact of gang membership of the informants as former gang members. This study employed a qualitative method of research employing a phenomenological approach that involves qualitative analysis and assessment of themes derived from semi-structured interviews and follow up questions has been made and with an aid with interview guide, observation and exploring the lived experiences of former gang members. The study was conducted in highly urbanized cities, namely Cebu City, Mandaue City, Lapu-Lapu City and Talisay City. A purposive convenient sampling was employed to select the informants. There were fourteen (14) informants in the study. Fifteen (6) emergent themes were created. For the experiences of former gang members on reasons why they join the gang, three themes emerged, namely: *Personal Safety*, *Peer pressure*, and lastly, *Broken Homes*. For the reasons why they stay in the gang, two themes emerged, namely: *Give and Earn Money*, *The Thug Lifestyle*, and *More Fun and Happiness*. For the reasons why they leave the group, three themes emerged, namely: *Family and Job Responsibilities*, *Realization to Have a Happy and Peaceful life*; and *In-group Rivalry*. Regarding the impact of gang membership and the positive experiences of the informants as former gang members, three themes emerged: *A sense of Belongingness*, *Develop Respect and Trust*, and *School Achiever*. Regarding the negative experiences, three themes emerged: *Gang War and Violence*, *Crime Involvement*, and *Incarceration*. The community must create and sustain a collaborative process for working toward a community free of gang membership and violence. This includes providing a clearinghouse for information on resources, strategies, services, best practices, and funding to prevent, intervene and suppress gang violence.

| KEYWORDS

Criminal Justice, former gang members, phenomenological approach, Cebu City, Philippines.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

No day passes without the appearance of some national and international news items involving stories of crimes committed by youth. Youth gangs are internationally associated with increased rates of delinquency and violent crime (Howell & Egley, 2005). In the Philippines, according to the PNP, crime incidents dropped 8.44 % from January to October 2017, owing to intelligence-driven focused police operations against organized crime groups and street crime gangs, a statement delivered by PNP spokesperson Chief Supt. Dionardo Carlos, during his interview with Ballaran (2017) of Inquirer.net, However, in the last few months, particularly in Cebu City, many reports involving youth gangs include riots, graffiti in vehicles, sex initiation and others, which makes the Local Government come to focus on youth gang formation prevention. According to the report by Semilla in Cebu Daily News mother seeks help after her kids joined a gang made up of children. The kid recruits were burned in the wrist and paddled to become a gang members.

The increase in crime and gang related activities in Cebu City leads the government agencies to take preventive measures against gang activities. This includes the implementation of a curfew ordinance in all barangay as instructed by the Mayor of Cebu City. Also, the DepEd 7 Child Protection committee suggest that the possible interventions would include strengthening the homeroom and school guidance program and close monitoring of students' activities even outside schools through PTA and youth formation activities, as interviewed by Semilla (2018) of Cebu Daily News.

Moreover, many youngsters who grow up in environments where gang violence is common often end up as members of gangs. There are several motivating factors for the persistence of gangs. In the field of youth studies, it is now generally accepted that there are connections between the entrenched socio-economic marginalization of impoverished urban communities and the high levels of dissatisfaction and rebelliousness among youth living in such communities. When confronted with little or no opportunity to escape poverty and reverse their marginalized status, many young people respond in ways that are regarded by citizens as deviant and dangerous (Thornberry, 2003). Youth gangs still remain an issue not only in government but also in other institutions like schools and churches, which serve as an instrument to prevent them from engaging in gang membership.

According to Science Leadership (2018), it is the lack of proper support from healthy institutions such as family, schools, and the local economy that helps cause young people to turn to gang life. They look for the good that these institutions offer, but they find it in criminal organizations such as gangs.

Most likely, if the youth had access to the positive institutions, most likely they would not join gangs. One such example is the writer Ta-Nehisi Coates. Coates currently works at *The Atlantic* as a journalist and has received praise for his writings, such as "The Case for Reparations." Although he is very successful, Coates grew up in a rough part of Baltimore during the 1980s, a part that was controlled by small rival gangs that dealt drugs such as crack. Despite this, Coates had a father who was fair to him, yet at the same time was very firm. He even, at one point, apparently had to "beat" Coates, but afterwards, he said, "it's better I do it once than the gangs or police do it possibly multiple times." With that guidance and caring, Coates did not become lost in gang life but found his way to success and a better living situation. If communities can figure out a way to provide loving authority figures, economic opportunity, and supportive education to young people who are disadvantaged, communities may find a way to end gang life.

