

Influencing Developmental Pathways:
A Church-Based Prevention Program of Youth Gang Involvement in Large U.S. Cities

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Abstract

Youth gang involvement and resulting engagement in delinquent acts is a widespread societal problem in large cities across America, which affects the lives and well-being of hundreds of people every day. There are two main approaches to understanding the factors or causes behind this involvement. The risk-protective model holds that behavior is the result of the sum total of influences that risk factors have on increasing the likelihood of the behavior and protective factors have on decreasing the likelihood of the behavior. A number of risk factors exist for youth gang involvement, with the principal domains being individual, family, community, peer, and neighborhood. Of these, parenting practices in the family factor domain are of particular importance and influence for youth gang involvement. The developmental cascade model affirms the importance of parenting in the presence or absence of cascading effects in a child's life. The formation of internalizing and externalizing problems seems to be the earliest indicator of cascading effects towards gang involvement, according to this model. Little that is being done currently is resulting in any significant change in the prevalence or the impact of youth gangs in their communities. A church-based prevention program is proposed to begin to help meet this need, and future directions for research and prevention are discussed.

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While the presence of youth gangs throughout the United States (U.S.) may not be felt directly by the majority of Americans, the societal impact of youth gang involvement often costs whole communities of uninvolved, innocent individuals aspects of quality of life, social order, and neighborhood cohesion (National Gang Center, n.d.; Romero, Richards, Harrison, Garbarino, & Mozley, 2015). Yet, there exists a wealth of research surrounding the topic that is capable of equipping motivated individuals with the knowledge needed to make meaningful change in their communities against this social phenomenon. With the appropriate training and the necessary tools, local church members can be a catalyst for change in communities exposed to high numbers of risk factors for youth gang involvement. Nothing says deterrence like prevention, and with the help of a church-based prevention program, community members can begin to make significant strides in reducing youth gang involvement throughout the U.S.

Terms

In order to avoid labelling a person as the behavior they are engaging in, the terms used in this thesis to refer to those engaging in delinquent acts or involved in gangs were chosen carefully. The terms “child or adolescent” and “youth” refer to individuals under the age of 18 years old, in preference over the term “juvenile” so as to avoid any legal or judicial connotations. The term “potential” refers to the likelihood of an individual engaging in a particular behavior, and is used in preference over the terms “propensity” or “predisposition” so as to avoid giving the impression of biological destiny or fate. “Gang” or “youth gang” refers to a group of youths who collectively identify themselves

by adopting a group identity, involving a name and/or symbols, and whose purpose is to engage in criminal or delinquent activity. This definition is based off of the federal definition of “gang” used by the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement (National Institute of Justice, NIJ, 2011). The terms “delinquent act” or “delinquency involvement” refer to any illegal act that is committed by an individual under the age of 18. In the name of avoiding labels and stigmatization, the term “juvenile delinquent” is not used in this thesis.

Youth Gang Violence as a Social Problem

Estimating the Prevalence of the Problem

Approximately 30,700 youth gangs operate in the United States as of 2012, representing about 35% of all gang members in the U.S., according to the National Gang Center’s (NGC, n.d.) analysis of their 1996-2012 National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS). This number is the highest it has been since 1996, when there were an estimated 30,800 youth gangs in the U.S. Approximately 41.6% of these 30,700 gangs (12,771) were primarily located in large city urban environments, with approximately 25.8% hailing from suburban counties, 27.1% from smaller cities, and 5.5% from rural counties (NGC, n.d.). In 2012, there were an estimated 850,000 youth gang members in the U.S., up 8.6% from the previous year (NGC, n.d.). Although urban environments account for only 40.6% of all youth gangs, a strong majority of youth gang members are located in larger cities (57.3%), indicating the presence of larger gangs in big cities than in small cities or suburban counties. This phenomenon was also represented by the estimated number of gang members by area type analysis, which found that nearly one in five (19%) larger cities reported a youth gang member presence of over 1,000, in contrast to roughly one in

ten (10.4%) suburban counties (NGC, n.d.). Almost half of all larger cities (49%) reported between 101 and 1,000 youth gang members in 2012 (NGC, n.d.).

According to the School Crime Supplement portion of the National Crime Victimization Survey conducted in 2015, 15% of urban students aged 12-18, 10% of suburban students, and 4% of rural students reported that gangs were present at their schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Additionally, the presence of gangs was reported by a higher percentage of students attending public schools (11%) than students attending private schools (2%). Black (17%) or Hispanic (15%) students were more likely to report the presence of gangs at school than White (7%) or Asian (4%) students. An estimated 10% of public schools reported the presence of gangs or gang activities during the 2015-2016 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

According to data from the NYGS, the total number of gang-related homicides reached 2,363 in 2012, up 23.6% from 2011 (NGC, n.d.). The number of youth gang homicides in cities with populations over 100,000 was 1,587 in 2012, up a staggering 35.1% from the previous year (NGC, n.d.). Approximately 67.2% of all youth gang-related homicides occurred in large cities in 2012— a stark difference from the next closest contributor: suburban counties at 17.3% of all gang-related homicides (NGC, n.d.). Interestingly, Chicago and Los Angeles, both large cities marked by rampant gang problems, accounted for approximately one in four of all gang homicides nation-wide from 2011 to 2012. Further, nearly half of all homicides on average in both of these cities were gang-related (NGC, n.d.).

Pyrooz (2012) found that gangs were responsible for approximately 20% of all homicides in the 88 largest U.S. cities between 2002 and 2006. In later research, he estimated that approximately 1,059,000 youths between the ages of 5 and 17 were members of gangs in the U.S. in 2010 (Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015). The NYGS gave a lower estimate of 756,000 youth gang members for the same year (NGC, n.d.). This discrepancy can likely be attributed to the difference in definitions of both “youth” and “youth gang” between the researchers. Pyrooz and Sweeten (2015) estimated the overall prevalence of youth gang membership to be 2% in 2010, with the highest prevalence of gang membership (5%) in youths aged 14. In a similar study, McDaniel (2012) estimated 7% of high-risk youths from an urban public school district to be affiliated with gangs.

