

2023

Gang Diversion Programs in The Success of Reducing Youth Gang Membership

Francis Songtiib Laari
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Francis Songtiib Laari

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Gang Diversion Programs in The Success of Reducing Youth Gang Membership

By

Francis Songtiib Laari

MA, Walden University 2020

MA, Liberty University 2015

BS, Westwood College, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in the Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
Law and Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

February 2023

Abstract

The rate of youth involvement in gang membership and crime has become a problem in Fairfax County, Virginia. It has increased violent crimes, drug trade, and incarceration rates for youths and decreased child school graduation rates. Youth gang membership is a significant public issue with broad mental and psychological implications for the child, family, and community because of the potential to commit a crime. Early exposure to gangs and violent neighborhoods can profoundly and negatively impact the residents. Researchers have explored why many children join gangs, but none have examined gang diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership. In this study, the perceptions and experiences of nine participants from the Northern Virginia Regional Gang Task Force (NVRGTF) staff, including administrators and collaborating partners were explored. The data collected were coded and thematized using Braun and Clarke's 2006 thematic approach. The results showed that gang prevention or diversion programs need improvement to meet the needs of the youth. Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory was used to explain the outcomes of a child's negative or positive social bonding to the family or community. A qualitative methodology was used to gain an understanding of how gang prevention or diversion programs could help youth stay away from gang involvement. One gang member in the community is too many due to the potential to commit a crime. A better understanding of how the programs work and the knowledge gained would help policymakers improve the programs and reduce youth gang membership.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late Dad, Chamba Chantug Laari, who spoke wisdom to me and said, "Do not let anything hold you back from your life journey." Due to this encouragement, I never allowed adversities to be my common excuse not to do the right thing. It increased the resiliency that led me to this graduation.

To my late father-in-law and mother-in-law, Noble Sir Gabrielle Louis Ihieje Opiepe and Mrs. Catherine Nneba Etu-Opiepe. I have never met them, but they are my home. The last time I spoke with my father-in-law on the phone before he passed away, he said, "Take care of your wife, count on me even if you cannot count on anybody in my family for support." His word of encouragement bore fruits in my relationship with my wife. It has also given me the confidence that helped me invest my time in this program.

To my older brother Sampson Kombert and my sister-in-law Bernice Opiepe, Sampson is always proud of me and what I do. It motivates me to do better. Bernice positively connected to my wife. It helped enhance my relationship with my wife, which led to the motivation and resiliency that I showed throughout my dissertation journey.

And to all my children, I am trusting that this will motivate you and increase your faith in God to believe that God is always there to bring kind people to help you through your educational endeavors, even if I am not there to support you.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge my faculty members and family, who have made my dissertation journey possible. My Chair, Dr. Mike Klemp-North. Dr. Mike has not only helped me overcome my writing style but also has been a superb chair and mentor who always guides, directs, and encourages staying motivated. My Chair member, Dr. Carolyn Dennis, for being a superb chair member for creating engaging questions and prompting me to rethink my research arguments and research directions. My research reviewer, Dr. Elish Lane. I would not have been proud of my dissertation without Dr. Lane. Dr. Lane did not only help me develop a new lens of connecting dots in the dissertation but also helped me be sensitive about the wordings, terms, and their sounds and flow in a paragraph.

Lastly, I would acknowledge my wife, Mrs. Comfort Laari. Comfort's continued support to the family made a lot of difference in how I achieved my dissertation goals.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Gang prevention and diversion programs are community tools to manage youth advancing into gang territory. The courts created diversion programs to divert offenders and nonoffenders from the justice system (Ntuli, 2017). According to Seroczynski et al. (2016), diversion or prevention programs use literature and mentoring services to enhance moral development in the community among youth and help promote their positive change. The increase in gang membership and violence has created many questions about the program's success in reducing youth gang membership and crime in Fairfax County, Virginia (Wilson et al., 2018). Wilson et al. (2018) affirmed that the increase in youth gang membership and crime does not reflect positive social change, including opportunities for a young child to build a positive relationship with the community and family.

This qualitative exploratory research is critical because of the widespread of youth gang membership, violence, and murder cases in the United States. The increase in child gang membership, violence, killings, high school dropouts, and incarceration rate shows a gap in the literature about the success of diversion programs in reducing youth gang membership. Exploring the success of diversion programs may be useful to policymakers in creating reforms of the program to reflect on its vision to reduce youth gang membership and crime in the community.

Background

Youth gang membership in the community is a severe public threat that includes the risk of selling drugs on the street, committing crimes, violence, and associated murders (Breen et al., 2018; Masho et al., 2016). According to Prinz and Ehmann (2019), the most vulnerable group of gang membership recruitment because they have low monetary motives and do not resist authority. Children with gang affiliation are subject to police scrutiny and legal penalties when involved in crime (Monterosso, 2018).

A diversion program becomes the first option when children engage in gang criminal activities in the community (Gwatimba & Raselekoane, 2018). The Juvenile Justice System (JJS) recommends diversion programs in cities with elevated gang activities and gang-related crimes or communities most likely to start or participate in gang activities or violence (Cheng, 2017; Forster et al., 2015). In Virginia, Fairfax County was one of the target cities benefiting from gang prevention or diversion programs due to the growing negative gang impact on children.

While diversion programs are designed to promote positive social relationships among youth, parents, and the community to fight against child deviance, gang involvement crime rates remain a concern in Fairfax County (Radic, 2016; Kilkelly et al., 2011). It increases the rate of high school dropouts and youth incarceration (Gilman, 2017).

According to the literature that I reviewed, possible factors include employment, lack of quality education and housing, illegal immigration, low-income family setting, broken families, the lure of quick money, drug trafficking, family influence, and peer

pressure. None of the literature that I reviewed included examination of the Northern Virginia Regional Gang Task Force (NVRGTF) diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime in Fairfax County. I have bridged this gap by exploring a sample of the NVRGTF staff, including administrators, and collaborating partners. Policymakers can use the results from this study to improve the programs and reduce youth gang membership and crime in the community. The dissertation is critical because I explored the success of diversion programs in reducing youth gang membership and crime.

Problem Statement

Gang membership, associated killings, and murder have become a problem in most states in the United States (Breen et al., 2018; Masho et al., 2016). Kessler (2017) found that these problems were linked to MS-13 gangs in the state of Virginia, where eight murders were reported in Northern Virginia (Nova), and that about 2,000 MS-13 gang groups live in Fairfax County. As a result, the county encounters increased youth incarceration rates and lower high school graduation rates (Gilman, 2017). Youth gang involvement, crime, and violence in the community have a physical and psychological impact on residents (Turner et al., 2018; Navarro et al., 2019). Youth gang membership and crime also affect the community's infrastructure, including commutes, schools, and businesses (Burley, 2018). Many factors contributing to gang membership, killings, or associated murders include lack of employment, quality education, and housing, illegal immigration, low-income family settings, broken families, the lure of quick money, drug trafficking, family influence, and peer pressure (Breen et al., 2018; Masho et al., 2016).

Kessler (2017). The literature that I reviewed included discussions about racism, poor parenting, and poverty (Garduno & Brancale, 2017; Jagers et al., 2017; Wu & Pyrooz, 2016). None of the literature reviewed examined the Northern Virginia Regional Gang Task Force (NVRGTF) diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime in Fairfax County. I bridged this gap by exploring the perceptions and experiences of nine participants from the NVRGTF staff, including administrators, and collaborating partners. I employed qualitative methodology to gain an understanding of how gang prevention or diversion programs could help youth stay away from gang involvement. The results will help policymakers improve the programs and reduce youth gang membership and crime.

Purpose of the Study

I conducted this qualitative study to understand the success of diversion programs in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community. The gang diversion program's primary purpose is to promote a positive lifestyle for the youth and help them overcome their family, school, peer, and workplace problems (Radic, 2016). Early exposure to gangs and violent neighborhoods can profoundly and negatively impact the residents (Burley, 2018). Youth gang membership is a significant public issue with broad mental and psychological implications for the child, family, and community because of the potential to commit a crime (Turner et al., 2019). Therefore, I explored the perceptions and experiences of nine participants from the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners. I employed qualitative methodology to gain an understanding of how gang prevention or diversion programs could help youth stay away

from gang involvement. Policymakers may use these results to improve the programs and help reduce youth gang membership and crime in the community.

Research Question

How can the members of NVRGTF measure the gang prevention or diversion programs' overall success regarding the prospects of reducing youth gang membership?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework for this study was Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory (SBT). Hirschi's theory states that youth participate in crime and delinquency when they develop a negative social relationship in the form of involvement, attachment, commitment, and belief (Koeppel et al., 2018). Hirschi's theory affirms that involvement refers to time spent in sports, educational activities, church, and community organizations. Hirschi (1969) demonstrated that attachment draws people to community, friends, and family. According to Koeppel et al. (2018), Hirschi's theory's principle of commitment refers to people's time and effort invested in school and having a better future. The theory reflects how people value and respect individual opinions, the law, and personal well-being.

Hirschi's SBT also refers to a person's ties to society or social groups (Wong, 2005). Hirschi's SBT is the most useful theory for promoting juveniles' avoidance of gang membership (Wong, 2005). The SBT premises asserts that youth are most likely to participate in crime and delinquency if they develop a weak social bond with their families (Quoquab et al., 2017). However, when children develop a definite social

relationship with their parents and community, they distance themselves from unethical behavior and gang activities (Koeppel & Chism, 2018).

Hirschi's SBT can strengthen certain activities and shape the prospects of reducing youth gang membership (Quoquab et al., 2017). Youth involvement in gangs depends on the type of activities involved and the persons associated with them (Donner et al., 2016). Quoquab et al. (2017) showed that youth-positive involvement in prevention or diversion programs in the community is critical for a child's success. In turn, the positive social bond reduces child gang membership (Donner et al., 2016; Pereira et al., 2016; Wong, 2005). Hirschi's SBT is used to understand how a child's positive social relationships with parents and friends can influence a child to build a common bond with their community and divert them from delinquency.

Hirschi's theory is significant because it accounts for youth attachment, commitment, and participation in a prosocial activity among a diverse demographic (Pereira et al., 2016). The SBT demonstrates the importance of youth and social ties relevant to this study's focus.

Nature of the study

I conducted this qualitative exploratory study to understand the diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime. I used face-to-face interviews, phone and Zoom interviews, and emails in which the participants answered the questions in the consent form and emailed them back with their personal or private email. I interviewed nine participants from the staff of the NVRGTF, including administrators and collaborating partners. I employed a qualitative case study design to

explore the perceptions and experiences of the participants recruited. This case study design also incorporates different research goals and results in adequate data collection and examination (Ridder, 2017). I used coding and a thematic assessment approach to examine patterns within the data (Rudestam & Newton, 2017). I found that a case study design can evaluate data, theory development, theory-building, and theory testing (Ridder, 2017). I used this design to gain in-depth knowledge of how the staff of the NVRGTF, including administrators and collaborating partners, perceive the diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community.

I applied Hirschi's SBT to understand child, parent, and community relationships. Hirschi's SBT is identified as the best approach to evaluate child relationships, attachments, or commitments with the community, family, and friends. Hirschi's SBT can be used to understand how children's positive social relationships with parents and friends can influence youth to build a common bond with their community. I ensured that ethical principles were followed in the data collection process. I helped participants understand and consent to the research process to ensure that they emerge protected from the entire experience (O'Sullivan, 2017). I fulfilled my duty to respect the rules and policies exercised by researchers (Abedini, 2016).

Definition of Terms

Evidence-Based Gang Programs: These are gang diversion or prevention programs that are tested and proven to work to enhance positive relationships among youth, parents, and the community to fight against child deviance (Kilkelly et al., 2011).

Gang Affiliation, Involvement, or Membership: This refers to gang desire for belonging, status, respect, or perceived protection while developing gang cohesiveness and team esteem rather than self-esteem and viewing themselves as unfair targets (Dong & Krohn, 2016)

Gang Conflicts and Crime: Refers to individual gangs fighting over their boundaries to enhance their monopoly power in the drug market and society by targeting the youth group of the population (Prinz & Ehrmann, 2019).