As a criminologist, the research inspired me to conduct an in-depth study on the experiences of push and pull factors of joining gangs and how the risk factors affect youth gang membership.

2. Literature Review

In Cebu City, the incidents involving gangster activities and violence as of 2018 include the following reports. According to Cebu City Councilor Dave Tumalak, who is chairman of the council's Public Order and Safety committee, said the gangs are made up of male and female minors who drink and vandalize walls or business establishments as interviewed by Villasawa (2017) of Manila Bulletin. According to the report by Semilla in Cebu Daily News, five children were recruited for a gang. They were paddled, and their wrists were burned by cigarettes. And found out recruited by a gang of children headed by a 17-years-old boy. Incident reports lead the researcher to study youth gangs. Also, as to the name of gangs in previous years until the present, the known gang in Cebu City includes Batang Cebu, Bone Axe, Satanas Gang, Zesto Gang, Bloods, and Crips.

In Talisay City, the incidents involving gangster activities and violence as of 2018 include the following reports. According to Mayor Eduardo Gullas, he wanted the curfew ordinance strictly implemented because of a recent incident that caused the death of a 16-year-old girl after her group clashed with members of another group or minors. Aside from engaging in gang wars, there are also minors already involved in the drug trade. Also, as to the name of gangs in previous years until the present, the known gang in Talisay City includes Batang Cebu, Bone Axe, Satanas Gang, Zesto Gang, Bloods, and Crips.

In Mandaue City, the incidents involving gangster activities and violence as of 2018 include the following reports. According to the report of Cuyo of Cebu Daily News, sniffing solvents like rugby, paint thinner, and sealant are among gang related activities. Also, according to Mendoza of Cebu Daily News, a 14-year old out of school girl admitted that she was forced to have sex with a boy member of their group during an initiation. Also, as to the name of gangs in previous years until the present, the known gang in Talisay City includes Batang Cebu, Bone Axe, Satanas Gang, Zesto Gang, Bloods, and Crips.

In Lapu-Lapu City, the Bloods and Crips are known in the area. The activity includes taking clothes and robbery. Since the City is also known as a tourist destination, they are also subject to victimization by these gangs.

Adolescence is a key development period for legally relevant psychological capacities. These capacities include higher cognitive capabilities, such as the ability to appreciate the consequences of one's actions, as well as capacities that require coordination

between thoughts and feelings, such as the ability to regulate ones' impulses and behave autonomously in the face of social pressure. Some youth may attain adult levels of maturity in these capacities well before they reach the age of legal majority (usually age 18). Others may not reach the pinnacle of their abilities until early adulthood (Shulman & Steinberg, 2016).

Children are assumed, under the law, to be vulnerable, dependent, and incapable of informed and mature decision making. They are, therefore, afforded special protections, denied certain rights, and held less than fully accountable for their actions. Adults, however, are presumed to be fully competent and responsible. Adolescents do not fit either of these profiles. Lawmakers have traditionally responded to the uncertain development status of adolescents by legislating that they are treated either as children or as adults, depending on the specific policy question (Shulman & Steinberg, 2016).

From an international perspective, pursuant to Article 4 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, governments have a responsibility to take all available measures to ensure children's rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled. When countries ratify the Convention, they agree to review their laws relating to children. This involves assessing their social services, legal, health and educational systems, as well as levels of funding for these services.

Governments are then obliged to take all necessary steps to ensure that the minimum standards set by the Convention in these areas are being met. They must help families protect children's rights and create an environment where they can grow and reach their potential. In some instances, this may involve changing existing laws or creating new ones. Such legislative changes are not imposed but come about through the same process by which any law is created or reformed within a country. Article 41 of the Convention points out that when a country already has higher legal standards than those seen in the Convention, the higher standards always prevail.

Furthermore, Article 5 states that governments should respect the rights and responsibilities of families to direct and guide their children so that, as they grow up, they learn to use their rights properly. Helping children to understand their rights does not mean pushing them to make choices with consequences that they are too young to handle. Article 5 encourages parents to deal with rights issues in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child. The Convention does not take responsibility for children away from their parents and gives more authority to governments. It places the responsibility on governments to protect and assist families in fulfilling their essential role as nurturers of children (UNICEF, 2018).