The Importance of Addressing Youth Gang Involvement

The prevalence of youth gangs in large cities poses a great deal of concern to those interested in the quality of life of all those living in said cities because of the ways that gangs, youth gangs or otherwise, can impact life, both on an individual and on a community scale (McDaniel, 2012; Melde & Esbensen, 2012; Puntteney, 2016). At first blush, the significance of gang presences in large cities is clear: 653 people died by homicide in Chicago in 2017 alone (Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI, 2017). The NGC estimated that approximately half of all homicides in Chicago are gang-related (NGC, n.d.). By this estimation, in 2017 approximately 326 people died in gang-related homicides in Chicago. However, the impact of gangs on their respective environments does not stop at the annual homicide count, or even the annual violent crime or property crime statistics. When it comes to youth gangs, the involvement of a youth in a gang during this key period of development (e.g., childhood or adolescence) may have both

present and lasting implications that span well beyond the period of active involvement (Dong & Krohn, 2016; Gilman, Hill, & Hawkins, 2014; McDaniel, 2012; Melde & Esbensen, 2012; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003).

Research suggests that being presently involved or affiliated with a gang as a youth is positively correlated with engagement in delinquent behavior, to include frequent underage drinking, frequent illicit drug use, and violent or antisocial behavior (Higginson et al., 2018; McDaniel, 2012; Melde & Esbensen, 2012). Involvement in a youth gang may serve to facilitate delinquent behavior (Thornberry et al., 2003). The strong and positive relationship between youth gang affiliation and delinquent behavior is well-established in the literature, and is considered one of the most consistent findings in this topic (McDaniel, 2012, Melde & Esbensen, 2012; Thornberry et al., 2003).

Thornberry et al. (2003) noted that although male youth gang members' likelihood and rates of engagement in delinquent behavior, violence, and drug using and selling increased when involved in the gang, all these decreased again upon exiting the gang, with the exception of drug selling. This suggests that the relationship between gang involvement and delinquency may be largely tied to when the youth is actively involved, and not after the youth leaves the gang or ceases association (Thornberry et al., 2003).

However, it would be incorrect to assume that past involvement in a youth gang has no lasting consequences in the life of an individual. Engaging in delinquent acts, violent behavior, and drug using and/or selling has the potential to interrupt what Thornberry et al. (2003) referred to as "developmental transitions," or key processes in adolescents' lives in which they change from youths to adults (p. 164). Those who, during childhood or adolescence, use drugs or are engaged in other delinquent behavior

are more likely to drop out of school, become pregnant or impregnate someone else, and be unemployed during early adulthood (Caspi, Wright, Moffit, & Silva, 1998; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Gilman et al., 2014; Kaplan & Liu, 1994; Smith, 1997; Thornberry et al., 2003).

Another less studied area of the long-term developmental consequences of youth gang membership is associated with the impact that engaging in delinquent behavior can have on a youth's social networks. Namely, such behavior may result in exclusion from conventional social networks, including prosocial friends, teachers, or family members (Thornberry et al., 2003). Involvement in delinquency may also increase the likelihood of associating with deviant peers, which is to be expected if the youth in question is primarily engaging in delinquency as a result of associating with gang members, or operating as a gang member himself (Thornberry et al., 2003). The road, it seems, goes both ways when it comes to the causes and effects of gang membership or association and delinquency.

Thornberry et al. (2003) distinguished this perspective as an added effect on the likelihood of an adolescent experiencing disorderly or inappropriate transitions to adulthood, independent of the effect that an involvement in delinquency was previously noted to have. In other words, while an adolescent who uses drugs separate from any affiliation with gangs is at an increased risk for disorderly and disruptive transitions that may result in a series of cascading effects throughout adulthood, an adolescent who uses drugs and is currently associated with a gang (i.e., a deviant social network) is at an even higher risk for those same disorderly transitions. This proposition is strongly supported by Thornberry et al.'s (2003) own research, in which they concluded that "being a

member of a gang increases the likelihood that youths will experience off-time and unsuccessful transitions” (p. 179).

It seems that being a gang member for a period of time, particularly in adolescence, does not result in life-long repercussions through the direct involvement in delinquency or other illegal behavior throughout the lifetime. Rather, it would be more appropriate to state that gang affiliation or involvement, particularly during adolescence, is related to engagement in delinquency during the time the adolescent is involved in the youth gang, which is in turn related to the failing or missed-timing of key developmental transitions to adulthood (Dong & Krohn, 2016; Krohn, Ward, Thornberry, Lizotte, & Chu, 2011; Thornberry et al., 2003). These, subsequently, can lead to a cascading series of difficulties, such as a “dysfunctional family life, unstable employment, and, in some cases, continued involvement in criminal activity” (Gilman et al., 2014; Thornberry et al., 2003, p. 180).

Being involved in a gang only serves to perpetuate the problem further, by contributing to disorder, dysfunction, and delinquency, through the process of failed or off-time developmental transitions to adulthood that influence not only the current generation but also future generations in cascading ways (Krohn et al., 2011; Thornberry et al., 2003). In summary, involvement in delinquency, particularly when in the context of a gang, affects a child’s transition to adulthood and the likelihood of experiencing disorderly transitions (failure to complete developmental tasks [e.g., high school dropout], out-of-sequence transitions [e.g., children before marriage], or wrong-time transitions [e.g., teenage pregnancy]), which in turn will likely affect future social class, employment, or criminality (Thornberry et al., 2003). It is also worth noting that, in

general, those who were more involved in gangs, or spent longer periods of time as members of youth gangs, are expected to experience more problematic disorderly transitions than those who were only members or affiliates for a short period of time (Thornberry et al., 2003).

Therefore, not only can the presence of gangs in a community affect, if only indirectly, the ability of a child to cope with his or her environment, and to successfully internalize and externalize appropriately, but also the inability of a child to cope with his or her environment, or to successfully internalize and externalize, can affect the presence or absence of gangs in that child's future community (by the involvement or non-involvement of that child in a gang; Krohn et al., 2011; Thornberry et al., 2003). The problem of youth gangs in America's largest cities today ought to be a concern for all Americans because, by its very nature, it is a self-replicating problem with no end in sight. No current strategies are serving to effectively reduce or reverse gang violence across the United States, as illustrated by the consistently increasing rates of gang problems reported in all 50 states (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, OJJDP, 2010). Local police in cities such as Chicago are overwhelmed by the volume of violence and disorder created by gangs every year. To illustrate this, in 2017, the Chicago Police Department had a homicide clearance rate of only 18.48%, meaning that less than one in five homicide cases in Chicago in 2017 were solved (Chicago Police Department, 2018). By the NGC's (n.d.) estimation, approximately half of those homicides were linked to gang violence.