Gang Diversion Program: A gang diversion program is a formalized system of intervention among law enforcement, the state and young people, and their families aiming to divert children from gang affiliation, crime, and court (Kilkelly et al., 2011).

Gang Prevention and Intervention Programs: These are programs that help law enforcement officers, teachers, and clinicians provide and facilitate substance abuse awareness and prevention initiatives (Wong, 2016).

Jail Diversion Programs: These programs provide treatment for all offenders who deserve a second chance or do not deserve jail sentences to undergo six to eleven months of intensive therapy and be released to the community (Boutros et al., 2018).

Mental Health Diversion Program: This refers to programs designed to help offenders with mental health issues to receive hospital mental health competency discharge or help those sentenced to diversion rehabilitation (Guirese et al., 2019).

Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions should guide all research. A researcher's assumptions reveal their beliefs about what knowledge is and how knowledge is constructed. When

designing this study, I took the viewpoint that multiple realities exist, and that knowledge is subjective. This perspective is consistent with a qualitative research approach in which reality is interpreted by individual knowledge, is constructed, and the phenomenon of interest is explored in its natural setting. Based on these philosophical assumptions, a qualitative case study approach was selected as the most suitable research approach for answering the research question.

My study was also guided by several practical assumptions. I assumed that the reports from investigating the gang diversion programs would help in understanding the programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime. It was my belief that the diversion programs' success would help the vulnerable youth population who were most likely to be recruited by gang members to stay away from gang territory. I also assumed that participants from the NVRGTF staff would be honest with their responses and would be willing to participate in the interview without external or internal influence. I assumed that a purposeful sample of 10 to 15 NVRGTF staff would be a sufficient sample size.

I assumed that all participants would share experiences about gang diversion programs' impact on youth in Fairfax County. I also assumed that participants would not respond defensively to the interview questions if confronted with evidence of their own biases (Gilli et al., 2018). Besides this, I assumed that the participants would describe their experiences and perspectives precisely as they appear in natural setting (Ofonedu et al., 2013).

Scope and Delimitations

This study delimitation included all the boundaries of the Fairfax area that I intentionally included in the research. I focused on the geographical area of Fairfax County, Virginia, and residents in the Fairfax area. The delimitation of this study was that I restricted the study to the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners who work in the gang environment or are in connection with gangs in Fairfax area. This delimitation also indicated that I have excluded many cities in the Fairfax area by choosing Fairfax County as my primary targeted area for data collection. It indicates that residents living in these areas were eliminated since they could not take part in the research.

The participants of this research included the NVRGTF staff, its administrators and collaborating partners who work in connection with gangs in the Fairfax area. By selecting the people that work in gang environments in the Fairfax area, I excluded the residents in the Fairfax area who do not involve or work with gangs. This delimitation showed that I dismissed potential residents in the Fairfax area who could have been participants in the study.

Limitations

A limitation was the geographical locations where I conducted the research. Many counties in Virginia were impacted by gang membership and crime while they operated diversion or prevention programs simultaneously in their local communities. This situation limited my ability to generalize the research results in Fairfax County to the other counties with similar issues because; other jurisdictions may have policies that

could impact the study results if the study were conducted in those locations. This implies that during data collection I focused on the targeted organizations that supplied gang diversion or prevention services in Fairfax County.

Significance of the Study

I collected data from a sample of the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners. Policymakers and stakeholders may use the results of this study to understand the usefulness of gang diversion programs and implement policies to support their mission. Policies and procedures are organizational resources for addressing practices, tracking the progress of the business, safety, and fidelity (Havinga et al., 2021). When policies are implemented by policymakers, they can guide and enhance the practices of the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners in the Fairfax area, to engage the community leaders, youth, and their families in the right direction.

When gang diversion or prevention programs are improved, they serve their intended purpose in the community by reducing child gang membership and crime and promoting a positive lifestyle for the youth and helping them overcome peer, family, school, and workplace problems (Radic, 2016, Mashdsdo et al., 2016).

While the result of the study helps policymakers improve diversion programs and promotes positive social change, it also helps bridge the research gap and contributes to knowledge in the discipline. This qualitative exploratory case study examined the NVRGTF diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime in Fairfax County. I bridged this gap by exploring the perceptions and experiences of a

sample of the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners. The result from this exploratory case study provided significant knowledge where the Fairfax County, NVRGTF, and collaborating partners can comprehend it, incorporate other resources, and enhance the programs to engage the vulnerable youth population involved in gang membership and crime in Fairfax area.

While many diversion strategies include participation in youth gang prevention programs, juvenile gang killings are one of the most common murder incidents in the Fairfax area (Mashdsdo et al., 2016). According to Mashdsdo et al. (2016), most towns in high gang crime areas are open to gang-prevention or diversion programs to engage the vulnerable youth population subject to gang recruitment. Based on the study results, the Fairfax County and NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners, are encouraged to implement evidence-based programs, enhance the representation of the targeted population, and supply ongoing staff training. Without these, many children in gang-crime environments such as Fairfax County will continue to participate in gang membership, activities, and crime.

Summary

The diversion or prevention program is an educational program created to provide treatments and services to people engaged in gang violence, illegal activities, and the CJS. The impact of gang diversion programs on youth has become a concern, as children involved in gang activities experience violence on the street, higher school dropout rates, and high incarceration rates. The potential factors contributing to youth gang involvement include unemployment, the lure of quick money and drug trafficking, lack of quality

education, illegal immigration, low-income family setting, and broken families. The literature I reviewed showed that poverty, poor parenting, and racism are the main factors affecting the diversion program's success. None of the extant literature included examinations of the NVRGTF diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime in Fairfax County.

In this study, I focused on understanding the diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community. I employed a qualitative case study and explored the perceptions and experiences of the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners, regarding the diversion programs' success. I examined the diversion program's success in Fairfax County. Policymakers may use the study results to implement an effective gang diversion policy in Fairfax County.

Chapter 2 will include an in-depth exploration of current literature reviews regarding this topic. I will also explore articles about gangs and diversion or prevention programs to understand the diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

I conducted this study to understand the diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community. Organized youth gang crimes, associated killings, and gang incidents are rising problems in Fairfax County (Masho et al., 2016; Rostami et al., 2018). These rising gang problems have resulted in lower youth graduation rates and increased youth incarceration rates in Fairfax County and raised questions about the success of diversion programs. (Gilman, 2017). Diversion programs are an alternative mechanism to combat child gang involvement or juvenile delinquency (Mustaffa, 2016). Diversion programs are used to enhance children's perceptions and attitudes about family and community and give children supporting tools to strengthen their relationship with their parents and the community (Gwatimba & Raselekoane, 2018). The literature review helped me learn about gang diversion and prevention programs.

The exploration of the literature review helped me understand and familiarize myself with the spectrum of gang diversion or prevention programs in the community. I explored the history of diversion programs and gang characteristics as organizations. The reviewed literature also discussed the challenges of identifying gang groups on the street and addressing the factors associated with the rising problems of youth gang involvement and crime. The proposed study's theoretical framework addresses how positive social relations between a child-parent and a community can impact child development and prevent unethical behavior.

In this literature, I explored the history and overview of diversion programs; factors associated with diversion programs' use; success and failure of diversion programs; police and public support for diversion programs in the United States; investigating diversion programs using a qualitative case study; and evidence-based practices (EBP) of diversion programs. I also explored the history of gang identity, statistics, culture, and recruitment or memberships. Apart from this, the literature examined gang-involved cases using qualitative case studies and explored the factors associated with child gang involvement or characteristics of child social bonding.

Literature Search Strategy

In this literature search, I used the Walden University Library databases and websites to gather information about gangs and diversion and prevention programs.

I explored these databases and retrieved information regarding diversion and prevention programs and gang memberships include academic research, criminal justice, ABI/INFORM Collection, APA PsycInfo, and ProQuest databases. I also searched using Google Scholar, sage databases, and the NVRGTF website.

In the literature review, I used search terms such as *gang diversion and prevention programs, gangs and family, gang prevention, diversion and intervention, court diversion program, gang-related murders, youth gang prevention, social bond theory and gang membership, and delinquency.*

Using these search terms and databases helped me retrieve scholarly peer-reviewed information relevant to the proposed study and theoretical framework. Most of the scholarly work that I accessed was from the last 4 years. I obtained literature from

search engines such as Google Scholar and peer-reviewed journals that were relevant to the research but were not directly referring to gang prevention or diversion programs. Such information did not limit the scope of the literature. Instead, it added knowledge to the literature.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this study is Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory (SBT). Hirschi's SBT asserts that youth distance themselves from crime and delinquency when developing a positive social relationship with parents and community through involvement, attachment, commitment, and belief (Koeppel et al., 2018). Hirschi's concepts of involvement, attachment, commitment, and belief assess the ability of Hirschi's SBT to explain youth deviance-oriented outcomes. These four elements of Hirschi's theory are the norms or values that youth hold in the developmental stage. According to Koeppel et al. (2018), the involvement of Hirschi's principles refers to youth time spent in social activities, including sports, educational activities, church, and community organizations. Simultaneously, Hirschi's principle of attachment refers to the number of interactions or engagements that draw people to the community, friends, and family. The commitment of Hirschi's theory relates to the time and effort people invest in school to have better futures. Beliefs on Hirschi's principles reflect how people value individual opinions, respect the law, and esteem personal well-being. Based on Koeppel et al.'s (2018) explanation of Hirschi's theory of involvement, attachment, commitment, and belief, child bonds to parents, peers, or community affect the child's development and psychological domain.

Theory's Focus on Social Bonding

Child development and psychological domain center on child social bonding with family and community. Craig's (2016) explanation of Hirschi's social bonding helped me understand that a child's dysfunctional relationships with parents, community, and school predict child delinquent behavior. Craig (2016) found that children are more likely to participate in crime and delinquency if they develop a weak social bond with their families. According to Craig's (2016) explanation of Hirschi's social bonding, youth who lack positive social bonds find it challenging to attach themselves to parents and mentors due to fear of revealing their criminal mindset. Hirschi's social bonding principles provided a theoretical view for understanding that parents cannot bridge the gaps with their children without forming a formal relationship with them (Koeppel & Chism, 2018). Koeppel and Chism (2018) understood that when children detached their bonds from their family and community, they distance themselves from home because they have no feelings of belonging there.

The knowledge I gained from learning the Hirschi's principles of SBT have given me a theoretical lens for seeing and understanding the factors influencing gang recruitment decisions, such as family dysfunction, school failure, or poverty when they encounter youth to recruit (Bhatt et al., 2018). Gang professionals adapted to Hirschi's social bonding concepts as their theoretical basis to welcome, nurture, or orient their members into gang membership (Posick, 2015; Craig, 2016; Koeppel & Chism, 2018). Gangs also emphasize belonging as part of their membership which triggers Hirschi's

involvement, attachment, commitment, and belief to sacrifice time and energy to support the team vision (Craig, 2016; Koepfel & Chism, 2018).

While gangs are promoting their membership using Hirschi's principles of social bonding, the success of diversion programs in reducing youth gang membership is questioned by the communities that are affected by gang violence. Based on the principles of Hirschi's (1969) SBT, diversion or prevention programs are providing prosocial activities that enhance child-parent relationships. The theoretical view of Hirschi's SBT that I learned helped me understand that only prosocial activities, such as gang diversion or prevention programs, can promote a child's relationship with their parent and community. Based on Hirschi's social bonding, children can develop a definite social relationship with their parents and community leaders by engaging in community programs. Children can distance themselves from unethical behavior such as gang activities when they encounter formal or structured program training (Koepfel & Chism, 2018; Wong, 2005).

Structured Environments

I have learned from the Koepfel et al. (2018) and Posick (2015) and discovered enough evidence to justify that Hirschi's SBT provides a theoretical basis explaining why youth crime rarely happens in well-structured environments, like schools, where conformity is the norm. According to Posick (2015) and Craig (2016), in a well-structured environment such as schools, youth are compliant with the culture of the school, which is the main focus of Hirschi's SBT. School environments involve structured, regular activities, creating a conducive place for definite social attraction,

which shows the real-world application of Hirschi's SBT for school and youth (Crawford et al., 2018).

