

IDENTITY AND BELONGING


GANGS, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY:
PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

UNIVERSITY OF KENT
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Centre of Research
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(CORE-FP)





The UK Government has made tackling gangs a national issue. Fifty two areas in the UK are currently identified as Ending Gang and Youth Violence priority regions, which is an increase of 20 areas in 2 years. As issues of County lines, which involve gangs travelling from large urban areas to smaller locations such as rural or coastal towns, are highlighted, the problems associated with gangs are increasing beyond the predominant city streets into schools and local communities. A result of this relatively new gang activity is that young people across the country are now vulnerable to being recruited by gangs to assist in their illegal enterprises.

The purpose of our Identity and Belonging conference this year (2018), was to bring together key professionals and support workers who are in regular contact with young people who are vulnerable to being targeted by gangs. Personnel from schools, police, psychologists (educational and forensic), practitioners, youth workers and those who have first-hand experience of gang activity either as gang victims or as ex-gang members, all attended this thought-provoking event. Topics discussed included policy responses to gang activity, police responses to gang membership and youth recruited by gangs, the psychology of gang membership and the identified effects on the mental health of youth involved in gangs. In addition, workshop formats were used to enable delegates to discuss current challenges to protecting young people from gang involvement and to provide their own thought-provoking insights into their personal experiences of gang membership. It was a day, that we believe, provided delegates with a better understanding of what motivates young people to become involved with gangs and some of the practices employed by other agencies to protect young people from the influence of gangs.

-Professor Jane Wood

ANONYMOUS DELEGATE TAKE AWAYS...

"THE CONFERENCE WAS VERY INFORMATIVE, WELL PLANNED AND THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF SPEAKERS WAS OUTSTANDING."

"I FEEL THAT I HAVE COME OUT OF THIS CONFERENCE WITH A MUCH BETTER UNDERSTANDING ON GANGS AND HOW TO SUPPORT THOSE INVOLVED IN GANGS."

"I'LL SPEND MORE TIME LISTENING TO THE KIDS I WORK WITH REGARDING THEIR ISSUES AND CIRCUMSTANCES. "

"I HAVE ALREADY SPOKEN TO A SCHOOL REGARDING TRAUMA FOCUSED GROUP INTERVENTION TO SUPPORT THE CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS FOLLOWING CSE EXPERIENCES. "

NICK WILKINSON

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL



Nick Wilkinson is the Kent County Council Prevent and Channel Strategic Manager. He was the chair of the Kent Criminal Justice Board from 2013 to 2016, chair of the Kent Out of Court Scrutiny Board, chair of the Kent Channel Panel and chair of Kent Safeguarding Children's and Adults' Risks, Threats and Vulnerabilities sub group. He is the lead officer for Prevent for KCC and has delivered Prevent training to over 10,000 professionals. He retired as an Assistant Chief Constable with Sussex Police in 2012. Nick was a member of the ACPO Children and Young Persons Group and ACPO Drugs Committee. He is a Fellow of the Chartered Management Institute and chair of governors at a large East Sussex primary school.

KENT & MEDWAY GANGS STRATEGY

The Kent & Medway Gangs Strategy is a dynamic document developed in 2017-2018 which outlines where we are now, where we want to be, how we are going to get there, and finally a multi-agency action plan. The action plan includes foundational information, such as how many/what kind of gangs are in Kent & Medway and what support services are available. The multi-agency action plan will be monitored and delivered by the Risks, Threats and Vulnerabilities Group.

This does not replace single-agency strategies, policies or action plans to deal with gangs. Nick says, "Our vision is to protect and prevent young people from becoming involved with gangs; to tackle gang-related harm and youth violence; and to pursue effective enforcement action to deal with those embroiled in gang activities."

NICK'S 5 KEY POINTS

1. We have established & mandated the need for multi-agency strategy
2. This strategy has been developed
3. The strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive action plan
4. The strategy provides a springboard for on the ground impact
5. Take home question: Who is your gangs lead and how do you receive updated information?

**"CHILDREN ARE THE
LIVING MESSAGE THAT
WE SEND TO A TIME
WE WILL NOT SEE"**

NICK WILKINSON

MARK PEARSON

EXCELSIOR SAFEGUARDING

Excelsior Safeguarding



Mark is CEO of Excelsior Safeguarding, a 'not for profit' organisation established to provide effective help and support to vulnerable young people and adults affected by group violence, drugs and other forms of exploitation. He previously served with Kent Police for 30 years; the last 5 years of service he was the Lead Police Officer on the integrated services Margate Task Force. He has advised government ministers, think tanks and director generals and successfully project managed a Department for Communities and Local Government funded initiative to drive innovation around gangs, drugs and exploitation.