In order to interrupt this cycle of violence, a focused attempt must be made to prevent, instead of respond to, gang violence—especially youth gang violence. Loeber,

Slot, van der Laan, and Hoeve (2008) found that a small number of children and adolescents are responsible for a disproportionate amount of all delinquent acts in the U.S. Therefore, the reduction of delinquency by these children would likely result in a significant decrease in youth delinquency overall, including the delinquency tied to youth gang involvement. They concluded: “the prevention of child delinquency is one of the best ways to reduce serious and violent offences for years to come” (Loeber, Slot, van der Laan, et al., 2008, p. 8). If any progress is to be made in decreasing the rates of violence perpetrated by gangs in the U.S., the origins of the problem must be traced to their beginning: childhood gangs and what causes them.

Theoretical Approaches to Addressing Youth Gang Involvement

Many models exist through which one can approach the topic of what actually causes youth involvement in gangs. Of these, two are considered here: the risk-protective model (Farrington & Welsh, 2007) and the developmental cascade model (Moilanen, Shaw, & Maxwell, 2010). Youth gang involvement, according to both models, results from not a single factor, but a multitude of factors which ultimately influence the likelihood of gang involvement in a variety of overlapping, multi-directional, cascading ways (Farrington & Welsh, 2007; Moilanen et al., 2010; Slobogin & Fondacaro, 2011). Human behavior is infinitely complex, and the preceding factors that influence human potential are similarly complex. No one factor, nor set of factors, will accurately describe the potential for a single behavior. Although these models provide a framework for understanding the potential of any individual for being involved with a youth gang, it should be remembered that these models are not exhaustive, nor do they describe the potential of every individual.

The risk-protective model. The risk-protective model of behavior proposes that a variety of factors play a role in the likelihood that an individual will engage in a certain behavior. Risk factors, in this context, refer to any factor which increases the likelihood of a youth engaging in antisocial or law-breaking behavior (Howell, Lipsey, & Wilson, 2014). Protective factors refer to any factor that decreases that same likelihood. Protective factors may operate in one of two ways. They may decrease the likelihood of antisocial behavior directly, by insulating youths from risk factors, or they may decrease criminal potential indirectly, through helping youths overcome risk factors that they already face (Howell et al., 2014).

The risk factor model is helpful in identifying at-risk youth, or those who are experiencing a higher-than-average number of risk factors for later serious offending. The risk factor model is also useful for developing interventions aimed at one or more factors, with the goal of reducing risk and increasing protection so that the likelihood that an individual or a group of individuals will engage in antisocial or law-breaking behavior in the future decreases. This model provides meaningful information about target groups of individuals, and provides aide in developing intervention or prevention strategies that should have a positive impact (Lipsey & Derzon, 1999).

Risk factors and protective factors are sometimes seen to be opposite extremes of the same spectrum. Namely, while low intelligence is consistently seen in the research as a risk factor for antisocial behavior, high intelligence is seen as a protective factor (Lösel & Bender, 2004). However, risk factors and protective factors rarely act in meaningful ways alone. Instead of a single protective factor buffering an individual from a specific delinquent trajectory, protective factors function together in complex, multivariate ways

to decrease a youth's potential for antisocial or delinquent behavior or involvement in youth gangs (Howell et al., 2014; Lösel & Bender, 2004; Slobogin & Fondacaro, 2011). Further, youth exposed to multiple risk factors are much more likely to engage in the behavior, whether it is simple delinquent involvement, or youth gang association (Hill, Howell, Hawkins, & Battin-Pearson, 1999; Lösel & Bender, 2004). The same holds true for protective factors, and research suggests that the more protective factors present in a youth's life, the better his or her chances are of desistance from delinquency involvement (Howell et al., 2014).

Risk and protective factors are typically divided into five primary domains: individual, family, peer, school, and community (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). Of course, factors from multiple domains may interact with each other to influence behavior, but separating them into independent domains helps to categorize them for domain-focused prevention or intervention measures.

Individual factors. The first domain of risk and protective factors to address is those factors experienced on the individual scale. This domain includes such risk factors as substance use or abuse, low intelligence, low empathy, impulsiveness, internalizing problems, violent victimization, mental health disorders, prenatal exposure to toxins, pregnancy/birth complications, and executive functioning deficits (Farrington & Welsh, 2007; Hussong, Curran, Moffitt, Caspi, & Carrig, 2004; Lipsey & Derzon, 1999; Loeber, Slot, & Southamer-Loeber, 2008; Raine, 2013). In contrast to these risk factors are a number of individual protective factors, including high academic achievement, high self-esteem, substance abuse treatment, positive attitudes toward family and school, and low impulsivity/hyperactivity (Howell et al., 2014).

Although individual factors can be targeted for interventions, it is generally more difficult to effect lasting change for this domain of factors because many of these factors are primarily biologically based (Raine, 2013). However, there is hope for youth with multiple risk factors in the individual domain. While intelligence, impulsivity, or early mental health problems cannot necessarily be changed through a targeted intervention, protective factors may be introduced to moderate or buffer the impact of those risk factors. For example, if provided appropriate mental health treatment, youth with mental health disorders will be more likely to desist from antisocial or law-breaking behavior (Howell et al., 2014).

Peer, school, and community factors. Although peer, school, and community factors differ in significant ways, they are grouped together for the purposes of this thesis to provide a clear distinction between their influence on youths and the influence of family factors. Peer, school, and community factors include all social factors that cannot be better understood in the context of the family. Risk factors in these domains include a negative school climate, peer substance use, antisocial peers, positive peer attitudes towards deviance, exposure to firearm violence, availability of drugs or firearms, low neighborhood attachment, and living in a disadvantaged neighborhood (Hawkins et al., 1999; Herrenkohl et al., 2000; Howell et al., 2014; Lipsey & Derzon, 1999). Protective factors include support and supervision by teachers, a positive school climate, clear classroom rules, non-deviant friends, involvement in religious groups, and a non-violent neighborhood (Howell et al., 2014).