UNICEF has recently articulated the most important elements of the argument for affording children special protection. These place emphasis on the individuality of children and their equal status as citizens. Children are too often regarded as secondary or ancillary to their parents, and by the Convention's definition, which classes all people below the age of 18 as children, literally billions of otherwise ignored people are directly addressed. Protecting this portion of society is a major investment in the future well-being of the earth. Children are also one of the most vulnerable groups in society. They begin life completely dependent on others for their survival, and only through proper care and nurturing do they become self-sufficient. Such care is naturally provided by parents in the family, but where this is not occurring, there is a positive duty on society not just to refrain from harming such children but to step in and provide the care and guidance they need (Lawteacher.net, 2018).

Also, due to the fact that children are still developing mentally and physically, shortcomings in society such as poverty, poor health care, hunger, malnutrition, polluted water, and an unclean environment all disproportionately harm children. Because of the failure of the government and other institutions, especially parents, to provide the basic needs and guidance to their children, this will find other options to fill in what is the missing piece of their lives and, lead them to join gangs perhaps (Lawteacher.net, 2018).

In the Philippines, legislation of laws pertaining to youth and children has been one of the priorities for the protection of the children; this includes RA 7610 (Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act), which states that the State will provide special protection to children from all forms of abuse, neglect, cruelty exploitation and discrimination and other conditions, prejudicial their development; provide sanctions for their commission and carry out a program for prevention and deterrence of and crisis intervention in situations of child abuse, exploitation and discrimination. The State shall intervene on behalf of the child when the parent, guardian, teacher or person having care or custody of the child fails or is unable to protect the child against abuse, exploitation and discrimination or when such acts against the child are committed by the said parent, guardian, teacher or person is having care and custody of the same.

Also, PD 603 (The Child and Youth Welfare Code) states that the Child is one of the most important assets of the nation. Every effort should be exerted to promote his welfare and enhance his opportunities for a useful and happy life. Lastly, RA 10821 (Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act) states that the State will protect the fundamental rights of children before, during, and after disasters and other emergency situations when children are gravely threatened or endangered by circumstances that affect their survival and normal development. Guided by the principles of survival and development, on child participation, and consistent

with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Children's Charter for Disaster Risk and Reduction, and the minimum standards for children in humanitarian action, the State shall establish and implement a comprehensive and strategic program of action to provide the children and pregnant and lactating mothers affected by disasters and other emergency situations with utmost support and assistance necessary for their immediate recovery and protection against all forms of violence, cruelty, discrimination, neglect, abuse, exploitation and other acts prejudicial to their interest, survival, development and well-being.

The children are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, which leads them to join any group membership and violence. However, intensive research by legislative bodies will eventually create laws for the protection of youth and children; otherwise, it will lead to youth delinquency. A survey conducted by UNICEF and the Philippine government has found a high prevalence of violence against Filipino children, with eight out of 10 suffering some form of physical or psychological abuse (Philstar, 2018).

Gang violence remains an issue in low- and middle-income countries in Africa and Asia, and the prevalence of gangs is particularly well documented throughout Central and South America (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). In the Philippines, the number of gang related cases has been growing and more violent. For example, the headline news states, A Grade 4 pupil in Ajuy, Iloilo, was allegedly gang raped by her four schoolmates after they watched porn videos. The victim was raped by Grade 5 pupils, ages 15, 14, 12 and 11 years old. The four suspects are now under the custody of their parents, while the victim is under the care of social workers and women and the child protection desk (Philstar, 2018).

In Baguio City, a group of gangsters were tagged in the murder of a 15-year old high school student. The victim was brutally beaten and stabbed by suspected gang members. The murder is one of a series of escalating youth violence in Baguio City. One of the suspects has a standing warrant of arrest for the murder of another minor two years ago (Philstar, 2018).

According to Dr. Casiple, a gang is commonly defined as a team of workmen working together or lawlessly working together. A gangster is a member of a gang of criminals or gunmen. Gangs are always characterized as organized groups often actively involved in rape, robbery, killing, and drugs and weapons trafficking. Studies showed that most gangs share certain characteristics that determine their membership, such as styles of dress or colors, handkerchiefs and shoelaces of specific colors, jewelry, tattoos, hand gestures, specific activities, likes, and patterns of behavior. They mark their territory and challenge other gangs with spray-painted graffiti or gang symbols.