NEIGHBOURHOOD RESPONSIBILITY PANELS

At-risk youth experience multiple levels of deprivation within the four pillars of justice (criminal justice, safeguarding, social justice, health justice). Neighbourhood Responsibility Panels (NRPs) are dynamic 'one stop' early intervention assessments that address Social Justice and Community Justice aspects.

Related to NRPs are the Family Support Panels (FSPs) which have been validated in research conducted by forensic psychologists at the University of Kent. FSPs place youth and their caregivers in front of a semicircle of support services for a confidential 50 minute session that consists of: 5 minute CBT assessment of emotions; 15 minute assessment of problems/causes; 20 minutes collaborating on joint action plan.

The 4 core components of FSPs are:

1. Declaration of support from those involved on the panel
2. Education about grooming methods, recruitment tactics, substance misuse & mental health advice
3. "Youth offer"
4. Positive future contracts between agencies, youth & caregivers

AUDIENCE Q&A

Q: "Why a semi-circle format?"

A: The semi-circle implies working WITH the individual. We encourage you to experiment with different formats to find what works best for you.

Q: "Do the panels have a risk of causing harm?" (i.e. agencies/services fall through, set children up to fail)

A: There is a danger due to under resourcing, which is very frustrating, so we need to think carefully about how we implement FSP to ensure there is a long term support.

Q: "What challenges do you face around data sharing in this model?"

A: Data sharing is critical; Thanet has created a new data sharing protocol to enable sharing to happen more effectively; cloud based systems may be the best option for confidential case notes/restricting access to enable effective information sharing

STEPHANIE WADDELL

THE EI FOUNDATION

Stephanie Waddell is a senior policy & practice adviser at the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), where she is leading work to look at the role of early intervention in preventing gang involvement & youth violence. She is also the policy & practice lead for EIF's work on social and emotional learning and the role of schools in early intervention. Before joining EIF in 2015, Stephanie spent over ten years in the Home Office & Ministry of Justice in a range of policy & project delivery roles concerned with preventing crime and violence, most recently as lead policy advisor for the government's ending gang and youth violence programme.

RESPONDING TO RISK: EARLY INTERVENTION TO PREVENT GANG INVOLVEMENT

Qualitative research conducted in South London schools indicates that many interventions currently being offered are not evidence based or consistent. There is a pressure on schools to educate about gangs and violence, but there are inadequate resources for teaching of skills that we know are useful for intervention. We already know the established risk and protective factors for gang involvement in youth, yet we are not adequately incorporating that knowledge into new programs. As Stephanie explains: "we don't need to reinvent the wheel."



EARLY
INTERVENTION
FOUNDATION

EIF advocates for evidence-based policy and decision-making that focuses on what we already know about protective and risk factors. EIF evaluates the strength of intervention programs with a defined framework and a very high bar for what constitutes "evidence-based". EIF offer a guidebook of evidence-based programme evaluations sorted by programme outcome, age groups, settings, etc.

STEPHANIE'S 5 KEY POINTS

- 1.** We know a lot about risk factors/effective responses; we don't need to fund new approaches
- 2.** SEL provision in schools is vital; need incentive and support
- 3.** Gap between what we know works and what is actually being delivered
- 4.** Gov't funders should be more strategic with investing in scaling up educational psychologist provisions
- 5.** Action to support vulnerable children needs to be coordinated at national AND local levels

JANE WOOD

UNIVERSITY OF KENT

When Professor Wood started her research, gangs were not viewed as a problem within prisons or UK communities. Now, 100+ years of research into background risk factors has culminated in an international definition of gangs (Weerman et al., 2009, p. 20):

- Involvement peaks at age 13-15, mostly males, increasing female membership
- Committed gang members and fringe gang members who drift in and out
- Engagement in excessive, disproportionate, and contagious violence
- Most victims of gang violence are gang members themselves



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GANG MEMBERSHIP

Do we need a psychology of gang membership?

Gang youth come from a variety of backgrounds, and we know their behaviour improves after leaving the gang. Psychological characteristics of gang members can be changed with appropriate intervention.