The activities in a well-structured environment make children comply with authority and develop a bond with them. Hirschi's SBT (1969) revealed that most children are compliant with authority in a well-structured environment because they are bonded with the environment. Schwartz et al. (2017) found that children are connected to home, school, or community due to their psychological adjustment to the environment. Hirschi's principles of involvement, attachment, commitment, and belief show how significant youth's psychological adjustment is in a social setting.

Previous Applications

Hirschi's SBT is a widely tested theory of youth's psychological adjustment in a social environment that leads to a child's bonds. According to Peterson et al. (2016), the application of Hirschi's principles of SBT on children in a social environment contributed to the understanding that the dominant factor that constrains children's intrinsic criminality is how bonded they feel to the conventional society. Based on Peterson et al.'s (2016) findings on Hirschi's SBT, child development, delinquency, and crime in the community are influenced by youth's psychological adjustment to such a social environment.

The extensive exploration of Hirschi's SBT helped me understand the dominant factors constraining children's inherent criminality; and contributed to understanding how religious faith helps youth resist engaging in sexual activities. For example, Yoder et al. (2017) confirmed that Hirschi's principles of involvement, attachment, commitment, and

belief played a role in understanding that religious youth's beliefs guide them to avoid intimate relationships or sexual activities at a young age. According to Zaidi et al. (2016), the application of Hirschi's principles of belief can be seen in religious youth's views and activities. Zaidi et al. (2016), affirmed that religious youth conform to religious norms. Based on this significant impact of faith-based values on religious youth, gang youth may have embraced their organization's rules in analogous way.

Relevance

Hirschi SBT is relevant to this study because of its significance in child-parent and community relationships. The Hirschi's principles of SBT serve as tools for parents and community leaders to engage youth with prosocial activities. Donner et al. (2016) confirmed that child involvement in prosocial life depends on the type of activities the child is involved in, and persons associated with them. Parents and community leaders can employ Hirschi's social bonding principles in prosocial activities such as gang diversion or prevention programs for youth as a means of helping children to develop a positive bond with the community. When Hirschi's principles of involvement, attachment, commitment, and belief are practiced in community programs, youth develop prosocial behavior and distance themselves from gangs.

Hirschi's SBT can also strengthen community programs and shape the prospects of youth developing a positive mindset with parents (Quoquab et al., 2017). According to Quoquab et al. (2017), Hirschi SBT empirically been assessed in a structured programs for children, and they were shown to enhance children's' relationships with parents and peers. The purpose of applying Hirschi's principles of SBT in a community setting is to

help both youth and their family members build positive relationships in the community (Pereira et al., 2016). Hirschi's theory is significant because it helps bridge the child-parent relationship gap at home (Koeppel et al., 2018). Overall, the SBT indicated that the level of child involvement, attachment, commitment, and belief influenced youth participation in school, community, and home activities (Koeppel & Chism, 2018; Yoder et al., 2017). The positive impact of Hirschi's principles of SBT on relationships among families in the community is relevant to this study.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

History And Overview of Diversion Programs

As millions of youths are faced with different levels of substance abuse, mental health challenges, delinquency, recidivism, gang involvement, and violence problems, policymakers and the courts have designed diversion programs to reduce child crime involvement and threats to public safety (Wylie et al., 2019). Diversion programs are designed to provide services for these psychological and socially challenged people while providing children a pathway for developing positive teenage lives that will lead them out of gang memberships and future involvement with the justice system (Menon & Cheung, 2018). The programs have helped youth build positive internal and external support systems to resist temptations to commit a crime (Menon & Cheung, 2018). Diversion programs are less costly and provide services that meet the needs of individuals involved with the criminal justice system (CJS).

Primary Goal

The diversion program's primary goal is to promote a positive lifestyle for the youth and their families and help them overcome problems with their family, school, peers, and workplaces (Radic, 2016). The diversion programs' continuous use has eliminated criminal behavior in the lives of the community's children and their families, enhanced the youth's criminal mindset, and empowered them to overcome their criminal challenges (Radic, 2016). Radic (2016) also indicated that diversion programs influence youth and their families who participate in the program to improve the whole community's quality of life.

Diversion programs are used in the United States to positively affect the lifestyles of children and parents and prevent children from going into gangs (Bouchard & Wong, 2017). Diversion programs have become family and community leaders' first option when considering child criminal integration or when children are advancing into gang territory (Gwatimba & Raselekoane, 2018). Diversion programs are designed to enhance children's perceptions and attitudes about family and community and give children supporting tools to strengthen their relationship with their parents and the community (Gwatimba & Raselekoane, 2018). Diversion programs are also designed to guide children and their parents to develop positive bonds in their community and distance themselves from criminal activities (Goldstein et al., 2019).

Diversion programs are designed to bridge child-parent and community relationship gaps by promoting a positive lifestyle for children and parents and engaging them in family conferencing to create a bond (Wong, 2017). The family conferencing

model of diversion program provides families the opportunity to engage their kids in family-community conferencing that allows children to associate themselves positively in the community and take responsibility for family relationships at a young age (Gwatimba & Raselekoane, 2018). Family conferencing in the community shows parents in the town coming together as one city to help children develop positive social bonds at home, school, and in the city. Family conferencing also helps parents not to rely on schools to nurture their children's behavior. When families meet and discuss family and social issues, they show children positive social ties among family, schools, and community. Family conferencing programs are tools that helped youth in many organizations learn and understand right from wrong, helping prevent the child from committing a crime (Bouchard et al., 2017).

As families and community leaders engage with children in family conferencing diversions, families and community leaders also use diversion programs to create a pathway for child development (Bouchard et al., 2017). Bouchard et al. (2017) affirmed that the services of diversion programs helped provide children pathway to develop into positive teenage lives without crime (Menon & Cheung, 2018). The programs help youth build positive internal and external support systems that will adhere to the diversion plan to resist adverse environmental influences (Menon & Cheung, 2018). Children's positive ties with family and employment can be essential turning points that lead them toward prosocial pathways.

Factors Associated with Diversion Programs' Use

The juvenile justice system (JJS) created diversion programs to reduce the level of youth criminal mindset, and recidivism, prevent future delinquents, and protect public safety (Wylie et al., 2019). The JJS designed diversion programs to target youth risk needs. According to Wylie et al. (2019), the JJS ensures that all children or offenders involved with the CJS are screened to assess their criminogenic needs and are provided with treatments in diversion or prevention programs. While youth are participating in diversion classes and community services to address their risk factors and conditions, the JJS ensures that parents and community leaders support the youth (Basanta et al., 2018).

Diversion programs are designed to target children and offenders' risk needs and address the stigma and negative consequences children, and offenders experience when labeled "delinquent" or engaged in antisocial attitudes and behaviors. According to the National Association of Justice (2020), when children are stigmatized with antisocial peers, they engage in crime and become involved with CJS. Antisocial peers and children involved with the CJS return to the community and parents when they engage in diversion and prevention programs designed to target their needs (JJS, 2020). Kim et al. (2018) found that diversion programs designed to target children and offenders' risk needs to reduce child prospects of associating with antisocial peers leading to gang activities and crime.

Exploring diversion programs helped me understand how diversions address child and offender risk needs and how diversion programs help antisocial and prosocial peers attach to their parents rather than become involved in crime. Boman and Mowen's (2018)

study discovered that children exposed to prosocial parenting or proper family care who also participate in structured-community programs tend to attach to their parents.

According to Boman and Mowen (2018), children securely attach to their parents exhibit rich exploration of their environment and practice prosocial lives.

On the other hand, troubled youth lack proper parenting and insecurely detach from their parents or guardians and community and cannot use them as a secure basis for exploration (Boman & Mowen, 2018). Thus, children raised with poor parenting or from antisocial families tend to associate with antisocial peers and subject themselves to the justice systems (Boman & Mowen, 2018; Kim et al., 2018).

It is critical to understand that while diversion programs are designed to promote prosocial behavior in youth, they are also used in courts across the United States to deal with various social, intellectual, and developmental issues (Marinos et al., 2018).

According to Marinos et al. (2018), almost every diversion program created is successful within the spectrum of its services in reducing youth criminal behavior, activities, or delinquency.

Family-Centered Diversions

The courts created the family-centered (FC) diversion program to involve parents in their child's life while the child receives treatment in the diversion program (Simons et al., 2017). Simons et al. (2017) helped explain that parents' involvement in their detained adolescents' lives in the Juvenile Justice Institution (JJI), help bridge the gap between delinquent child and parent. A solid child-parent relationship not only helps children

distance themselves from criminal behavior and activities, but also reduces the number of adolescents recidivating into JJI (Simons et al., 2017).

School-Based Diversions

The courts created school-based diversion programs in Pennsylvania to help schoolchildren participate in crime awareness and mentoring services at their various schools (Goldstein et al., 2019). These programs provide youth and families with positive, non-punitive interactions with the police at school and in the community while allowing law enforcement officers to meet with students, school staff, and parents and facilitate the program (Goldstein et al., 2019). Goldstein et al. (2019) revealed that the police used the diversion program to help students with first-time offenses or second-time offenses who receive a warning or participate in workshops to avoid the court. Overall, the program helped reduce child arrests at school and protect students from the collateral consequences of justice systems (Goldstein et al., 2019).

Recidivism Reduction

The United States' Midwestern County courts developed Reading for Life (RFL) diversion programs for juvenile offenders to help reduce youth recidivism in the area (Singh & Ntuli, 2017). According to Singh and Ntuli (2017), the RFL program provided juvenile offenders with literature and mentoring services, which helped the youth develop a positive mindset, and avoid delinquent behavior and crime in the community. RFL programs helped juveniles to obey the law, stay away from peer influences, seriously take their responsibilities at hand, and understand that crime does not pay itself off (Singh & Ntuli, 2017). RFL diversion program significantly reduced recidivism of juveniles with

most severe offenses and decreased the number of youth arrests in the United States' Midwestern counties (Seroczynski et al., 2016; Singh & Ntuli, 2017).

Mental Health

The Fulton County Courts of Georgia created Female Mental Health Diversions (FMHD) for female jails to address women with mental health issues (Coffman et al., 2017). According to Coffman et al. (2017), the FMHD provided rehabilitative services to women with mental health issues and helped them regain stability to reenter the community. The study demonstrated that most of the women who identified with mental illness completed the program, successfully diverted, and entered the community (Coffman et al., 2017). Overall, the program reduced the number of women with mental health issues entering the prison (Coffman et al., 2017).

Success and Failure of Diversion Programs

Success Diversions

The diversion programs have significantly reduced crimes committed by teen mental health offenders in the United States. According to Smokowski et al. (2017), the court designed a teen-court diversion program (TCDP) in North Carolina for teenagers involved with the justice system to enter, complete, and reunite with their families. The study affirmed that the court created TCDP as a community-building workshops, that included youth behavior modification practices, anger management, and effective communication methods to improve child prosocial interactions. As a result, the program enhanced teens' prosocial behavior and academic performance, and it also increased their

self-esteem and confidence, reducing parent adolescent conflict and enhancing family relationships (Smokowski et al., 2017).

As the use of diversion program successfully reduced teens' involvement with teen courts in North Carolina, it successfully reduced the increasing rate of offender mental health (MH) cases in the courts of Arkansas. Liles et al. (2018) indicated that the courts in Arkansas created MH diversion programs for MH offenders involved with the CJS. I understand that the courts in Arkansas created the MH diversion program to reduce MH offender cases in the court while helping the offenders receive treatments to improve their MH problems. The study indicated that the courts in Arkansas ensured that offenders involved with the CJS are ordered to receive community corrections diversion program treatments and be released to the community. According to Liles et al. (2018), the community corrections in Arkansas implemented the MH diversion programs and designed treatment plans that met individual MH offender needs. Most MH offenders ordered to complete the MH diversions successfully graduated from the program and became law-abiding citizens of the community. The study found that, over time, the number of MH offender cases was reduced.