Family factors. Although individual, school, peer, and community/neighborhood factors all play important roles in the development of a youth into the adult he or she will

be, no review of risk and protective factors is complete without discussing family factors. Family factors refer to any risk or protective factor which operates primarily within the family context, as opposed to the social (school, peer, community) or individual context. A long history of research on the risk-protective model has consistently concluded that family conditions, including large family size, poor parental supervision, or poor parenting skills, are strong predictors of youth delinquency or gang involvement (Farrington, 1995; Farrington & Welsh, 2007; Higginson et al., 2018; Howell et al., 2014; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Slobogin & Fondacaro, 2011; Utting, 2003). Higginson et al. (2018) reported that negative family environments were associated with nearly a doubled risk of youth gang involvement. Conversely, they found that positive family environments were associated with about a 25% reduction in the risk of youth gang involvement (Higginson et al., 2018).

Supporting this conclusion is the consistent finding in recent research that parenting practices, including parenting style, parental monitoring, and parental supervision, remains a key predictor of youth delinquency or gang involvement (Deutsch, Crockett, Wolff, & Russell, 2012; Farrington & Welsh, 2007; Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, Diaz, & Miller, 2000; Hoeve et al., 2009; Vuk, 2016; Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2003). In fact, Farrington and Welsh (2007) estimated that poor parental supervision alone typically predicts a doubled risk of youth delinquency involvement. Even after controlling for the mediating effect that parenting might play on peer behavior, parenting still predicted both youth gang involvement and youth gang delinquency (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2003).

Importantly, parenting styles appears to be linked with childhood internalizing and externalizing problems. Pardini, Fite, and Burke (2008) found that authoritarian, neglectful, or permissive parenting styles were positively linked with higher levels of externalizing problems amongst boys from childhood to adolescence, while authoritative-style parenting was negatively linked with the same. Sluis, van Steensel, and Bögels (2015) found that parenting styles which emphasized punishment and did not emphasize modeling or reassurance tended to be related to higher levels of internalizing problems in children. While the effect that parenting styles seems to have on externalizing and internalizing does not constitute a direct effect on youth gang membership, both externalizing and internalizing problems serve as risk factors for future youth gang involvement. Farrington (1995) noted that the parents of youths who were later convicted of delinquent acts during adolescence tended to be more authoritarian in their parenting style, more uninterested in their child's education, and less cooperative towards research presented on best parenting practices. Hoeve et al. (2008) found significant links between their three classifications of parenting styles and childhood delinquency trajectories, with parenting styles characterized by low levels of warmth and support, inadequate discipline techniques, and harsh punishment associated with serious delinquency trajectories. Finally, Vuk (2016) found a negative relationship between authoritative parenting and youth gang membership, and positive relationships between authoritarian, neglectful, and permissive parenting styles and youth gang membership, further strengthening the link in the literature between parenting style and youth gang membership, both directly and indirectly.

Family protective factors include parental education, good parental monitoring and supervision, parent management training, family models of constructive coping, positive parental attitudes toward child's education, good parental support, and low parental stress (Howell et al., 2014; Lenzi et al., 2014; McDaniel, 2012; Utting, 2003). Not surprisingly, as a result of the impact that parenting practices seems to have both directly and indirectly on a youth's likelihood of associating with a gang during childhood or adolescence, interventions that focus on parental education and parent management training seem to be the most effective in mediating, moderating, or eliminating key family risk factors (Farrington & Welsh, 2007; McDaniel, 2012).

Family factors as mediators or moderators of other risk factors. In addition to interacting with the likelihood that a youth will associate with gangs, family factors seem to play some role in risk factors presented by other domains as either a mediator or a moderator of that factor's effects. Mediators can be understood as causal links between a risk factor and its outcome. They serve to explain how the risk factor has its effect on the outcome (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). Moderators, in contrast, do not help to explain the causal link between a risk factor and an outcome, but do contribute to the strength or direction of that link (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). A number of studies suggest that family factors act as mediators or moderators in the main effects of several key risk factors (Devenish, Hooley, & Mellor, 2017; Dorius, Bahr, Hoffmann, & Harmon, 2004; Sampson & Laub, 1995; Utting, 2003; Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2004).

Curiously enough, in many of the instances where family factors mediated or moderated a particular risk factor, the specific family factor that seemed to have the largest impact was parenting practices (Bjørknes, Kjøbli, Manger, & Jakobsen, 2012;

Dorius et al., 2004; Devenish et al., 2017; Forehand, Lafko, Parent, & Burt, 2014; Lahey & Waldman, 2005). For example, Bøe et al. (2014) found that parenting practices and parental emotional well-being may mediate the relationship between low socioeconomic status (SES) and child mental health problems, including externalization and internalization problems. These results are supported by Farrington and Welsh's (2007) research, concluding that the effects of low SES may be mediated by family socialization practices.

Bjørknes et al. (2012) found that parenting practices “fully mediated” child conduct problems after a targeted intervention (p. 101). Parenting practices, in their study, functioned as a mediator in two independent ways: by reducing harsh maternal discipline, and by increasing the use of positive parenting methods (Bjørknes et al., 2012). Some studies focused on the type of parenting style, whether authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, or neglectful. Research by Dorius et al. (2004) revealed a moderating effect of authoritative parenting in peer pressure to use drugs. In other words, parenting, when authoritative, moderated the relationship between peers and adolescent marijuana use. Those children with authoritative parents were less likely to engage in drug use after being exposed to peer pressure to do so. Additionally, a meta-analysis performed by Devenish et al. (2017) found that parenting practices, in addition to parental depression, conflict between parents, and adolescent resilience, mediated the relationship between several significant risk factors, including economic stress, chaos in the home, and violence in the community, and negative adolescent developmental outcomes, such as increased rates of externalizing behaviors, conduct problems, or adolescent depression.

The term “parenting practices” does not only refer to parenting style, as is demonstrated by Sampson and Laub (1995) in their research. They found that the consistent use of discipline and good parental monitoring, in addition to good attachment to both family and school, mediated the effects of many individual factors, such as low SES or low IQ future childhood delinquency (Sampson & Laub, 1995). Utting (2003) agreed more generally: “There is a persuasive case, on the available evidence, for regarding parent-child relationships as the mediator between a range of risk factors and children’s social (or antisocial) behaviour [sic]” (p. 256). Yet another study found that three out of the four parenting variables studied were found to moderate the relationship between youth gang involvement and problem behavior, indicating that the impact of the family does not end when gang affiliation begins (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2003). Lahey and Waldman (2005) painted a more complex picture of childhood conduct problems and parenting practices. They hypothesized that, although adaptive parenting moderates the likelihood that cognitively and temperamentally predisposed children will develop conduct problems in the future, the sorts of behaviors that children with a potential for developing conduct problems tend to display may evoke the kind of harsh, non-adaptive, inconsistent, and negative parenting behaviors that foster conduct problems (Lahey & Waldman, 2005).