Do gang members differ in the way they think and feel? Why?

Gang members show high moral disengagement, displacement of responsibility, & hostile rumination, as well as high psychological distress, poor emotional well-being, & low emotional intelligence. Gang members value personal status, reputation, & group dominance. This is likely related to a number of group processes and influences.

Do those associated with a gang have poor mental health?

Research conducted in Kent schools shows gang youth are more depressed and are more likely to be exposed to violence than non-gang affiliated youth. In adulthood, gang members are more likely to experience severe mental illness than non-gang members, even those who are offenders.

JANE'S 5 KEY POINTS

1. Be wary of stereotypes
2. The more involved someone is with gangs, the more vulnerable they are to severe mental illness
3. The more involved someone is with gangs, the more likely they are to abandon prosocial groups
4. Members value status and reputation & may respond with hostility if they feel disrespected
5. Gang members do have morals, but they can morally disengage

SAMMY WOODHOUSE

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Sammy is a Rotherham abuse scandal victim and is now an upcoming author, public speaker, campaigner, fundraiser & consultant in training throughout the UK. As an award winning campaigner, Sammy has championed for improvements around counselling services, better national funding, mandatory education, licensing policies and Sammy's Law. As a campaigner she is trying to generate awareness for Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and make changes at a national level.



SAMMY'S STORY

In July 2013, Sammy contacted Andrew Norfolk at The Times newspaper and handed over evidence that proved she had been a victim of abuse and had been failed by local authorities. Police judged her for "making a lifestyle choice" and failed to recognise her as a victim.

Her story was published, naming the man that abused her, Hussain and the deputy leader of Rotherham council in August 2013. This triggered the Alexis Jay report, which exposed 1,400 children being abused and failed in Rotherham. A police investigation (Operation Clover & Operation Stovewood) was also launched into her abuse and into all non-recent child abuse cases in South Yorkshire making it the biggest investigation in the UK.

In February 2016, after Sammy's evidence was heard in court, Hussain was found guilty and sentenced to 35 years in prison alongside 5 others, for a total of 102 years. Four trials in total under Operation Clover & Thunder, 21 survivors, 20 criminals and a total sentencing of 290 years 6 months.

AUDIENCE Q&A

Q: "What could have been done to intervene?"

A: "There's a lot that could have been done, but one important part is education on grooming, basic respect for the self and others; encouraging others to come forward"

Q: "What could professionals do to counter the stages where the victim is caught up in the positive experiences with the abuser?"

A: Inconsistencies in social support allow victims to fall through the cracks; children involved in CSE may not know what CSE is or that they're involved in it, so calmness, support & accessible language are important,

UNDERSTANDING GANGS & CSE: EDUCATION NOT SEGREGATION

MATT TATE & KENDRA HOUSEMAN
HARTSDOWN ACADEMY

Matthew Tate is Headteacher at Hartsdown Academy. Matthew has a track record of school improvement working in the Senior Leadership teams of several schools in challenging circumstances. He believes that an excellent education is a matter of justice and that working as a group, schools can ensure that all children, whatever their circumstances, can achieve.

Kendra Houseman has been involved with gangs, exploitation and CSE for over 26 years. A complicated background and living in an inner-city estate in South West London are just some of the factors that led her to make life changing choices from the age of 11. Currently, her work focuses on preventing what happened to her from happening to other children.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Hartsdown Academy seeks to create a gang-proof culture through their policy of no permanent exclusion. By keeping students out of pupil referral units (PRUs) and in mainstream education, they aim to give students aspiration for the future.

Keeping gang-affiliated students in class and out of PRUs allows Hartsdown Academy to provide at risk youth with mentoring & safeguarding, while also educating professionals, parents/carers about the dangers of gangs.

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE

Gang affiliated youth have developed a language through the production of mainstream drill/grime music which is prevalent in East Kent. Learning the language is key for communicating. Here are some key terms you may have heard:

Zoot (join), **fam** (family), **dip dip** (stab), **bredrin** (friends), **sket** (slag), **endz** (home, place you represent), **OP's** (opposition), **trappin** (involved in drugs/guns), **lending out** (giving a girl/boy to another group to prove their dominance), **shotting** (dealing drugs)

IS IT HOPELESS?