What was significant about the MH diversion program is that it helped reduce the rate of MH offender cases in Arkansas courts and the number of MH offenders sentenced to jail in Chicago. Usually, the courts in Chicago ruled mentally disabled offenders involved in the CJS and unfit for trial and needing medical treatments to be able to stand for court and discharged to jail (Boutros et al., 2018). The Boutros et al. (2018) study helped me understand that whenever the courts order a medically treated offender to

prison after a trial rather than rehabilitation in a diversion program, the MH offender experiences a severe MH problem and cannot reenter the community. According to Boutros et al. (2018), rehabilitating offenders with MH problems in the diversion facilities became critical in Chicago courts. The courts created diversion programs to allow MH offenders found guilty in the courts to be placed in habilitated in diversion program. It was fair that when a medically treated MH offender was found guilty, they should be discharged to receive rehabilitation in the diversion program and released rather than jailed (Boutros et al., 2018). The study demonstrated that MH offenders discharged from the diversion program in Chicago successfully live with their families in the community, are employed, and are distancing themselves from criminal behavior or rearrests (Boutros et al., 2018).

Failed Diversion

While diversion programs are recognized for their success in reducing the number of MH offender cases in Arkansas and Chicago courts, they failed to create a pathway for MH women in Georgia. According to Coffman et al. (2017), the courts in Georgia designed MH diversion programs as a pathway for mentally challenged women to receive diversion treatments, resolve their pending charges with the court, and be released to the community. Instead, the diversion programs enabled the courts to impose jail time for mentally ill women (Coffman et al., 2017). The failure of the diversion programs to create a pathway for women with mental health issues receive treatment and be released into the community is one of the many reasons I want to examine the success of diversion programs.

Police and Public Support for Diversion Programs in the United States

The American police and public support diversion programs work not just because they divert the youth from violence and crime, but also because they reduce the risk of people becoming involved in contemporary issues, including developmental, psychological, or mental health, and crime or CJS (Thielo et al., 2019; Marzano et al., 2019).

U.S. Police Support

Police role in identifying and addressing risk factors that often reduce youth substance use and delinquency and directing individuals to places to get help indicates how much police support diversion programs. Although police are passionate about supporting and forming part of the team that provides substance abuse prevention and diversion programs at schools, police are also among school-based substance abuse prevention facilitators, contributing to most schools' ongoing drug abuse programs (Wong, 2016).

The role of police in facilitating school-based substance abuse diversion programs demonstrates how police used diversion programs to reduce youth substance use. Police officers are the first emergency service agents to be alerted when an emergency has occurred. Regardless of their role as frontline emergency officers, police also recognize and manage people at risk of suicide, drug addiction, or involvement with the CJS (Marzano et al., 2019). Police officers have become the diversion programs' potential components because; they provide the most prevention strategies in the community by

recognizing situations where people are vulnerable and facilitating access to appropriate services.

The studies suggested that police officers supported diversion programs as a vital means of helping bridge drugs and mental health challenge gaps in the community (Marzano et al., 2019). Notably, police agencies across the US employed a sequential intercept model (SIM) diversion program to respond to drugs, psychological, or mental health-related issues (Mok et al., 2019). Studies have shown that police officers received training to detect persons with drugs and mental health problems upon arrest and guide them into treatment (Mok et al., 2019, Marzano et al., 2019). Most police officers also trained and shared ideas with medical health services regarding getting help for offenders with cognitive challenges (Mok et al., 2019).

In general, police are more involved in diversion programs as part of their duty to help arrest and guide people to the programs and help school administrators create juvenile diversion programs to manage adolescent behavior at school rather than calling the police. Police effort in developing school-based juvenile diversion programs helped change school policies. The police helped create the program and recommended that the schools utilize standard disciplinary measures to correct adolescent behavior rather than calling the police and exposing adolescents to the CJS (Goldstein et al., 2019). Goldstein et al. (2019) indicated that whenever school administrators call the police in response to adolescent behavioral incidents, (1) they expose the child to short-term consequences, including arrest, adjudication, incarceration, and probation supervision, and (2) they also subject the child to long-term collateral consequences, such as denial of college

admission, ineligibility to serve in the military, loss of public housing assistance, and restriction of employment opportunities. Police efforts to help create the school-based juvenile diversion in Philadelphia resulted in reduced adolescent encounters with police and CJS, which is partly why the US public supports the program.

U.S. Public Support

The US public widely supports diversion programs. According to Thielo et al. (2019), the US public favors treating offenders' criminogenic needs using diversion programs rather than prison for offenders. The US public understands that low-level offenders, including offenders with drug and mental health problems, the homeless, veterans, or people engaged in domestic violence, can get treatment for their criminogenic needs and be corrected from their criminal mindset (Thielo et al., 2019; Pope & Jones, 2020). The public also recognizes that when low-level offenders' criminogenic needs are met, offenders become law-abiding citizens, settle with a family, and avoid the CJS (Pope & Jones, 2020).

The US public endorses the treatment of offender criminogenic needs and the use of pre-arrest diversions to reduce the number of low-level offenders going to jail. The US public identified pre-arrest diversion programs as viable programs for offenders with low-level offenses to avoid the consequences of police arrests and criminal records (Kopak & Frost, 2017). According to Goldstein et al. (2019), police opted to use diversion program rather than arrest and jail to allow low-level offenses to enter and complete the program and help their families in the community. Families of low-level offenders also support the pre-arrest programs as a vital option because they help their

family members secure employment, avoid prison, and social stigma (Kopak & Frost, 2017; Goldstein et al., 2019)

The US public supports diversion programs not only because they provide police with options to direct pre-arrest offenders for treatment but also because they benefit offenders who complete the program. According to Pope and Jones (2020), almost every offender who participated in the diversion program was helped by avoiding jail time, having their charges removed from public data, and enjoying the opportunity to maintain a productive life in the community. The study found that most offenders who completed the program settled with their families without further criminal activity, maintained sobriety, and lived better lives (Colleen et al., 2016).

Investigating Diversion Programs Using A Qualitative Case Study

A qualitative case study has become an anchor in revealing the vitality of diversion programs in reducing child involvement with gangs and crime (Anastasia et al., 2017). The qualitative case study is inevitable used when exploring and analyzing diversion programs to determine their success in reducing youth gang involvement and crime. Because of its in-depth data collection, the qualitative case study is used for investigating and analyzing different diversion programs and was employed in various diversions, including Los Angeles County Teen Courts, the South African empowerment model, and Australian court diversions.

Los Angeles County Teen Court

Defosset et al. (2019) employed a case study to examine the Los Angeles Teen Court (TC) diversion program's practices, characteristics, and theoretical assumptions

regarding the prospect of reducing teen crime in the community. Defosset et al. (2019) discovered that the Los Angeles Teens involved in the CJS could voluntarily participate in the court proceedings and the decision-making process related to their cases. Teen involvement in court procedures was one of the TC strategies designed to help teens understand the nature and consequences of their crimes and distance themselves from future involvement with the CJS. Anastasia et al. (2017) demonstrated that the use of qualitative case studies and analysis revealed the vitality of TC diversion in reducing teens' involvement in crime.

South Africa Empowerment Model

The ongoing use of case studies in exploring the success of diversion programs in reducing youth gang involvement has helped reveal the success of Los Angeles TC diversions and the South Africa (SA) youth empowerment diversion program. The use of the case study approach helped Singh and Nolwazi, (2017) determine that the courts in SA created the diversions to empower youth against offending and victimization in SA. The case study approach also helped reveal that an empowerment diversion program was designed to motivate young offenders to participate in training programs so that they could understand and avoid the CJS (Singh & Nolwazi, 2017). Regardless of the effort to empower SA youth against crime, the study found that the program failed to reach its goals due to the increased crime rate and rising jail intake (Singh & Nolwazi, 2017).

Australian Court Liaison and Diversion Services

The use of the case study approach in investigating diversion programs proved justified because it helped reveal the failure of SA youth empowerment diversions and

uncovered the success of the Australian Court Liaison services diversion programs (ACLSD). The ACLSD services were designed to screen psychiatric disorder offenders and report the court's results to decide the cases. The qualitative case study was employed to examine the court liaison diversions' services success in Australia (Davidson et al., 2017). The use of the qualitative approach helped discover that the administrators of the liaison services ensured that offenders with mental health issues are screened to provide enough information for the courts to decide on court cases (Davidson et al., 2017). The study indicated that ACLSD services administrators collaborated across the court system, and the courts successfully resolved many mental health related cases (Davidson et al., 2017).

Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) of Diversion Programs

The EBP demonstrated that parents' involvement in their child's participation in the diversion programs is critical to moving youths beyond delinquency (Cullen, 2017). The programs intend to divert children from CJS by involving parents in the process (Cullen, 2017). Parents' collaborating with in the program will help bridge children's relationships with the community and reduce the prospects of children walking into society with vulnerability. Parents' involvement in the program helped children cope with trouble and pervasive personal difficulties in the community (Cullen, 2017). 00

It is critical to know that while parent involvement with their child's treatment in the diversion program is critical for youth success, the EBP also discovered that diversion programs are not structured. Despite their wide use in the US, diversion programs lack accountability or an independent monitoring structure to review how the program works

to keep youth from delinquency. Kilkelly et al. (2011) found that diversion programs lack clarity in their implementation and structure to ensure accountability. The programs lack complaint data to statistically assess the information (Kilkelly et al., 2011; Smyth, 2011). The programs failed to demonstrate that parents understand the plan and are willing to engage with professionals to divert youth from criminal involvement (Kilkelly et al., 2011; Smyth, 2011).

History of Gangs: Identity, Statistics, Culture, and Recruitment or Memberships

Gang Identity

The increasing youth gang activities, criminal behavior, substance use, and violence in the US are persistent, but it is challenging to identify gangs on the street (Fox et al., 2021). Gangs are reluctant to reveal their identity on the street because a labeled gang member risk severe consequence (Sharkey et al., 2016). According to Sharkey et al. (2016), a labeled gang member can be targeted by law enforcement for noncriminal crimes, treated with less respect by the community and school administration, and targeted by gang members for recruitment or retaliation. There are currently no legitimate approaches on the street to identify gang members and develop statistics to justify their population across the state unless by self-admission and tattoo recognition (Sharkey et al., 2016). Gangs are identified and reported by various agencies, including law enforcement, prison, and the court, because their members committed a crime, arrested, and testified (Sharkey et al., 2016).

Gang Statistics

It is difficult to develop gang statistics or census on the street due to gangs being reluctant to identify themselves. Gang members can be identified only by self-admission, gang members arrested and testified in the court, or tattoo recognition (McCarkle et al., 2019). McCarkle et al. (2019) found that the lack of gang statistics poses challenges for community leaders to get enough government funding to fight gang crimes. McCarkle et al. (2019) revealed that many politicians, law enforcement, and news media profile against gangs by linking them to violence and murder in the community (McCarkle et al., 2019). At the same time, other politicians suggest that gang crises in most communities are manufactured by agencies that provide diversion or prevention services to obtain resources from the government and expand their authority (McCarkle et al., 2019; Sharkey et al., 2016). McCarkle et al. (2019) that gang problems are real, growing, and deserving public attention on the street because; gang violence is measured based on gang crimes reported.

Gang Culture

Gangs threaten society by bringing a culture of violence, creating an atmosphere of fear, and diminishing the value of life (Blumenstein, 2009). Gangs also endanger society's safety, attacking children's well-being and future and bringing drugs to the community's doorsteps (Maringira & Masiya, 2018; Blumenstein, 2009). It is often complicated to differentiate and understand the numerous gang groups in the community, but gangs exist as groups of people who share other goals and interests (Maringira &

Masiya, 2018). Each gang group comes together for a common purpose to review market strategies, socialize, or commit a crime (Maringira & Masiya, 2018; Blumenstein, 2009).

Gang Recruitment

Gangs fight over market boundaries to enhance their monopoly in the drug market by increasing individual gang groups' workforce with lower-wage employees and decreasing drug prices (Prinz & Ehrmann, 2019). Gangs target the vulnerable youth population for recruitment because; children have low monetary motives and do not resist authority (Maringira & Masiya, 2018; Prinz & Ehrmann, 2019). The supply of drugs and cheap labor causes gang members to fight for the youth's shrinking piece for recruitment (Prinz & Ehrmann, 2019).