Like fraternities, gang members show strong loyalty to their brothers or fellow members. These qualities of gangs vary from gang to gang. All of these gang related characteristics can now be observed in schools here in the Philippines. Hence, the presence of gangs in schools increases violence and tensions as they may play a significant role in the violent happenings inside and outside the school campus. For this reason, students in schools with the presence of gangs are more likely to be vulnerable to violence as they may become victims of these gangs than in schools without gangs (Cartwright et al., 1975).

Studies showed that schools are not only vulnerable to gang-related violence but are themselves rapidly becoming centers of gang activities. Schools are sometimes venues for gang recruitment and gatherings. Gangs may also spread unexpectedly from one gang-infected school to gang-free schools. Hence, school officials shall always be aware of these gang activities. Poor family ties are a root cause of gang formation. Some parents focus their attention on their business or on their job to feed their family, especially those working abroad or overseas. They forgot to give ample time to their family or to their children as well. Gangs in schools develop primarily due to students' needs for affiliation that are not being done in their families, especially for youths who belong to broken families or youths who lack good family relationships and acceptance (Cartwright et al., 1975).

Students' frustrations and anger of not being supported by the school or their families may lead them to seek support from outside institutions or groups. This influences them to become gang members, giving them power and control and, later on, involvement in illegal activities as an outlet for their anger. The powerful motive for gang involvement, especially for impoverished youths with poor education and lack of decent jobs, is money. The vast sums of money available through illegal activities increased the size of gangs. To combat gang formation, schools and communities should strategize and mobilize all their resources to destroy the root causes of gangs. Schools should know the reasons for why gangs form and attract the students. Interventions must be done to address this gang formation and the probability that gangs will be less able to attract new members and retain old members (Cartwright et al., 1975).

One of the more serious problems social scientist face in their efforts to study delinquent gangs is the lack of consensus on what defines a gang. Sometimes, the term gang is used broadly to describe any congregation of youth who have joined together to engage in delinquent acts (Siegel & Senna, 1981). Frederick Thrasher also defines a gang as an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting face to face,

milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict and planning. The result of this collective behavior is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, spirit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness and attachment to the local territory (Thrasher, 1927). Also, Malcolm Klein defines a gang as any denotable adolescent group of youngsters who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood; (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name); and (c) have been involved a response from neighborhood residents and/or enforcement agencies (Klien, 1971). Lastly, Desmond Cartwrights define a gang as an interstitial and integrated group of persons who meet face to face more or less regularly and whose existence and activities are considered an actual or potential threat to the prevailing social order (Cartwright et al., 1975).

One of the most important suspected causes of joining gangs and juvenile crime is the relationship within the families. Today, the family is undergoing significant change. Today's families face socioeconomic burdens, parental pressures, and family and cultural conflicts. Negative family environments and experiences contribute to the delinquent behavior of children chiefly because the family is the primary unit in which children learn the values, attitudes, and processes that guide their actions throughout their lives (Siegel & Senna, 1981).

The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals states that it is the social interaction between the child and those in its immediate environment that constitutes the vast majority of the steps contributing to the production of a healthy and normal young person. The learning process is enhanced by environmental stimulation, but the central developmental relationship occurs within the family. Also, they concluded and states family life that is shattered by episodes of physical or emotional mistreatment may breed feelings of rejection among children and retard the youngsters' normal development. Thus, programs designed to ensure that all children are raised in home situations that are beneficial to their healthy growth should be a major component of a community delinquency prevention plan.

In addition to the physical and emotional mistreatment of children, other family factors are believed to be conducive to the formation of gangs and delinquency (Siegel & Senna, 1981). The following are: First, the immorality or criminality of parents and siblings. Second, the absence of one or both parents through death, divorce, or illegitimate birth. Third, poor disciplinary practices may take the form of either extreme laxity or extreme severity. Fourth, lack of love and harmony among family members, resulting in a tense atmosphere in the home. Fifth, severe financial difficulties. Sixth, mental illness or chemical dependency of one or both parents. Lastly, a strong and intact family is a front line defense against delinquency.