The workshop highlighted that structural changes are needed to address the culture of silence around gangs and grooming. Matthew and Kendra emphasised that this is not an individual problem; it's a **structural** problem. Glasgow has seen huge reductions in gang involvement since beginning to treat this issue as a structural health issue rather than an individual crime issue.

Matthew and Kendra also emphasised that we need to accept that there is a problem because CSE thrives in silence. Cross agency work is needed in order to effect legislative changes.

LEAP: CONFRONTING CONFLICT

GABIN SINCLAIR-CONSTANCE, AHMED MOALLIM,
& KENT EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Gabin has been developing youth engagement initiatives for more than 20 years. As the founder and Managing Director of a youth music charity in East London, Gabin has extensive experience of designing programmes for young people at risk of offending or exclusion. Gabin continues to find satisfaction in developing innovative ways to help young people reach their potential and continues to learn how best to encourage youth creativity and responsibility.

Ahmed is a well recognised youth-work practitioner who has been delivering emotional intelligence and conflict management training to young people and adults across the UK. Ahmed has delivered countless programmes for Leap and is also a facilitator on the Addressing Sexual Bullying Across Europe project. He is deeply committed to creating, and sustaining, positive change in the lives of young people through innovative engagement methods.

Leap adopts game based interventions to create sustainable change in youth. They work within 4 ecosystems (care, support state, community, schools) and address the entire organisation instead of training just a handful of individuals. They aim to create a support network within each group. Training consists of 2 meetings a week over the course of 6-14 weeks in which individuals reflect back on their experiences and emotional intelligence in a therapeutic setting. Training is asset based and encourages individuals to identify their skills (e.g., selling drugs is a business, so you have entrepreneurial skills).

Leap uses the term "friendship group" to refer to gangs. Youth identify the pros of being in their "friendship group" and cannot see those positive options anywhere else in their lives. Interventions like these aim to make it easier **not** to be in a gang.

GROUP ACTIVITY

In this group activity, the facilitator read four statements about youth gang involvement and participants positioned themselves around the room to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement. On the following page, you will find each statement and some key points raised during the debrief discussion that identified a variety of perspectives on each topic.

"Issues affecting young people today are the same issues which have always affected young people"

Agree: "Human nature doesn't change"; the context changes because what counts as a criminal offence changes over time. Children face the same issues, we just talk about them more and deal with them differently now than how we have in the past.

Disagree: "Things are different now" (e.g., peer pressure & social media); "parents change in their perception of the world" (i.e., perception of less safety, therefore children aren't allowed to take risks, so youth take higher risks when they have the opportunity); cultural differences; disintegration of stable family structures

Uncertain: It's both, fundamentally adolescents are adolescents, but contexts have changed

"Young people autonomously choose to be involved in gangs or organised crime"

Agree: Youth experience a pressure to be involved in crime and desire to feel a sense of belonging, so children make choices that align with those experiences.

Disagree: "It's easier to collude than to challenge." There is always a context and interplay of complex factors: saying a child chooses to do something has certain implications, do they actually have the agency to choose? The word "autonomously" is an issue.

Uncertain: "Do young people from privilege make an autonomous choice to get involved in crime?" How do they differ from youth with an underprivileged background? Thinking about them without autonomy removes their individual identity. Children make choices from a position of ambivalence; the positive outcomes are more salient than the negative because of social pressures.

"Schools are not responsible for addressing gang involvement and violence"

Agree: Outside intervention is important because the teachers interact with the students every day and eventually lose their impact

Disagree: Everyone is responsible for addressing gang involvement. A lot of gang activity starts in school; therefore, schools need to support students' emotional wellbeing. Children also spend a majority of their time in school, so it is the best place to start.

Uncertain: Everyone is responsible, including the children themselves. There's a lot of pressure on the schools with limited staff and resources. Schools have an OPPORTUNITY rather than a responsibility for addressing gang involvement and violence.

"The pros of being in a gang outweigh the cons"

Agree: Gangs offer something more attractive than what many youth have in their lives currently.

No disagree/uncertain comments were made.