When recruited, a new gang fulfills receives certain benefits of their membership, including the desire for belonging, status, respect, or perceived protection (Dong & Krohn, 2016). Newly hired gang members develop gang cohesiveness and team esteem rather than self-esteem and view themselves as unfair targets (Prinz & Ehrmann, 2019). Gang membership contributes to delinquency and violent crimes because; most children involved in gangs commit crimes and eventually arrested and put in jail or diversion programs (Dong & Krohn, 2016). Due to frequent youth gang involvement, diversion programs are examine00d to determine their success in reducing child integration into gang.

Investigating Gang Involved Cases Using Qualitative Case Study

Due to numerous gang-involved cases across national and regional territories, a qualitative case study was employed because of its in-depth data collection. Patton et al.

(2016) adopted a case study approach to explore digital street gang violence in Chicago. Gang members digitally used Twitter communication, threatened their opponents, directed killings, and expanded their membership. The qualitative in-depth data collection and analysis helped me understand that most gang murder cases in Chicago are associated with one gang unit directing killings in another team through electronic communication (Patton et al., 2016). The case study also helped determine that Chicago gang members had communicated violent crimes through the internet to exercise gang culture, promote affiliation, and enhance their networking sites (Patton et al., 2016).

An in-depth qualitative case study helped explain the digital street gang violence in Chicago and why gangs present in Thomson Middle School (TMS) contributed to sexual harassment and victimization. TMS became the center for gang youth and sexual harassment because; each time there was gang activity or an appearance in the compound, the school community experienced harassment issues in the form of bullying and victimization (Forber-Pratt & Espelage, 2018). Forber-Pratt and Espelage (2018) indicated that the use of qualitative case studies helped TMS discover that the boys were heavily involved in bullying and victimization, so the school reformed its policies and decreased bullying among the youths.

The qualitative case study approach not only helped discover why gangs present in TMS contributed to sexual harassment and victimization but also examined street gangs and organized crime groups' killings in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Due to numerous gang killings in Bangladesh, Atkinson-Shepperd (2016) employed a case study approach and analyzed how Dhaka's gang organizational structure and how they recruited youth in the

community to commit a crime. According to Atkinson-Shepperd (2016), the case study analysis helped examine how gang members in Bangladesh recruited children from Dhaka's street to sell drugs, carry guns to conduct contract killings, participate in political violence, and collect extortion money. The study indicated that case study analysis helped understand labor division among each gang in Dhaka and how gangs exploited children and ordered them to commit murders in Bangladesh (Atkinson-Shepperd, 2016).

As qualitative case study analysis revealed how gangs exploited children and ordered them to commit murders in Bangladesh, it also demonstrated that mass murders in Hong Kong were connected to different gang groups in the community. Lam (2016) argued that the case study approach helped discover gang groups' structures, activities, and behaviors regarding murder plots in Hong Kong. The case study also found that numerous murder incidents had occurred because gangs from different gang groups had fought to protect their sovereignty (Lo & Lam, 2016). The qualitative study revealed that gang members were comfortable grouped according to their identity (Lo & Lam, 2016).

The qualitative approaches were helpful in discovering gang mass murders in Hong Kong and gang misuse of the English government's youth funds for gang film making in London. According to Blum-Ross (2017), the English government-funded youth-media project hoped to empower South London children to participate in the media film shows. Using a qualitative approach, Blum-Ross (2017) discovered that most young teens used government funds to promote gang films and associated gang murders on the street. The study also revealed that many gang crimes in South London had been influenced by young gangs living in the city. The qualitative approach helped show that

gang teens misused government funding for youth media projects for gang crimes (Blum-Ross, 2017).

Factors Associated with Child Gang Involvement

Characteristics of Child Social Bonding

Child developmental challenges, family detachment, peer influence, and environmental risk factors contribute to youth gang involvement (Smith et al., 2019). Child social attachment also defines the child's behavioral patterns, habits, social lifestyles, and characteristics (Zavala et al., 2019). Smith et al. (2019) and Zavala et al. (2019) studies highlighted that child negative social bonding explains the child's exposure to a criminal mindset, which increases the youth's chances for delinquency. The application of SBT in social relationships indicated that positive youth development in the community rests on children's positive relationship with parents, peers, and community educators (Zavala et al., 2019). The absence of parental involvement in a child's life can contribute to children joining gangs.

Parental Absence in Children's Lives

The lack of parental bonding and guidance in Chicago led to child gang membership, CJS involvement, or lower academic grades (Voisin & Elsaesser, 2016). Voisin and Elsaesser (2016) found that lack of child positive attachment with parents and community caused many children to drop out of school or join gangs. Due to the increasing dropout rates, most schools in Chicago promoted child-teacher relationships and helped improve youth educational outcomes in Chicago (Voisin & Elsaesser, 2016).

The most efficient way for parents to promote positive child behavior in the community is to engage them in a prosocial lifestyle (Voisin & Elsaesser, 2016).

Despite the fact that in Chicago, child-teacher relationships helped improve youth educational outcomes, children's negative social bonding to the community, school, and family shows their antisocial characteristics (Na, 2017). Most youths lack positive attachment to their families and seek membership with gangs (Na, 2017). According to Na (2017), almost every gang group is antisocial due to their potential of committing a crime or violence. Children involved in gang memberships are considered antisocial and vulnerable. Young children's vulnerability leads them to dropping out of school and social affiliation with antisocial peers (Na, 2017).

Refugee Camps

Child negative social bonding is also associated with childhood exposure to refugee camps. The adversity in refugee camps can negatively affect child development because children's exposure to violent experiences makes them likely to get involved in crime (Ellis et al., 2016). According to Ellis et al. (2016), the adverse social adjustment of children at the refugee camps poses psychological effects on children and triggers youth gang involvement and crime. The difficulty associated with the youth refugee experience increases a child's chances of pursuing a gang lifestyle and growing attachments with gangs in the refugees' environment. Child exposure to adversity in refugee camps leads many youths to gang membership and delinquency (Ellis et al., 2016).

Summary and Conclusion

The study was to understand diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community. In the literature review, the history of diversion programs and gang memberships, and culture in the United States were explored. The exploration of diversion programs revealed that the programs were designed to reduce various child developmental issues, substance abuse and mental health challenges, and social and criminal problems. I discovered in the literature that the diversion programs prevent children and juveniles from becoming criminal offenders in the future. The diversion program became the first alternative to illegal integration or children eventually joining gangs. Various diversion programs histories showed that they promoted positive youth lifestyles and helped children overcome their family, school, peers, and workplace problems.

Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory (SBT) was identified as the most helpful approach regarding children's parental and community bonds. In the literature review, Hirschi demonstrated that negative bonds led to antisocial behavior. The literature reviewed revealed that dysfunctional child relationships with parents, community, and school raise the likelihood of delinquent behavior. The literature review demonstrated that gangs target venerable youth for recruitment. The study also discovered that gangs emphasize belongings as part of the membership triggering commitment or attachment impulses.

The study's findings confirm this argument above, revealing that most children involved in gangs and crime in the Fairfax County area have no bond with the parent,

school, or community. The findings also support the literature review argument that child social attachment defines the child's behavioral patterns, habits, social lifestyles, and characteristics. The study's findings confirm that the lack of social attachment is associated with child gang involvement.

Chapter 3 will explain the research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, the participants' selection logic, instrumentation, and procedure for recruitment, participation, and data collection. I will also explain the data analysis plan, the issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

I conducted this qualitative study to understand the success of gang diversion programs in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community. In the previous chapters, I explored the literature about the research problem and gap that needs to be addressed to improve gang diversion programs and reduce youth gang membership and crime in the community. In this chapter, I explained how I employed qualitative methodology to understand how gang prevention or diversion programs successfully reduce youth gang membership and crime. I also described in this chapter the rationale for selecting the qualitative exploratory case study method, my role as the researcher, and the primary instrument of the research. I explained the following sections: The procedure for recruitment, participation, and data collection and analysis. I also explained trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures. Besides this, I summarized the chapter, including the sections I have addressed.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question I used was: How can the members of NVRGTF measure the gang prevention or diversion programs' overall success regarding the prospects of reducing youth gang membership? I used qualitative exploratory case study design for this study. The exploratory case study is methodologically recommended for a real-life situation in qualitative research (Hardy, 2016). According to Gurol and Hakan (2019), using an exploratory case study design will allow me to thoroughly explore the

perceptions and experiences of the NVRGTF staff and collaborating partners about diversion programs' success. This design can also use a single case, such as an individual, a social community, or an organization, and thoroughly examine the workforce's experiences regarding the programs' success (Wrona & Gunnesch, 2016). I used this qualitative case study design and explored the perceptions and experiences of 9 staff members of the NVRGTF, including administrators and collaborating partners. I also used this qualitative case study design to analyze the data collected from the NVRGTF staff.

Using qualitative exploratory case design allowed participants to freely express their perceptions and experiences regarding how the diversion programs operate in Fairfax County to reduce youth gang membership and crime. According to Ridder (2017), this design incorporates different research goals and helps with in-depth data collection and examination. The use of this design helped analyze the pattern of each piece of in-depth interview information about the perceptions and experiences of the staff of the NVRGTF, including administrators and collaborating partners. The use of this design also helped me gain in-depth knowledge of the diversion programs' success by interviewing nine participants from the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners.

In this study, I focused on diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community. The diversion program's primary purpose is to promote a positive lifestyle for the youth and help them overcome their family, school,

peer, and workplace problems (Radic, 2016). Child exposure to gangs can negatively impact the child, family, and community residents (Burley, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher's role is vital for the successful completion of the I explored the perceptions and experiences of the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners. I understood and accurately interpreted participants' perceptions and experiences of how the NVRGTF diversion program's operations impact the youth to reduce the prospect of children joining gangs. The researcher also has a role in maintaining the research protocol by ensuring that ethical principles are followed. Participants enter and exit the interview without the harm of losing a job or having an identity revealed.

The researcher has a role in preplanning the research's interview to protect the participants' privacy, security, and safety (Fleet et al., 2016). The researcher's role is to respect the participants' cultural norms and differences and ensure that it does not become a challenge in the interview process (Thorpe et al., 2018). The researcher ensures that their role is present in their practices, goals, obligations, responsibilities, risks, and ethical framework (Hart et al., 2020). The researcher's experience and attitudes toward the participants and their organization are the researcher's successful critical embedment in the study (Boylan et al., 2019).

As a gang specialist and the diversion programs' treatment case manager, I ensured that my experiences did not overshadow my role as a researcher during the data collection and analysis processes. Besides this, I had no personal or professional

relationship with the participants or participants' organizations that could compromise objectivity or bias and power management to stay objective.

Methodology

In this methodology, I explained the participants' selection logic and data collection process and provided justification of the sample size and how I reached saturation. I provided justification why the saturation was necessary to end the data collection and resume analysis. A basic qualitative exploratory case study was best suited for the research. The qualitative exploratory case study was methodologically recommended for a real-life situation in qualitative research (Hardy, 2016). It also incorporates different research goals and allows adequate data collection and examination as Ridder (2017) described.

Participants Selection Logic

The sample size for this study was nine staff of the NVRGTF, including administrators and collaboration partners. I specifically stated in the recruitment flyer that I was calling for the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners, to participate in the study voluntarily. I posted questions in the flyer asking the potential participants if they work in gang prevention or diversion program environment. I also asked volunteers if they were 18 years or older. I ensured that the flyer had enough information for volunteers to decide to participate in the research.

Due to the sensitivity of the research environment, the research flyer was not allowed to be posted on the premises. I contacted the research organization and received the email list of the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners,

and I, individually, contacted the staff with the recruitment flyer. The interested participants contacted me after they read the information on the flyer, and I provided them with the consent form; they voluntarily consented and were recruited to participate in the research. The participants I recruited came from the email list and the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners from the Fairfax area.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interview options included a face-to-face interview, Zoom, telephone, and email interview. I had a few people who chose Zoom interview while the rest chose phone or email. I had 14 volunteers who consented to participate in the study. Ultimately, only nine of these volunteers took part in the interview.