Youth gang is not a new problem; much research has been done, but still, gangs are everywhere, and we don't know that we are the next victim. Maybe because the member of our family is one of the gang, or perhaps in darkness, there are many of them waiting for us, and we will be the next target. Risk factors for joining a gang have been identified by the Siegel and Senna family as the main risk factor, but for Martinez et al., it is community, family, school, peer, individual, and family. Because of the prevailing effect of youth gangs, the researcher would like to conduct an in-depth study of what forces pull and push youth towards gangs (Esbensen et al., 2012).

Additionally, in Cebu City, headline news has emerged involving youth. The Sunstar News headlines in their article "Sex in gang initiations persist" that children in barangays are still exposed to gangs and harsh initiation rites that include having sex with leaders and elderly members. The sex initiation is to become a full pledge member before they become a member of the group.

The impact of gang membership and the burdens they place on our health, law enforcement, corrections and educational system are significant. The risks for delinquency and violence (as both perpetrator and victim) dramatically increase after a young person joins a gang. Young gang members are also at higher risk for substance abuse, high-risk sexual behavior, dropping out of school, criminal behavior and numerous other negative consequences (NIJ, 2018).

Despite this, we are looking forward to the better. Gang membership, violence, and delinquency can be prevented. The aforementioned theories, related literature and studies also served as a guide to the researcher in gathering and organizing data and coming up with a concrete output of the study, particularly on the formulation of implications for practice such as the recommendations, suggestions and measures for implications. It also served as a guide in the formulation of the implication of future studies for the purposes of in-depth investigation of a phenomenon to the experiences of the gang members and why they join and leave the group. In this study, the researcher wants to explore and understand what is behind the push and pull factors of joining gangs and how the risk factors affect youth gang membership.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In order to provide a comprehensive interpretation, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative technique, was employed in this particular study project. "Interpretive phenomenological analysis" is shortened to "IPA," and the main unit of analysis for an IPA study is the importance of various interactions, events, and emotions to the participants. Stated differently, it does not aim to produce an impartial description of the thing or occasion in question. It is distinguished from an attempt to produce an objective account of the item or event itself, which is the focus of the other, by this concern. Every phenomenological study starts with a thorough investigation of the subject's real environment. This stage of the research process is crucial (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

3.2 Data Collection

A purposive convenient sampling was employed to select the informants. Purposive in the sense that the informant comes from a class or group who are best suited to be the subject of the research. Convenient in the sense that only informants who are willing and show interest will be interviewed. The researcher has 14 informants in this study who were formerly gang members for not less than three years, had actively participated in gang activities and lived in highly urbanized cities. Eight of the informants who came from Cebu City were interviewed in focused group discussion (FGD); two of the informants who came from Mandaue City, two of the informants from Lapu-Lapu City and another two of the informants who came from Talisay City were individually interviewed.

Prior to the interview, the researcher explained to the informants the purpose of the study and the manner in which the interview would be conducted, informing them of the rights and obligations of the researcher before and after the study. As part of the research procedure, the informants' consent was sought as articulated by the consent form duly signed by them.

3.3 Data Analysis

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach is to explore in a profound way the lived experiences of research participants and help them understand the phenomenological significance of their experiences through investigative procedures and the Moustakas series of methods in analyzing phenomenological studies. Transcribed key points are marked from the data collected with a series of codes extracted from the text. The codes are grouped into similar concepts to make them more workable.

4. Results and Discussion

The researcher of this study underwent several stages of coding and recoding. There are (6) emergent themes that were derived from the responses of the informants; the following are the emergent themes arranged according to each sub-problem. Two themes were created for the push factors of joining a gang, namely, *personal safety* and *peer pressure*. For the reasons why they stay in the gang, two themes were created, namely, *The Thug lifestyle* and *Sense of Belongingness*. For the pull factors of leaving the gang, three themes were created, namely, *Family Responsibilities* and *Living in Peaceful Life*.

4.1 Theme 1: Personal Safety

Some adolescents choose to join gangs from a rational calculation to achieve safety. Youth who are new to a community may believe they will be harassed or attacked if they remain unaffiliated. Girls also join gangs for protection. Though they may be exploited by male gang members, they are protected from assaults by non-gang member's male in the neighborhood, Healey (2007).