Another study revealed that parental support for childhood fighting was not only directly associated with youth physical aggression but also moderated at least one risk factor for childhood violence (Farrell, Henry, Mays, & Schoeny, 2011). These moderating effects varied based on gender and decreased over time, suggesting that the

influence of parenting, at least for this relationship, was strongest when the children were youngest (Farrell et al., 2011).

Forehand et al.'s (2014) meta-analysis revealed that only 45% of included studies concluded that parenting served as a mediator in the relationship between behavioral parent training and child externalizing problems (Forehand et al., 2014). Yet, they noted that this disparity may be explained, at least in part, by the finding that some parenting behaviors, such as positive parenting, had more support in terms of mediation for those studies addressing at-risk children (prevention studies) as opposed to those studies addressing clinic-referred children (intervention studies; Forehand et al., 2014). Additionally, the researchers found more support for parenting as a mediator for younger children (under 10 years old). These results suggest that parenting practices may be most effective as mediators when the child is young and potential behavioral problems have not yet occurred.

Limitations of the risk-protective model. Though helpful, the risk-protective model is not without limitations. Perhaps its greatest weakness is the difficulty in determining which factors are truly causes of behavior, and which are only correlates (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). Three criteria are needed to establish if a given factor meets the threshold for causality: temporal precedence, covariation, and the elimination of alternative explanations (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). If the risk factor in question does not precede the behavioral outcome in the child's life, then the risk factor cannot be the cause of the behavior. For example, if a child does not live in a neighborhood with a high rate of violence until after he or she begins acting out in conduct-related behavioral problems, living in the neighborhood could not have caused those exact behavioral

problems. Covariation refers to the presence of the behavior in the presence of the preceding risk factor, and the absence of the behavior in the absence of the preceding risk factor. For example, in order to say that bad parenting practices causes mental health problems in children, mental health problems would have to be present always, or almost always, when bad parenting practices are present, and never, or almost never, when good parenting practices are present.

The most difficult step of establishing causality is the sufficient elimination of any possible alternative explanation for the behavior observed (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). For example, perhaps children from low SES families frequently or almost always experience high rates of conduct problems. It cannot be concluded that low SES causes conduct problems without ensuring that no other variable or factor could have caused the conduct problems instead, such as parenting, biological/temperamental potential, victimization, or mental health problems. One of the only ways to eliminate this possibility is to perform an experiment with random assignment of “treatment” (such as good parenting practices training) and control (no treatment) conditions (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). By using random sampling to obtain a representative sample of the target population, and by randomly assigning participants to treatment conditions, the researcher can effectively control for many potential third variables, or variables that are the ones truly responsible for the change in behavior.

However, this type of control is rarely possible in developmental or criminological studies, because it is either impossible or unethical to randomly assign conditions like low SES or conduct problem potential to research participants (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). The best way to solve this problem is to conduct a quasi-experimental,

within-individual study that follows participants during a period of time and measures individual scores taken before an event to those taken after (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). This type of study controls for many potential confounding variables by comparing individuals only to themselves (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). Many times, it may be helpful to conduct an additional between-individuals analysis, not to establish causality, but to ensure the same relationships could be seen between the variables of interest.

A second concern about risk factors involves scope limitations in the predictive potential of a single risk factor. In essence, no single risk factor, or risk factor domain, will ever sufficiently predict a behavior, much less the complex individual and contextual phenomenon of adolescent criminality or gang involvement (Catalano et al., 2005; Farrington & Welsh, 2007; Howell et al., 2014; Slobogin & Fondacaro, 2011). Further, there is no list of risk factors, however short or long, that comprehensively describes the onset of any particular behavior, such as youth gang involvement (Howell et al., 2014). Although in concept, the risk-protective model is relatively straightforward, in practice it is an undeniably complex and irreparably limited model that only begins to adequately describe what goes into the involvement of an adolescent in a gang. Studies such as Lahey and Waldman's (2005), which found complex and multidirectional causes and effects with regards to parenting behaviors and child conduct problems, imply the presence of many interrelated, complex, and cascading factors that, only together, paint the picture of an outcome behavior. This begs the presence of an additional model to help explain how all these factors fit together and interact in order to accurately predict behavior, and no such model serves this purpose better than the developmental cascade model.

The developmental cascade model. The developmental cascade model emphasizes the cascading nature of factors that together make up the cause of any particular behavior (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010). According to this model, symptoms of problem behavior in one domain, such as externalizing problems, can negatively influence the functioning of other domains, such as parenting practices, and which, in turn, may increase the risk of the first problem behavior occurring again, and potentially other, new problem behaviors as well, such as internalizing problems (Moilanen, Shaw, & Maxwell, 2010). Though there is no current study examining youth gang involvement from a developmental cascade perspective, the developmental cascade model can provide a helpful framework to understand the many complex risk factors that play a role in a youth's involvement in a gang, many of which begin at their most basic level with internalizing or externalizing problems.

Internalizing and externalizing problems have been discussed, but no satisfactory explanation has yet been given for their nature and impact in the context of this thesis. Externalizing problems can be understood as negative behaviors that are directed outwards. They can be seen in externalizing types of disorders, such as oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) or conduct disorder (CD; Moilanen et al., 2010). Externalizing problems refer to how an individual processes and copes with negative thought processes and energy, and does not necessarily include the behaviors associated with externalizing problems. It is more appropriate to refer to such behaviors as symptoms of externalizing problems. Externalizing symptoms include inattention, impulsivity, aggression, and hostility (Moilanen et al., 2010). Conversely, internalizing problems refer to negative behaviors that are directed inwards. Internalizing types of disorders include depression,

anxiety, or eating disorders, among others. Internalizing symptoms include withdrawal, passivity, substance abuse, and self-harm (non-suicidal self-injury).