According to Larrinaga (2017), the qualitative case study approach allows the purposeful selection of participants based on specific criteria to participate in the research study. Therefore, I purposefully selected the participants for this study. I confirmed nine participants as the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners, who took part in the interview to reflect saturation. While transcribing, coding, and analyzing the nine participants' data, I realized that there was no added information or ideas coming from the participants. Therefore, I reached saturation since it was unnecessary to continue collecting the same data pattern.

The NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners who took part in this study contributed in-depth information based on their perceptions and experiences about how the diversion or prevention programs are operated in the Fairfax area. I used this information according to the research question to examine and decide the

gang diversion or prevention programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community.

Every one of the nine participants answered basic qualitative interview questions. I used this interview's data and developed themes reflecting the participants' views. I used these themes and analyzed the data about the perceptions and experiences of the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners in the Fairfax area. The experience I gained from the analysis helped me understand, find, and examine the data to determine the diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime.

Instrumentation

Taking the concepts of qualitative exploratory case study, the researcher is the instrument (Xu & Storr, 2012). I was the primary data collection instrument for this qualitative exploratory case study. During the literature review, I explored many articles and journals about gang diversion and preventions and gang memberships and crime. I gained knowledge, understanding, and experience about the spectrum of gang diversion or prevention programs and gang membership and crime in the community. Based on the knowledge and experience gained from the literature, I developed eight interview questions that were enough to answer the research question. To show content validity, I obtained approval from my chair and committee member and Walden University's IRB to use my interview questions for the interviews.

During the interviews, the participants did not want a face-to-face interview option due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants took part through phone

interviews, Zoom, and email interviews. I used voice dictation software on my computer and a portable recording device for all my phone interviews. Next, I used a Zoom recorder for all the Zoom interviews. Because the email interviews came already written, I coded them upon receipt. As the results of these interviews, I obtained enough data from the participants from the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners, to answer the research question.

Procedure for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The recruitment of people to begin the interview process was a fascinating task. Due to the sensitivity of the research environment, I was not permitted to post a research flyer on the premises. I contacted the organization and received the email list of the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners, as approved by the IRB. I, individually, contacted the staff with the recruitment flyer. The interested participants contacted me after they read the information on the flyer. I provided participants with the consent form; they voluntarily consented and were recruited to participate in the research. The participants came from the email list and the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners from the Fairfax area.

I started data collection after the participants voluntarily consented and offered me the available time for the interview. I scheduled participants for the interview based on their availability. The duration of the interview was about 30 to 45 minutes. I conducted four interviews over the telephone, two on Zoom, and three via email. The technology used in the phone and Zoom interviews included a portable voice recorder, my computer's built-in voice dictation software, and Zoom recording software.

I informed all the participants about possible transcription issues after the interviews, and we agreed that I should contact them in case of any transcription issues. I contacted only one participant on a few transcription issues, and we resolved them. The built-in voice dictation software handled interview transcription and had the transcripts ready immediately after the interviews. I addressed transcription errors by reviewing them in conjunction with the voice recordings to ensure that I correctly transcribed the original reports.

I informed participants about their rights to quit the interview at any time they choose to during the interview process. I also informed the participants that I would respect their will to participate in the interview or exit. Nineteen volunteers responded through phone or email after they received the flyers and read them. Of these nineteen volunteers, fourteen consented to participate in the study. Overall, nine participants completed the interviews, resulting in saturation.

Data Analysis Plan

The qualitative case study design and thematic approach was employed to collect and analyze the data. I used a case study for the coding and thematic assessment approach to examine the data patterns as case study designs incorporate different research goal, data collection, and examination as Ridder (2017) and Rudestammk and Newton (2017) described. I also used a case study design to explore the perceptions and experiences of NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners. Ridder (2017) demonstrated that the case study approach could evaluate the data's complete knowledge, theory development, theory-building, and theory testing. Using a case study approach

helped me to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the NVRGTF diversion programs' success in reducing youth gang membership and crime.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Successful qualitative research rests on credibility, transferability dependability and confirmability (Daniel, 2019; Kornbluth, 2015; and Ramos, 2016). I provided enough evidence to show that my study was credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable according to the qualitative case study tradition (Snodgrass et al., 2018).

Credibility

I ensured credibility and provided the study's rigor, as Daniel (2019) described, by ensuring data collection methods, results, and interpretations were credible to achieve research quality. I obtained credibility and reached trustworthiness by using an approved data collection flyer, consent form, and research question, according to Sinkovics et al. (2008). This helped participants understand the research, feel comfortable and willingly participate in the interview. I obtained my data from participants from the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners in the Fairfax area, who have first-hand experience using diversion programs in the gang environment. I shared the transcribed data with participants whose transcriptions had some errors for clarification as part of the agreement I had with all the participants during the interview.

Transferability

I provided thorough information about the interview process and a step-by-step process of collecting data to ensure my research is transferable as Daniel (2019) described. I also provided information about my data analysis method to help future

researchers follow the pattern of my study. I established transferability by ensuring that my interview questions and answers to these questions showed common themes that explicitly helped my method of analysis and interpretation of the data to ensure a step-by-step follow-up process.

Dependability

I established dependability in this research by being reflexive during the data collection process to ensure consistency and detailed descriptions from data collection to saturation and analysis as described by Ramos et al. (2016). I confirmed that I achieved dependability in the instrumentation process. The devices I used for the interviews were dependable because I transcribed the information immediately after each interview. I achieved dependability by preserving all interview recordings, detailed coding, and analysis (Morse et al., 2008). I developed a dependability strategy by using an audit trail.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a direct approach to demonstrating trustworthiness in qualitative research as Sinkovics et al. (2008) described. This study was credible and confirmable because my evidence indicates that I did not accommodate bias as Snodgrass described. I showed confirmability by using reflexive journaling during the data collection process. I employed a personal journaling approach to track my activities related to the research. I wrote down a brief note about my thoughts, feelings, and concerns about each data collection process, from instrumentation to coding and data analysis, to avoid bias.

Ethical Procedures

The challenges of conducting free ethical, and efficient research are tremendous, and it is critical to ensure that research principles and appropriate steps and procedures are applied to every study process (Kue et al., 2018). I protected my research participants from unfair treatment and rights violations by following the IRB-approved procedures and guidelines. I ensured that the IRB approved the procedures for data collection to avoid unethical practices in the research process (Fleet et al., 2016). I followed the set moral foundation of the IRB for every study that required me to follow all entities. I treated ethics as a characteristic of my relationship and research (Wolff-Michael et al., 2018).

I took confidentiality as the hallmark of this qualitative exploratory case study to protect participants' identity, data, and norms of the research (Glenna et al., 2019). I ensured that any electronically received information from the interview was stored on my computer and had a strong password and that hard copies were locked in a fire-resistant safe at home. When the research period expires, I will ensure that all research data is nullified according to IRB standards and the University policy.

All the participants consented before data collection began. I ensured that participants reviewed the entire consent form to understand the information they consented to. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many participants opted to participate in the Zoom, phone, or email interviews. I recorded the Zoom and phone interviews according to the IRB-approved procedures. Besides this, I encrypted all written responses through personal email. Also, I securely stored all email information on my computer

with a username and password. I kept all printed information in my file cabinet, locked with a key in my house.

This data collection was not anonymous because it involved face-to-face interview options where the participants' identities were known to me. However, I used codes or pseudonyms to identify and represent participants to ensure that I protected their identity. I also ensured that participants' identities would not link to any source that would expose them.

Summary

In this chapter, I addressed the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher and methodology, and the participants' selection logic. I also discussed the instrumentation of the research, the procedure for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Besides this, I addressed the data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. In chapter 4, I will present the data collected from the participants and how I analyzed them.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

I used this qualitative study to understand the success of diversion programs in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community by exploring the perceptions and experiences of NVRGTF employees, including administrators and collaborating partners. The results from this exploration will help policymakers understand the success of diversion programs in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community.

The guiding research question to understand the research problem was How can the members of the NVRGTF measure the overall success of gang prevention or diversion programs in reducing youth gang membership? In this chapter, I explained the data collection process, which has been divided into the following sections: setting, demographic, data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and summary.

Setting

This qualitative exploratory case study setting was virtual through Zoom, phone, and email. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, none of the participants chose face-to-face interviews. I interviewed all the participants via Zoom, phone, or email according to their available day and time. I used my home library room for all the interviews I conducted from Zoom, phone, and email. The recording devices I used were the voice dictation software on my computer, a voice recorder, and a Zoom recorder. I recorded information directly from the participants.

I reminded all the participants that participation was voluntary without compensation. I ensured that they understood the interview and were willing to participate. I also reminded the participants that they could choose to withdraw at any time during the interview process without any problem.

I reminded the Zoom and phone interview participants that the interview takes about 30 to 45 minutes to complete. I also told the participants who participated in the email choice that the interview should take about 30 to 45 minutes to provide written responses. I reminded the email participants that they should email the responses back to me through their personal or private email within 2 weeks or 14 days.

Demographics

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Administrator	Probation Officer	School Social Worker	Gang Specialist	Male	Female
2	1	4	2	4	5

Table 1 shows the demographic of the participants who voluntarily participated in the interview. Nine volunteers completed the interviews, yielding saturation in this study. The nine volunteers include five females and four males. Participants included two gang specialists, four school social workers, one probation officer, and two administrators from the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners. All volunteers were professionals who work directly or indirectly with the gang population using the gang prevention or diversion approach on the field. They supplied detailed information

about youth gang prevention or diversion program success in Fairfax County. The participation was voluntary, and the participants offered their perceptions and field experiences on their own accord.

Data Collection

I conducted data between November 1, 2021, and December 31, 2021. Nine volunteers completed the interviews, yielding saturation in this study. Before entering the data collection process, conditional approval was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which required a letter of permission from my partner organization for final approval to begin data collection. Flyers were printed after my partner organization granted the letter of authorization and the IRB approved me for data collection. I then contacted my partner organization for access to post flyers seeking volunteers to take part in the study. Unfortunately, my partner organization does not allow postings of any kind on the premises due to the sensitivity of the environment. Instead, they sent me their email list of staff and collaborating agencies whom I could contact individually to gauge research participation interest.

Flyers were sent out according to the email list, and 19 volunteers responded through phone or email. Of these 19 volunteers, 14 consented to participate in the study. Overall, only nine participants completed the interviews, resulting in saturation. Four interviews were conducted over the telephone, two on Zoom, and three via email. Technology used in the telephone and Zoom interviews included a portable voice recorder, my computer's built-in voice dictation software, and Zoom recording software. The built-in voice dictation software handled interview transcription and had the

transcripts ready immediately after the interviews. Transcription errors were addressed by reviewing them in conjunction with the voice recordings to ensure that the original reports were correctly transcribed.

All interviews took place in my study library at my residence, with each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes, on average. There were some unusual circumstances with participants who opted to complete interviews through email. I recruited these participants per the usual process. They had also read the consent form and consented to participate in the interviews, understanding that the email format required them to return completed responses through their private or personal email. However, they decided to send their completed interviews through their work email instead. I reported the situation to my chair and the IRB. The IRB determined that the participants involved had read the consent form, understood it, and consented but opted to use their work emails at their own risk. Following the advice of the IRB and my chair, I went ahead with the interviews until I reached saturation at nine interviews.

Data Analysis

I employed Braun and Clarke's 2006 thematic approach described by Schlesinger et al. (2021). I employed the six-step method of transcribing data, generating initial codes, reviewing, defining themes, and producing a final report (Schlesinger et al., 2021). After the transcripts were ready, I reviewed each transcript five times.

After understanding the data and becoming familiar with the terms and phrases, they were highlighted and extracted from each interview's raw data into a table. As Schlesinger et al. (2021) demonstrated, I used inductive analysis and generated initial

codes and initial themes in the table. I ensured that the table's initial codes and themes reflected the transcript information. I defined 11 final themes that captured the entire data reflection in relation to the research question. I also found common meanings across the coded data and initial themes in the table in relation to the 11 final themes defined.

Based on Braun and Clarke's 2006 thematic approach described by Schlesinger et al. (2021), I reviewed the 11 final themes after I had defined and refined them, focusing on the reflection of the data, analysis on the table, and research question. This exercise indicated that the defined 11 final themes comprehensively reflect the data, initial codes, and themes in the table analysis.