I joined gangs because I want someone to lean on and talk too because our barangay is very chaos, and many criminals live there and. I have enemies, so with my group, I have someone to lean on and give me protection. (Participant 2)

Gang membership is viewed by the informants as a safe haven for a youth living in a gang infested community. The informants claimed that in order to be safe and not be bullied, they had to join the group; otherwise, the lasting pain would no longer be endured. Additionally, the informants seek personal safety from a number of sources. They may seek refuge and safety from other gangs and have a mindset that joining a gang will provide safety, or they may be looking for safety from individuals and bullies. According to them, they feel no aim, direction, or purpose in their lives. That's why they turn to get membership in a gang to fulfill this part of their life and protect their self-esteem. Being a member of a gang gives them purpose in life and protects their self-esteem from being bruised and injured (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

4.2. Theme 2: Peer Pressure

Based on studies, most teens/adolescents think that joining a group gives them popularity with their peers. The average teen feels pressure either from the school, peers, or parents, thus enticing the need to belong to groups. Oftentimes, they get involved in violence, alcohol or drug use, and sex. Studies will prove that high school students spend more time with their friends than with

parents or other influential adults. Teenagers who get involved with delinquent friends shun themselves away from good or straight kids and choose to fit into their own kind. Nowadays, the majority of families are headed by single parents, most of them mothers, who work extra jobs. Single parents are spending little time with their teens, thus leaving them victim to peer group pressure. Research shows that peer group pressure may lead to delinquent behavior among teenagers, which includes criminal acts such as motor vehicle theft, burglary, robbery and others (Cabot, 2007).

I was influenced by my friends, so that's why I join, and I also wanted to know what that gang group is. My friends said that you join because there are lots of good things that you can gain, also you can have money, then they said they had lots of money so that's why I was carried away to join the group. (Participant 1)

Peer pressure can be described by the informants as a positive or negative reaction that occurs when one is influenced by certain people or peers. If your peers are a good influence, then you are on the right path, but this is not always the case because the majority of the informants suffer negative experiences. Peer pressure is said to be responsible for the informants' behavior's, starting from the choice of clothing and committing crimes like selling drugs, burglary and larceny. In this case, senior gang members admit that whatever vices they have will also be the same habits of its members. Youths who report inadequate or strained peer relations are the ones most likely to become delinquent. Adolescents who maintain delinquent friends are more likely to engage in antisocial behavior (Shields & Georgia, 1994).

4.3. Theme 3: The Thug lifestyle

The researcher formulated this theme based on the responses of the informants as a gang member wherein they celebrate deviance and criminality, and that is the values they have already embraced. Part of the gang membership experience is trouble, and they must prepare to defend themselves and the group against the adversary. For the informants, the ability to learn new skills on how to kill and commit crimes is common in order for them to be protected against harm and injury. As a result, uncertainty for the gang members when they walk alone and eventually get in trouble is common (Vigil, 1990).

Because of this gang, I was near to death because our rival gang stabbed me in the abdomen due to gang rivalry. But still, I'm lucky because someone helps me. (Participant 5)

Young gang boys want to embrace the movie gangster lifestyle and fatalism. They are ready to shoot it out with rival gang members. In this outlaw world, gang boys can make their own rules, do what they want, and take what they wish without worrying about the consequences. It is a lifestyle where respect is demanded and power rules. Thugs enjoy their ability to use violence to gain vengeance against their enemies or to demonstrate their criminal skills. Just as a doctor, lawyer, or police officer identifies with his profession and gains self-worth from his professional calling and successes, self-esteem for many who choose to join a gang becomes dependent on their thug exploits. (Siegel, 2012)

4.4. Theme 4: Sense of Belongingness

Happiness is contentment and satisfaction, but in the case of the informants as gang members, true happiness can only be found in the group. According to them, spending time with the group provides more happiness than material possessions. These can bring comfort, support and encouragement when they need it. They are there when times are good and there for them when times are tough. For them, simple things like bonding and drinking beer along with them can make them strong and united, and they call it camaraderie. Some groups join gangs simply to have fun. They enjoy hanging out with others like themselves and want to get involved in exciting experiences. There is evidence that gangs learn pro-gang attitudes from their peers and that these attitudes direct them to join gangs (Sommer, 2001).

I want my gang because y are my family now; whenever I felt disgusted, I have someone to talk too, and as we gather together, we do have lots of fun, so I stayed with them. (Participant 6)

Participant 7 stated:

It's really fun in the group wherever you are, you go with them, and then there's a lot of beautiful girls. I stayed longer in that group because it's nice and united, and if you gather together, the jamming between the group is so nice, like doing rapping and singing, so that's why I stayed long coz it's really fun (Ontario, 2018).