FEATURED POSTERS

Emotional traits of street gang members in prison

Jaimee Mallion & Jane Wood

Good Lives Model and street gang membership amongst students

Jaimee Mallion & Jane Wood

Through the trauma lens: A systematic review of the role of trauma exposure in the development of internalizing and externalizing symptoms in at-risk and gang-involved males

Hayley Beresford & Jane Wood

A social psychology framework of gang membership: An explorative study

Katarina Mozova & Jane Wood

Exploration of group processes in gang members with focus on activities

Katarina Mozova & Jane Wood

Gang membership, mental-ill health, victimisation and violence: A systematic review

Sarah Osman & Jane Wood

Attitudes towards sexual assault in women affiliated with gangs

Eibhlín Looney & Mark James

The variable gang member model

Mark James & Jane Wood





CLOSING Q&A

Q: "What small steps can we take to work better with other services in this time of fragmentation and under-resourcing?"

A: Do not think that professionals are becoming territorial over the children, and attend multi-agency meetings. It's a question of resources & funding, so re-thinking the distribution of funding. Maintain courage & honesty

Q: "Can we develop a toolkit at identifying and preventing gangs? Any evidence-based programmes to assist practitioners when dealing with sexually exploited children?"

A: Kendra from Hartsdown developed a toolkit for identifying which she will share with everyone after the conference.

Q: "How do the classic psychology studies of belonging/group identity fit with the current understanding on gang culture?"

A: Gang membership is not qualitatively different from classic social identity studies. There is a lot of work coming from the US specifically on social identity theory with gang members.

Q: "Is the link between mental health and gang involvement correlational or causal?"

A: It is correlational, but we suspect a causal relationship; currently putting together a bid to fund research to identify the causal role of gang membership and mental illness.

Q: "How can we use lessons from Rotherham to educate the sentences in the court system to understand more about exploitation?"

A: The court system is a bit too late in the process, we need to be concerned with early intervention; challenge whether we should be putting victimised (child) perpetrators into the criminal justice system.

Q: "What is the exit strategy [for gang involved youth]?"

A: In London, you can be moved out of the area after presenting yourself to the authorities; this type of system is not in place in Kent. Many exit strategies don't work long term because of the sense of belonging in the peer network supplied by gangs, and we need to provide alternatives rather than just an exit strategy (this is why Leap works with the whole group, not just the individual)

Q: "How do you identify gang members/at risk youth?" (in reference to conducting research)

A1: Avoid the word "gang"; five criteria about group existence and crime to avoid stereotyping; Eurogang definition

A2: "The reality is, you have to ask them if they're in a gang, because there's no way to tell and every student is at risk."

Q: "Are there any studies into adult offenders in gangs? There's a push from the crown court to get info on this."

A: We don't know what works to reduce recidivism in adult gang members, but there are many of interventions being implemented (i.e. Identity Matters, but that's just a one-to-one intervention with self-identified members)

Q: "How can Leap get involved in the Thanet area?"

A: Rather than bringing in an external organisation, we recommend sharing best practice by learning about what Leap does effectively and applying it to Thanet. We don't need to do the work together, just help each other.

Q: "What research has been done on Leap's efficacy?"

A: Leap does way more than just gang-related work, but there is a lot of separation between the workers inside the school and the charities. We are currently doing impact research.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

RELEVANT RESEARCH

Alleyne, E., & Wood, J. L. (2014). Gang involvement: Social and environmental factors. *Crime & Delinquency*, 60, 547-568. doi: 10.1177/0011128711398029

Alleyne, E., & Wood, J. L. (2010). Gang involvement: Psychological and behavioural characteristics of gang members, peripheral youth and non-gang youth, *Aggressive Behavior*, 36, 423-436. doi: 10.1002/ab.20360

Wood, J. L., & Alleyne, E. (2010) Street gang theory and research: Where are we now and where do we go from here? Special Issue: Group Processes and Aggression, Gannon, T.A. and Wood J.L., (Eds) *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, p. 100 – 111. doi: 10.1016/j.avb.2009.08.005

Wood, J. L., Alleyne, E., & Beresford, H. (2016). Deterring gangs: Criminal justice approaches and psychological influences. In M.K. Miller & B. Bornstein (Eds.), *Advances in psychology and law*.

Osman, S. & Wood, J. L. (2018). Gang membership, Mental Illness, and Negative Emotionality: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*. doi: 10.1080/14999013.2018.1468366

EXTERNAL LINKS

[Kent and Medway Gang Strategy](#)

[Just A Child: Britain's Biggest Child Abuse Scandal Exposed, Sammy Woodhouse \(2018\)](#)

[Early Intervention Foundation](#)

[Excelsior Safeguarding](#)

[LEAP: Confronting Conflict](#)