Because I was the only researcher for this research, I checked the final themes against the raw data as a form of auditing in the coding process. After this process, I did not find any oversights or omissions at this stage for revision. Therefore, I did not make further changes and revisions.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the notion that the research, researcher, and research environments are deserving of trust and that participants feel confident that the study is designed to achieve the greatest benefits for their community (Griffith et al., 2020). I engaged with the participants one-on-one through telephone, Zoom, or email. As a probation officer and gang specialist at my work unit, I was critical of my subjective experiences and biases to ensure that none influenced my interactions with the participants or my information collection and analysis. I was also mindful of my research principles and procedures to ensure credibility, validity, reliability, and transferability.

Credibility

I ensured credibility throughout the extensive coding process and carefully described the data analysis process to ensure ease of verification as Daniel (2019) described. I have also ensured that all findings are relevant, dependable, and correspond to the participants' provided information. The recordings were used to verify the transcripts and verify interview information correctness. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the final reports were discussed and shared with my chair and committee members to ensure credibility and enable knowledge transferability. Finally, reflexivity was applied during the data collection process to ensure data collection consistency until saturation was achieved as Morse et al. (2008) and Ramos et al (2016) described.

Transferability

The information obtained from the investigation can be used in future research by supplying evidence as Daniel (2019) described. Accordingly, interview characteristics have been described, including participant demographics and behaviors during the data collection process. Moreover, the trust gap with participants was further bridged by ensuring that they were knowledgeable about the study area and that they supplied expert experiences relevant to the primary research question.

Dependability

Reliable and valid data collection procedures and analysis tools have been described. IRB approved my investigation examination procedures to avoid unethical practices in the research process as Fleet et al. (2016) described. I have also ensured that

the IRB agreed to the methods used under the proceedings, considering ethics in both my relationship with the participants and the research method (Wolff-Michael et al., 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability is a direct approach to demonstrating trustworthiness in qualitative research (Sinkovics et al., 2008). This study was credible and confirmable because my evidence indicates that I did not accommodate bias as Snodgrass et al. (2018) described. I showed confirmability by using reflexive journaling during the data collection process. I employed a personal journaling approach to track my activities related to the research. I wrote down a brief note about my thoughts, feelings, and concerns about each data collection process, from instrumentation to coding and data analysis, to avoid bias.

Results

I aimed to examine the success of diversion programs in reducing youth gang membership in Fairfax County by capturing the perceptions and experiences of the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners who work in the Fairfax area. Accordingly, interview questions were formulated to capture the perceptions and experiences of interview participants who could contribute enough information to determine the success of the diversion programs. Evidence from this live, in-depth interview process and the information gained from NVRGTF staff and collaborating partners have been presented based on 11 identified themes generated from the coding process. The themes are as follows:

- Theme 1: Put pressure on early intervention.
- Theme 2: Allow schools to help in the screening process.

- Theme 3: Create community-wide educational programs.
- Theme 4: Empower the community stakeholders.
- Theme 5: Increase the representation of the targeted population.
- Theme 6: Connect undocumented students with private or non-profit services.
- Theme 7: Lack of funding.
- Theme 8: Prioritize collaboration across agencies.
- Theme 9: Set up statistics.
- Theme 10: Set up ongoing education for professionals in the field.
- Theme 11: Allow compulsory participation of vulnerable families.

The above themes emerged from the terms and phrases coded in the tables. Each table represents one theme, corresponding to 11 tables for 11 themes.

Themes

The number of themes I created corresponds with the tables displayed below them with themes' information. The information regarding each theme was grouped in each separate table to help understand how the participants individually contributed to each theme. Accordingly, each table's terms and phrases were grouped to generate themes used to interpret and analyze the data. I developed eleven themes during the process to ensure that I thoroughly addressed specific and relevant information.

Theme 1: Put Pressure on Early Intervention

Theme 1 emerged from the shared opinions of eight participants during the coding process in Table 2. The eight participants from the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners, contributed their perceptions and experiences

about how gang prevention or diversion programs can help reduce youth gang membership.

Table 2

How Gang Programs Could Help Reduce Youth Gang Membership

Participants	Interview extract	Initial Codes	Initial themes
1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9	If we were targeting the right kids very early, if youth with high-risk factors can be identified early	Early intervention/proactive	Proactively engage kids with early intervention services
1, 3, 5, 7, 8	I think that we missed a lot of not targeting the right kids for early intervention and diversion	Lateness/Early intervention	Lack of early intervention in reaching out to kids before they get into trouble

The eight participants argued that putting pressure on "early intervention" is critical for the success of gang prevention and diversion programs. They also expressed that the organization must introduce "early intervention(s)" and "put pressure from the start" to enable engagement. Moreover, they mentioned that vulnerable parents and "kids have no options to keep themselves out of trouble" and that, therefore, "not targeting vulnerable kids at the beginning" is not helping them succeed. Six of the eight participants elaborated on this argument to a greater extent.

Participants 1, 3, and 7

According to Participants 1, 3, and 7, for gang diversion or prevention programs to succeed, the organization must pressure early intervention to target vulnerable kids at an early stage. Regardless of the effort, participant 1 stated that "we're trying a little late;

we're not targeting them initially," going on to say that they "have perfect professionals" and a "lot of services," but "I think we are missing on the timing, on when to start those services." Participant 1 also said most kids that come to them have already been involved in a gang and the Juvenile Justice System (JJS), committing their crimes on behalf of the gang. Moreover, kids who enter the JJS have little success. Below is Participant 1's statement based on field experience:

When I contacted these kids, they had already gotten into trouble. So, from my perspective, we were not successful because those kids ended up getting in or falling through the gang and committing a crime on behalf of the gang, getting involved with the courts, and entering the juvenile justice system. So, I'm sure there is some success, but there is not much success with the kids I work with daily. Once they enter the Juvenile Justice System and end up in my caseload, I have seen little success.

Participant 1 confirmed that the organization must "pressure early intervention" on "vulnerable immigrant kids joining their parents" in the community, arguing that "if we're targeting kids who come from their country as soon as they get here and go to school instead of waiting until they start making bad decisions, it will be better." The participant also reported that most of the youth population they work with are immigrant kids from Spanish-speaking countries looking to "rejoin or reunite with their families" here in the US and that when such kids come here, they are "complete strangers, filling that void with gang membership." Participant 1 then expressed that "these are the stories that I hear from the kids usually left behind in their countries by their parents" and later

rejoin their parents here in the US. The participant emphasized that if "those kids" are connected "with services" on time, it will help in the "unification process." Again, Participant 1 suggested that it would be helpful if the NVRGTF and collaborating partners could "invest" in the "activities program" and engage those immigrant kids, stating:

If we target those kids as soon as they get here, I think it will be better. Primarily, if the schools can find those kids and connect them with services, that would help with the reunification process, and that would be very helpful when they are connected with those services. If we invest in youth sports and have positive role models teaching them the country's values, they will avoid joining gangs.

According to Participant 3, the NVRGTF must "educate kids" about gangs at the "earliest age." The participant argued that "reaching the youth at the earliest age possible and giving the pros and cons and helping them know the negative pieces of the gang and educating those would assist with the excessive prevention." Participant 3 believes that a "younger kid is more successful if reached on time" and that it is "more difficult" for a kid to come out after entering a gang. Based on field experience, Participant 3 said:

If a younger kid is not reached, these juveniles sometimes get a little older and a little more involved, and it's a little more difficult for them to come out of the gang. I feel that it is a little bit difficult for them to get out of the gang. I think that the success of the programs has been beneficial. However, more resources would need to go into educating at a younger age than what is offered now with the gang population.

According to the data, it is critical also to pressure the kids. Participant 3 argued that "putting pressure from the start with youth will help with the prevention" and that "we have to be more proactive about gang intervention and gang prevention and attempt to educate these youth about the kinds being involved in a gang prior to knowing these gang members are recruiting them." The participant also believes that gangs recruit youth at "incredibly early age" when they are at a "middle school or even elementary school age." To counteract this, the participant suggested that gang prevention and diversion programs must "take an active step in terms of providing information" to kids "regarding gangs and how to avoid joining gangs."

Participants 8, 6, and 5

According to participants 8, 6 and 5, "children must be given access to services" to be successful, arguing that "helping stop kids from joining gangs before it becomes too late for them would be huge." Participant 8 believes that when kids are given "access to services," they learn and become "aware of the gang situations" and refrain from gang involvement, saying:

If kids had more access to services and more access to prevention programs to occupy their time and were given the tools to be aware of the situations they're getting themselves into, it would help mitigate what ends up happening later on. They're already in too deep, and they don't realize the level of involvement they're getting into once they're in it.

Participant 8 expressed that it is unfortunate that "we just don't have a lot of early intervention" services for kids, reporting that most kids received do not have "criminal

charges" but that there are no suitable programs to "refer them" to. Furthermore, the participant indicated that six months down the road, these kids who had no criminal records would be "already incriminated." Participant 8 recollected several instances where they received kids that had no criminal records:

We get a lot of kids on their first charge. So, they may be a chain case—a child in need of supervision who doesn't have any criminal charges—but we see all the red flags. Where do you refer them? How do you know right then, before six months when they've already gotten in and can't, in some cases, get out?

Theme 2: Allow Schools to Help in The Screening Process

Theme 2 emerged from the shared opinions of seven participants during the coding process, captured in Table 3. The seven participants from the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners, contributed their perceptions and experiences about how gang prevention or diversion programs can help reduce youth gang membership. The seven participants believe that gang prevention or diversion programs can succeed if the schools can be allowed to help in the screening process to find the vulnerable kids and direct them to the programs. According to the shared opinions of the seven participants, Fairfax County should "allow the schools" to be involved in "screening vulnerable kids" and directing them to service points. The seven participants argued that "getting the schools involved" in screening for vulnerable kids is critical for the success of the gang prevention or diversion programs in Fairfax County. They further reported that child gang recruitment "starts at the elementary school age."

The participants said that when child "high-risk factors" are identified early at school, they can direct the child to appropriate programs and services.

Table 3

The NVRGTF Staff Perceptions and Experiences About the Programs' Success

Participants	Interview extract	Initial Codes	Initial themes
1, 2, 3, 6,7, 8, 9	Reaching the youth at the elementary school level; at the earliest age possible; and giving them pros and cons	Need for screening kids at elementary schools	Introducing early-screening services at pre-school or elementary levels
1, 2, 3, 8, 9	If schools can identify at-risk kids at the pre-school and elementary level and connect them to services	Schools should be involved in screening for vulnerable kids and connecting them to services	Allow schools to screen for vulnerable kids and connect them to the right services

The following participants have contributed more information to support their arguments in theme 2:

Participants 2, 3, and 8

Participants 2, 3, and 8 expressed how the schools could help screen for vulnerable kids and provide the support they need to overcome their vulnerabilities and avoid being recruited by gangs. They also reported that gang recruitment "occurs at the pre-school and elementary level." According to Participant 2, if the schools can find those "at-risk" kids and recommend them to programs, it will benefit vulnerable youth. The participant also argued that identifying vulnerable-child risk factors at the pre-school and elementary level gives parents and the NVRGTF enough time to strengthen their "protective factors" and set them on the right track.

Participant 3, 7, and 9

Participant 3, 7, and 9 argued that finding "youth with high-risk factors" at the school level will help "reduce those risk factors" and increase the child's "resiliency skills" to cope with life. The participant "suspected it is harder to be successful with older youth. The older they are, the higher the likelihood that they have been approached by gangs and grown potentially interested."

Participants 1 and 2

According to Participants 1 and 2, most of the vulnerable kids in the Fairfax area are immigrant youth who traveled here to the US to "reunite with their parents" and do not "understand the English language." Participant 1 argued that "if the schools can identify those kids and connect them with services, that would help reunify" them, saying, "if we were targeting those kids as soon as they get here, I think it will be better." The participant also suggested that it would be helpful if "we're investing in youth sports" and engaging kids with "positive role models" who can teach community and family values. Participant 2 expressed that most of these immigrant or vulnerable kids are "unaccompanied minors who do not only have a legal guardian" but also "cannot access many social services due to their legal status."