4.5. Theme 5: Family Responsibilities

A family is an assembly of people who have marital relations and blood related individuals living under the same roof. A group of many families living together is considered a society. In other words, the family is a cell of modern society. Each and every individual has the responsibility of building up the family in order to create a happy family. To achieve this happiness, the majority of the informants decided to leave the group and find a job to sustain and provide the basic needs of the family. The informants admitted

that when they had a baby, they religiously said educating their children was not an individual task. It must be done with both the parents, taking care and being treasured. When they are in the group, they don't care about their families, and eventually, they find their purpose, which is the family. They believe if they continue in gangs, the problems may arise because they believe that children are sensitive and always eager to learn new things from the world. Every little thing from the outer environment will affect their perspective, which decides the children's behavior when they grow up (Heimer, 1996).

As time passes by, we need to work for the future and then be good at school coz friends lead us to the wrong path; that's why I left the group and did well in my studies for a good future. I don't have planned to join the group again. I joined before because I'm curious, but now I think about my future and my upcoming family. (Participant 3)

The informant seems to be two distinct patterns of gang desistance. Some gang members suddenly leave the gang. One reason for the abrupt termination of gang activity may be exposure to violence long associated with ganging also because of family responsibilities of both members. The more kids are bound to their gangs, the more likely they will become crime victims.

The second pattern is a slow, gradual departure from gang membership precipitated by an ongoing change in lifestyle. This member leaves the gang because he gets married and begins spending more time with family and work than he does with the gang. Rather than an abrupt departure, desistance may be part of a slow maturation process in which the gang member turns emotionally from the gang toward conventional activity (Mak, 1991)

4.6. Theme 6: leaving in a Peaceful Life

The life changing moment of the informants is when they experience bad things while in the group. This includes arrest by a police officer for committing a crime and negative reputation and feedback in the community since they are involved in illegal acts. Also, their family is affected by what they have done. After this realization, they begin to pursue their studies, and some are looking for a job, even with a low salary, just to make their family proud. These experiences give their life a purpose and sense of direction.

I left the group because I realized that I don't have a good future if I will stay in the group. All we did is trouble and making petty crimes. With this, my parents called my attention and worried about my situation; that's why they call a help to my auntie if she can offer a free college education, and she did. (Participant 1)

Gang members leave the gang for a variety of reasons. Probably more members leave for positive reasons, related to the desire to conform to dominant societal expectations, than negative reasons like fear of getting caught or imprisonment. Most members probably leave for a combination of reasons: marriage, fatherhood, steady and satisfying employment, religious conversion, fear of imprisonment or return to prison or simply battle fatigue (Spergel, 1966).

5. Conclusion

Gangs offer a place for the youth to belong. As the number of broken families among the informants is increasing, gang membership is also increasing. The participants felt social protection as they had a place to call their own. It also gives them something to portray and be a part of. Without being accepted by anybody, you will feel left out and alone, and you won't have anybody to guide you or even help you make good quality decisions in life.

Former gang members must divulge themselves to work and their families because it is the only way for them to restrain themselves from going back to their old lives and focus on their life reformation.

Local government units (LGU's) must give support to the youth, not only the former gang members. It is essential that young people, in general, be provided with education and protection. Also, a series of youth reconciliation projects should be developed at the local region levels that will promote diversity among young people.

The community must create and sustain a collaborative process for working toward a community free of gang violence. This includes providing a clearinghouse for information on resources, strategies, services, best practices, and funding to prevent, intervene and suppress gang violence. Provide information and guidance to funding agencies, community departments and community groups that will help develop policies and programs to support the reduction of gang violence.

The increasing concern about gangs and how to respond to gangs, particularly when youth are involved, is relatively new. This should be given attention because these youth are vulnerable to committing crimes. As a consequence, community understanding of gangs is largely limited to media accounts of gang activities and the popularization of gangsta imagery in movies, television and music.

The parents must do their duties and responsibilities to avoid their children joining gangs; the suggestions include parents listening to their children because many youth turn to gangs because they don't think they can trust and confide in anyone else. Begin by building your relationship, communicating with positive responses, avoiding scare tactics, and finding ways to occupy your children's free time and spend time with them. These are only a few recommendations, so please don't ignore your children; instead, live a happy life.

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