To better explain the developmental cascade model as it particularly relates to externalizing, internalizing, and academic competence, Moilanen et al. (2010) proposed three hypotheses: the adjustment erosion hypothesis, the academic incompetence hypothesis, and the shared risk hypothesis. Each of these hypotheses will be discussed here because, while they do not directly deal with a youth's potential for involvement in gangs, they address behaviors which do, such as academic competence or internalizing symptoms.

Adjustment erosion hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, initial internalizing or externalizing problems result in later academic difficulties (such as disinterest in school, low academic achievement, or rejection by prosocial peers and subsequent acceptance by antisocial peers) and increase the child's vulnerability to maladaptive experiences in other domains, such as conduct problems. The importance of being academically competent in terms of the potential for future delinquent or gang involvement is highlighted by Thornberry et al.'s (2003) work on key developmental transitions to adulthood. Not only do initial internalizing or externalizing symptoms affect a youth's criminal potential through the likelihood that youths experiencing internalizing or externalizing problems will be rejected by their prosocial peers and accepted by antisocial or deviant peers, but so too do they affect a youth's criminal potential through the likelihood that that youth will experience academic failure, whether as a result of dropout or expulsion, which constitutes a key failed transition to adulthood (Moilanen et al., 2010; Thornberry et al., 2003).

Further, initial externalizing may lead to subsequent internalizing problems (Moilanen et al., 2010). Moilanen et al. (2010) gives an example of how this might play out through the impact of the family: “difficulties associated with externalizing problems... may increase the likelihood of poor family or peer relationships, both of which may contribute directly to heightened anxiety and lower self-worth,” (p. 636). Anxiety and low self-worth are two examples of internalizing symptoms. This relationship can operate the other way, too, in which initial internalizing problems may result in subsequent externalizing problems (Wang, Williams, Shahaian, & Harrison, 2018). Moilanen et al. (2010) suggested that this relationship occurs in one of two ways. First, a child may attempt to mask what they are feeling internally by acting out externally (Carlson & Cantwell, 1980; Oland & Shaw, 2005). Second, children who experience internalizing problems are more likely to be isolated or withdrawn, which increases the likelihood that they will befriend or be befriended by antisocial or deviant peers who will model and reinforce externalizing symptoms such as aggression or antisocial activities (Moilanen et al., 2010; Oland & Shaw, 2005)

Academic incompetence hypothesis. The second of Moilanen et al.’s (2010) hypotheses to account for the cascading effects seen in the context of young boys is essentially the opposite of what the adjustment erosion hypothesis posits. Instead of initial internalizing or externalizing problems contributing to the development of later academic difficulties, this hypothesis suggests that it is initial academic failures that contribute to the subsequent development of internalizing or externalizing problems (Moilanen et al, 2010). There are a series of mechanisms which facilitate this effect, such as deviant peer association, through which academic incompetence may lead to

externalizing problems (Moilanen et al., 2010). The importance of this hypothesis in terms of a youth's involvement in gangs is illustrated by desistance from delinquent behavior following improvements in school performance (Thornberry et al., 2003). Though this hypothesis does not hold true in all cases, it is an important one in understanding the link between academic failures and future internalizing/externalizing problems, which may in turn lead to problems in other domains, just as the adjustment erosion hypothesis expects as well (Moilanen et al., 2010).

Shared risk hypothesis. Finally, the shared risk hypothesis suggests that cascading effects may not be a product of either internalizing/externalizing problems or of academic incompetence, but rather may be a product of third variable factors, such as low intelligence, poor parenting, or neighborhood adversity (Moilanen et al., 2010). Such factors may span many domains, and may disrupt healthy adjustment in many domains (Moilanen et al., 2010). Of particular note is the joint association between both academic incompetence and internalizing or externalizing problems held by poor or ineffective parenting (Bayer, Sanson, & Hemphill, 2006; Moilanen et al., 2010). Although the shared risk hypothesis was not strongly supported by Moilanen et al.'s own research, there is something to be said for this association and its place in cascading effects (Thornberry et al., 2003).

The developmental impact of family. A number of studies lend weight to the significance of the family in cascading effects on youth internalizing and externalizing problems—both key factors in a youth's potential involvement in gangs or delinquency (Bailey, Hill, Oesterle, & Hawkins, 2009; Bayer et al., 2006; Carlson & Cantwell, 1980; Dishion et al., 2014; Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991; Dodge & Pettit,

2003; Joussemet, Koestner, Lekes, & Landry, 2005; Supplee, Unikel, & Shaw, 2007).

These studies have found links between family influences and internalizing or externalizing problems either directly (Bayer et al., 2006; Supplee, Unikel, & Shaw, 2007; van der Sluis, van Steensel, & Bögels, 2015; Wang et al., 2018) or indirectly (Bornstein, Hahn, & Suwalsky, 2013; Dishion et al., 2014; Dishion et al., 1991; Dodge & Pettit, 2003; Kimonis, Frick, & McMahon, 2014). If childhood internalizing and externalizing problems can be prevented, and if academic commitment can be encouraged, the odds are good that a child will not go on to experience mistimed or inappropriate transitions, develop behavioral or conduct problems, or go on to become involved in either youth gangs or delinquency (Bornstein et al., 2013; Dishion, Véronneau, & Myers, 2010; Moilanen et al., 2010; Thornberry et al., 2003). Again, just as with family risk factors, the focal point of research significance appears to be centered on parenting practices, which includes parenting styles and parenting monitoring or supervision (Dishion et al., 2014; Forgatch & Kjøbli, 2016; Kazdin, 2010; Pinquart, 2017; Shaw, Gilliom, Ingoldsby, & Nagin, 2003; Turner & Sanders, 2006). This phenomenon suggests an important opportunity for prevention or intervention efforts that are aimed at helping parents develop more effective, more positive, and less harsh parenting skills (Kimonis et al., 2014).

Gender, Ethnicity, and Culture

No discussion of the factors and reasons explaining a youth's involvement in gangs is truly complete without a comment on the impact that gender, ethnicity, and culture can have. Risk factors for future delinquency involvement tend to be applicable for most individuals, despite gender, race, or culture (Bui, Farrington, Ueda, & Hill,

2013; Fagan, Van Horn, Hawkins, & Arthur, 2007; Howell et al., 2014; Maldonado-Molina, Piquero, Jennings, Bird, & Canino, 2009). However, some significant discrepancies exist. Regarding gender, an important difference between risk factors for boy versus girls is sexual assault victimization, which is an important risk factor for most youths (Howell et al., 2014). Namely, girls are 10 times more likely to experience sexual assault than boys, putting them at an increased risk for delinquency involvement based on this factor alone (Howell et al., 2014). However, boys report both being victims of violent acts more frequently and being more affected by those acts in terms of developmental impact than girls (Fagan et al., 2007). Parental practices seem to be more predictive of future delinquent involvement for girls than for boys (Howell et al., 2014). Cutrín, Gómez-Fraguela, and Sobral (2017) found significant gender differences in the direct effects of family support on nonviolent antisocial behavior. Further, girls may differ in terms of offender type, with an overall lack of life-course persistent female offenders, or those who engage in chronic and stable offending throughout their lifetime and usually beginning in adolescence (Krupa & Childs, 2014). While this type of criminal engagement is frequently seen in boys and men, the presence of life-course offending in girls and women appears markedly absent (Krupa & Childs, 2014). These findings certainly play an important role in determining the appropriate prevention or intervention measures for girls.

Race, ethnicity, and culture all play major roles in how different factors or problem behaviors affect individuals. This influence is particularly true in the domain of family factors, including parenting practices. Parenting remains one of the more culturally-bound influences on an individual's life, and it would be a mistake to assume

that all parents (a) parent in the same types of ways, and (b) those types of parenting have the same types of effects on children, regardless of ethnicity or culture (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001). For example, African American parents' use of physical discipline seems to have a different effect on their children than European American parents' use of physical discipline has on theirs (Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1996; Lansford, Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2004). Specifically, it seems that while European American parents' use of physical discipline typically results in significantly higher rates of child externalization problems, the same sort of discipline used by African American parents tends to result in lower rates of child externalization problems, at least for adolescents (Deater-Deckard et al., 1996; Lansford et al., 2004). This finding might be explained by how the children view physical discipline (e.g., either as an out-of-control parent's potentially threatening actions for European Americans, or as a painful but understandable practice undertaken with the child's best interests at heart, for African Americans; Lansford et al., 2004). This interpretation is supported by findings of less discrepancy between the two cultures when the children studied are younger (Lansford et al., 2004).

The importance of ethnicity and culture is further illustrated by the finding that the effects that parenting practices have on child externalizing and internalizing problems may also be moderated by the effects of socially demanding kin relations in African American households, with increased parental control/monitoring resulting in increased child internalizing problems only when demanding kin relations were present, and resulting in decreased internalizing when demanding kin relations were absent (Taylor, Lopez, Budescu, & McGill, 2012). In this context, socially demanding kin relations can

be understood as a form of negative social exchange, which may result in “interference/demands, insensitivity, criticism/ridicule, hostility/impatience, and negative social control” (Taylor et al., 2012, p. 475).

Along the same lines, parental control and/or monitoring seems to play an even bigger role amongst African American families than families from European cultures in preventing delinquency (Deutsch, Crockett, Wolff, & Russell, 2012; Lopez-Tamayo et al., 2016; Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001). Culturally-targeted interventions intended to improve parental control in order to reduce behavior problems in African American youth have had positive results (Caldwell et al., 2010). Interestingly, while parental control seems to have a particularly important role among African American families, self-control as a means of preventing conduct problems, delinquent involvement, or gang association seems to be less important for African American youths than it appears to be for other cultures, including other minority cultures (Baek, Nicholson, & Higgins, 2018; Fix, Clifford, & Burkhart, 2018).

Cultural and ethnic differences are not limited to African American families, however. Several key studies suggest important cultural and ethnic effects on a child or adolescent’s potential for engaging in delinquent behavior or becoming involved in a gang, either directly or indirectly, through factors such as internalizing or externalizing problems (Baek et al., 2018; Bao, Haas, & Tao, 2016; Garduno & Brancale, 2017; Jiang & Peguero, 2016; Reingle, Wesley, & Maldonado-Molina, 2011). For example, select risk factors, such as level of acculturation or presence of depression, play significant roles in predicting violence in Hispanic adolescents, more so than they play in other cultures (Garduno & Brancale, 2017; Reingle et al., 2011). Some risk factors may be present for

some cultures or ethnicities but not for others. Amongst Native American adolescents, self-control seems to play a large role in predicting future delinquent involvement—a stark contrast to African American adolescents (Baek et al., 2018). It is also important to recognize the role that racial discrimination may play in adolescent pathways to delinquency or gang involvement. There are some endemic factors, such as racial discrimination, that may affect certain youths more than others (Unnever, Cullen, & Barnes, 2016).

Yet, the factors and effects discussed apply to adolescents across America, despite culture, ethnicity, and gender. However, it is important not to underestimate the effect that culture, ethnicity, and gender may play in an individual's life, particularly when addressing a diverse population such as the children living in large U.S. cities.

The Potential Role of the Church

Before discussing what the local Christian church can do in their respective communities to address and hopefully prevent youth gang involvement in their cities, one should ask the question: why the church? Youth gangs and delinquent acts are typically understood as a law enforcement, or at least a government, problem. However, in order to make any significant progress in reducing youth gang involvement in large cities, a number of social institutions need to get involved, including schools, community organizations, and religious institutions (Howell et al., 2014; Sampson & Laub, 1995). What is currently being done to respond to youth gangs is not working (Howell et al., 2014). In cities like Chicago, law enforcement simply cannot keep up with responding to gang violence, much less preventing it (Main, 2018). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) agreed that law enforcement is not the solution to youth gangs in

America (2018). In fact, many government agencies are now beginning to encourage community involvement and incorporate evidence-based, comprehensive strategies into their programs (CDC, 2018; NGC, n.d.; youth.gov, n.d.). For two programs—the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders and the Community Reclamation Project—the involvement of local faith communities in the prevention efforts of government officials served as key factors in the programs’ success (Howell & Curry, 2009).

The church has an influence, and there is a need for the church to get involved in their own communities, but the ultimate reason why the church should care about youth gang involvement is that local churches have a responsibility outlined in Scripture to seek the welfare of their communities, and to care for the fatherless and those living in poverty. Key passages in the Bible highlight this responsibility, such as James 1:27, which says: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (English Standard Version, ESV). Just as God is the Father of the fatherless (Psalm 68:5), so the church ought to care for those who cannot properly care for themselves (Psalm 82:3; Jeremiah 22:3). As the exiles of Israel in Babylon were instructed by God to go and seek good in their city (Jeremiah 29:4-5, 7), so Christians in their own cities should be active participants in pursuing their city’s good (Piper, 2012). Isaiah 1:17 summed up well the responsibility of the Christian, and by extension the local church: “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (ESV).

Suggestions for the Local Church

Early prevention refers to intervention measures taken before early adolescence in a child's life, and before the child begins associating with gangs or engages in his or her first delinquent act (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). Available research suggests that early prevention is superior to all other types of intervention in terms of reducing the target behavior, in this case, gang involvement (Farrington & Welsh, 2007; Greenwood, 2006; Herrenkohl et al., 2000; Howell et al., 2014; Loeber, Slot, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2008; Turner & Sanders, 2006). Further, because a small number of youth make up for a large percentage of all youth crime, a focused approach targeting youth exposed to high numbers of risk factors, such as youth in large, urban communities, will likely be the most effective at reducing youth crime in the years to come (Loeber, Slot, van der Laan, et al., 2008).

Thus, in order to prevent the youth in their community from becoming involved in gangs, local churches in target areas ought to initiate a parenting mentorship/training program, so that church members equipped with the necessary training, resources, and knowledge can meet one-on-one with parents in the area for the purpose of (a) educating them regarding their child's potential involvement with youth gangs, (b) educating them regarding the influence they as parents have, and (c) empowering them with the tools they need to use parental best practices to prevent their children from entering into a life of gang involvement and crime. The hinge-point of this program is the willingness of the parents to listen, learn, and potentially change, and the willingness of church members to be sent out to their community to serve in this way.

Nearly all the research addressed in the earlier pages of this thesis have pointed towards the importance of the family in a child's involvement in or desistance from gangs, either directly or indirectly, through a series of cascading effects that typically seem to begin with internalizing or externalizing problems. If the local church can be effectively equipped to engage their community with resources and training to help parents parent better, they may very well begin their own series of cascading effects that have potential to positively impact not only the current generation's children, but also many future generations to come. Additionally, previous research suggests that the impact of an involved church in a community may go beyond improving parenting skills, but that children may receive direct benefits from involvement in church activities, such as positive peer networks, social support, higher self-esteem, and better emotional regulation (Crosby III & Smith, 2016; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006; Smith & Crosby III, 2016).

Given the importance of beginning prevention efforts early, parents with children of all ages up through 18 years old would be admitted into the program, but parents with children under the age of 10, including pregnant moms with no other children, should be strongly encouraged to participate in this mentorship program. Church members willing to be mentors would receive the appropriate and necessary training in good parenting practices, including positive parenting style, good parental supervision, and healthy parental control. Already-existing programs such as the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) or Parent Management Training–Oregon Model (PMTO) can provide a helpful and evidence-based starting place for churches looking for training material (Dishion, Forgatch, Chamberlain, & Pelham III, 2016; Turner & Sanders, 2006). These programs

provide the necessary tools to train both the volunteers and, through the volunteers, the participating parents. Mentors and mentees, through this program, would meet regularly at convenient times and in appropriate places to discuss parenting strategies, common developmental issues or milestones, and any questions or concerns that the parents might encounter. The logistics of this program would vary church by church and neighborhood by neighborhood, depending on the resources available to them and the specifics of the need in their community. Where the need is high and resources are limited, the financial or material support of larger, higher SES churches may need to be sought.

One of the advantages of implementing a youth gang involvement prevention program through the local church is that not only is there a Christian church in almost every community in America, with some exceptions, but the church is comprised of individuals from the community. Thus, when sending volunteers out to do the program work, there is minimal interference from outside influences such as individuals from separate communities, especially higher SES communities or government agencies, which could be poorly received. Externally-driven programs often fail because the target community is not engaged and therefore does not accept the efforts of perceived outsiders (Gomby, 2007; Record et al., 2015). Educating and thereby empowering local churches to implement this program in their own communities increases the likelihood of program success because of the elimination of this concern. Further, if the individuals ministered to through this program become Christians through the process, they now have access to the local church and can, when appropriate, begin to be involved in the process of prevention themselves. This results in a self-sustaining program, with the possibility for growth to neighboring communities through neighboring churches.

This type of family-focused and community-driven prevention program is supported by a number of researchers and government entities, both of which are capable of providing a great number of resources to parents wanting to develop or improve parenting skills (CDC, 2018; Dishion et al., 2016; Farrington & Welsh, 2007; Forgatch, Patterson, & Gewirtz, 2013; Herrenkohl et al., 2000; Howell et al., 2014; Lahey & Waldman, 2005; McDaniel, 2012; Thornberry et al., 2003; Turner & Sanders, 2006; OJJDP, 2010). Parents play an important role in a child's life, and this program gives local churches the opportunity to empower their community members with the knowledge and skills to effectively parent, despite facing a wide range of stressors such as poverty, mental health problems, or unemployment. Given the need seen in the amount of gang violence occurring in large cities all around America, the abundance of research supporting programs like these, and the local church's clear responsibility to be involved in their communities, the church ought to act whenever and wherever possible, for both the material and spiritual well-being of the children and parents in their communities.

Future Directions

A social problem as complex and dynamic as youth gang involvement in large cities can be addressed only through a comprehensive, holistic, and evidence-based prevention/intervention plan. Although the proposed program is a step in the right direction, it cannot be the only step in the direction of preventing youth gang involvement. There are many other ways, for example, that the local church can get involved (e.g., providing mentorship for youth in the community). Organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of America can provide peer mentorship, but there seems to be

a place for responsible adult mentorship for youth exposed to multiple risk factors—particularly for children in single-parent families (McCarthy & Hutz, 2006). However, responsibility does not stop with the local church. As Howell et al. (2014), the CDC (2018), the NGC (n.d.), and the OJJDP (2010) have all repeatedly stated, if youth gang association is to be reduced to any great extent, the entire community must get involved. Everyone, from schools to private sector businesses, and from local law enforcement to federal agencies must become active participants in the attempt to make a difference for children in large cities all around the U.S.

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