Participant 7

Participant 7 argued that "the Juvenile Justice System (JJS) should consider involving the schools" in the early screening process, further stating that the schools do not report kids due to confidentiality issues. The participant explained that school support is necessary because they "see the problems every day in juvenile justice." Still, they

don't have a "wider community response to encompass all the partners in our community for support." Participant 7 believes that this "would be the biggest barrier," that it is "the problem" facing the gang prevention and diversion programs' success, and that the school environment is one of the ideal places to find and help vulnerable kids.

Participant 8

Participant 8 argued that the "biggest barriers" and "biggest factors" that contribute to kids being held within and bonded to gang environments are "access to resources" and "access to support," stating that when kids have this access, they will be aware of the gang situation and stay away from such environments. Additionally, the participant argued that "socio-economic" factors are the most significant cause of kids' involvement in gangs, emphasizing that vulnerable kids join gangs because of their "socioeconomic status." Participant 8 also argued that "whether they're undocumented, come from low-income households, high-crime communities, or bear trauma, risk factors need to be addressed to deal with gang involvement." Based on field experience, Participant 8 felt the gang prevention or diversion programs are not successful because they do not address "macro-level and multi-socioeconomic" needs. When I asked Participant 8 how NVRGTF members perceive the success of gang prevention or diversion programs regarding the prospects of reducing youth gang membership, the response was as follows:

My perception is that they're not very successful. They're just they're not addressing the macro level and multi socioeconomic issues that these kids often face. It's that these programs often focus on the kid changing behaviors and not on

some of the broader issues that caused them to get involved in that behavior. So, telling your kid don't steal when there's no food at home isn't gonna solve the issue. It's similar to gang involvement in that there's a more significant, broader issue that's not being addressed, so we're seeing very low success rates.

Participant 7 and 8 expressed that the confidentiality issues at schools are a significant concern, stating that these school "confidentiality issues" do not help the "vulnerable child." The participant explained that there is "resistance in schools" to collaborate when kids' information is involved due to these issues. Furthermore, the participants believe that the schools' efforts to shield vulnerable children from getting involved with the court do not help the kids obtain their criminogenic needs, saying:

If I can't talk about my client, how am I supposed to say this is the problem? See it? The schools want to protect the kids from becoming court-involved, which is good, but it's good to try to guard these kids against being incriminated.

Participant 8 argued that gang prevention or diversion programs focus on "micro-issues," explaining that the NVRGTF organization must "start Zooming out," "stop focusing on the micro issues," and focus on "intervention." The participant also argued that when we focus on only "one kid who is committing all of these atrocious acts" on the street and forget about the broader gang, we are only concerned with "micro-issues." Thus, the participant believes that it is critical to work as a "team" and focus on "early intervention" to start developing and implementing "sustainable plans" and "evidence-based programs." Participant 8 believes that such action would help get kids "who are in danger of their lives" in gang territory on the streets out of that environment. Finally, the

participant reported that it is critical to understand that the current programs are not "addressing" kids' "problems," saying:

We need to focus on what we do right now as an intervention as a team. I believe satisfaction will increase when we start having more sustainable plans and more evidence-based programming and really talk about early intervention and resources for those on the opposite end of these kids who are heavily involved in gangs. How do we get them out? That's another huge area people are not satisfied with in the program: no access to helping these kids who are in danger of their lives if they leave the gang. We give them a pat on the back and say don't do anything bad again, and we're not addressing their problems. If I don't report to my gang, if I don't do what I'm being asked to do, I could get killed, my family could get killed; what can you do to help me? I can wag my finger and put you on an ankle monitor; that's about it. There's a huge gap in services from the early intervention side and the late intervention side. What does a case manager do, or what does a gang representative do?

Theme 3: Create Community-Wide Educational Programs

I generated Theme 4 based on the nine participants' shared opinions during the coding process in Table 4. The nine participants believe that gang prevention or diversion programs can be successful only when "community-wide educational programs" are created. They also believe that these programs, including recreational activities, will help engage the community leaders, youth, and their families and cause them to develop a common bond to enhance their relationships and help youths succeed. The participants

directly or indirectly argued that "community-wide educational" and "recreational activities" are critical to helping the youth succeed. They also expressed that there were "not enough programs" to reach out to the "vulnerable youth population" in the Fairfax area. Table 4 shows the shared opinions of the nine participants.

Table 4

How Could Gang Prevention or Diversion Programs Become More Successful

Participants	Interview extract	Initial Codes	Initial themes
1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	I think if we're investing in more recreational activities; educational programs; youth sports; and positively role-modeling them	Invest in youth recreational and educational programs and activities	Engage youth with educational programs and activities
3, 7, 9	It would be more community-based actions; community-wide activities, recreational activities	Create community-based programs or recreational activities	Implement community-based programs and recreational activities to engage the youth

According to the data, communities are engaged when "more community-based actions" such as "recreational activities" occur. The nine participants believed that the youth needed to be aware of the gang situation in the area. Seven of the nine participants think that if "we're investing in more recreational activities or educational programs, such as youth sports and positively role-modeling the youth," it will show how the gang prevention or diversion programs are succeeding in Fairfax County. Five of the nine

participants individually contributed more insights to help understand the spectrum of these arguments.

Participant 8

Participant 8 argued that the gang prevention and diversion programs can be successful if the NVRGTF and county could "help kids learn and be aware" of the situation, stating that kids do not know the extent of consequences incurred by gang memberships until they are already involved. The participant also believed that if youth could be given "access to more programs" and "access to more prevention services," they would be aware of the gang situation, saying:

If kids had more access to services and more access to prevention programs to occupy their time and give them the tools to be aware of the situations they're getting themselves into, it would help mitigate what happens later on. They're already in too deep, and they don't realize the level of involvement they are getting into, and once they're in, they're in.

Participant 8 expressed that the programs do not address the criminogenic needs of the children. Instead, they focus on the "kid changing behaviors," reporting that the programs had not addressed the "macro-level and multi-socioeconomic issues" that the children face on the street. Below is what Participant 8 emphasized in terms of their experiences and perceptions:

I think the programs are not very successful; they're just not addressing the macro-level and multi-socioeconomic issues that these kids often face. These programs often focus on the kid changing behaviors and not on some of the

broader issues that caused them to get involved in that behavior. So, telling your kid don't steal when there's no food at home isn't going to solve the issue. It's similar to gang involvement in that there's a more significant, broader issue that's not being addressed.

Participant 6

Participant 6 argued that it is critical to develop "activity programs" to help divert the kids' attention from the "gang activity that goes on within the county." The participant also suggested that "various stakeholders" across the county can create different "activity programs" to engage kids and help resolve the needs of "those heavily involved" in gangs. When I asked Participant 6 about how the gang prevention or diversion programs could help reduce youth gang membership, the following was reported with hesitation:

Well, I think the programs can help by addressing those kids that are heavily involved in gangs. It can happen when different activity programs are provided in the community. It shouldn't be just on the court-side but be a collective effort by various stakeholders within the county. So, I'm cool with the law enforcement, probation, school, community, and rec departments in any locality, mentors, or community members that want to participate. So, I think it has to be a collective effort. It can't be solely on one agency within the county to address it.

Participants 3 and 5

Participants 3 and 5 shared the argument that the "children" and "community members" need to be educated about gangs and should be introduced into gang prevention or diversion programs. When asked how the gang prevention and diversion

programs could help reduce youth gang membership in Fairfax County, they expressed common opinions, suggesting that they must "take an active step in terms of providing gang information" to kids and help them "avoid joining gangs" because it is necessary to "first educate the community members." Participant 5 also stated that the entire community must be "educated about gangs," have "those risk factors addressed," and be able to give them the "native support," saying:

I think there are a few ways to educate community members that are made up of adults and youth. The more that folks are educated about gangs, the more young people will not join gangs. What are some of those risk factors that increase the likelihood that a young person will join a gang? What does the law say about gangs? What are the various support systems available in the county? I believe that the more education that it does, it will reduce the likelihood that you'll have young people joining gangs. I think it is also a fantastic approach and strategy for supporting young people who may have made inappropriate decisions in terms of diversion. Instead of you throwing back at them, you can step in and provide them some native support. It will prevent deviance. It will increase the percentage of young people not doing it again.

Participant 7

According to Participant 7, the most significant factor in overcoming youth gang involvement in the community is "parental education and involvement." The participant argued that if they "could wave a magic wand and open an ideal program, it would be more community-based actions and more resources like community centers" to educate

families in the most "dangerous neighborhoods." The participant also reported that some parents do not "understand the seriousness of the situation, " saying parents need "awareness." Thus the participant believes that it is critical to help parents "understand the risk factors for their children." Overall, the participant greatly emphasized the need for parental education, stating:

I think a big piece of it is parental education and involvement. Many of the parents come from different cultures and are overwhelmed with both the needs of the kids and the financial help of the household, as well as the parenting expectations. So, helping parents understand the risk factors of their children will help. Some parents may not understand the seriousness of the situation, but they need awareness and the ability to support their kids.

Theme 4: Empower the Community Stakeholders

Theme 4 emerged through the shared opinions of seven participants during the coding process in Table 5.

Table 5*How NVRGTF Staff Help Make the Programs Successful*

Participants	Interview extract	Initial Codes	Initial themes
2, 4, 5, 8, 9	If we empower the community leaders to fix the communities themselves, the less we have to worry about doing it for them	Empower the community leaders	Empower community stakeholders to take responsibility for engaging the youth in their communities
2, 4, 6, 7, 8,	Work together with the people in the community and become more involved with the community stakeholders	Work together with the community stakeholders	Allow staff to collaborate with the community stakeholders

According to the data, seven participants believe that gang prevention and diversion programs can succeed if community stakeholders are involved. They also believe that the programs will work well when the NVRGTF and Fairfax County empower the community leaders and allow staff to collaborate with them. They argued that the NVRGTF and Fairfax County could "empower the community stakeholders" to take a role and responsibility in helping engage with vulnerable families using gang prevention or diversion programs. They also suggested that the NVRGTF and collaborating partners can implement "evidence-based programs" in the system and engage kids with "positive activities and role models." The seven participants shared opinions on empowering the community stakeholders; five contributed detailed information to support their position.

Participant 8

Participant 8 argued that it is critical to "empower the neighborhoods" so they can self-sustain and "support each other," also suggesting that the kids are not connected "with the community." Participant 8 believes that kids need positive pathways to integrate "their families into the community," saying:

We need to have more access to ways to support families in moving out of these neighborhoods or empower the settings to create a more sustainable community.

We need more support, more community-based support, or ways to integrate these kids in their families into the community and connect them with the district.

We have to empower the community to be self-sustainable, support each other, and feel connected. That's a big issue that we're having now!

Participant 5

Participant 5 argued that empowering the communities requires a collective effort to decide the "right support necessary" for the community. According to the participant, the county must help "figure out" what they could do to "help the kids." From this perspective, Participant 5 shared the following views:

Let's help out with other things that could help the kids through better family support, parents' education, or more recreational activities in their community; just better alternatives.

Participant 9

Participant 9 argued that creating "more community-wide activities" will help support the community empowerment initiatives and "promote trust" among community members.

Participant 2

According to Participant 2, empowering community stakeholders will help promote trust and "provide an adequate safety net for students targeted for gang recruitment."

Participant 4

According to Participant 4, kids have no options to "keep themselves out of trouble," adding that kids cannot "engage in positive activities with positive role models" by themselves. It has to be the NVRGTF and Fairfax County leaders who help create activities to prevent children from drifting "towards delinquent lifestyles that include gang affiliation."

Theme 5: Increase Representation of the Targeted Population

Theme 5 emerged from the shared opinions of seven participants during the coding process in Table 6. The seven participants shared the argument that the targeted youth gang population in Fairfax County doesn't have "representation" within it. Thus, due to the lack of "representation of the targeted population," many undocumented students and their caregivers are "reluctant to accept support from entities connected to local government." The seven participants also argued that most vulnerable immigrant kids and families "do not understand English" and are "scared of receiving services" due to their immigration status. They argued that gang prevention or diversion programs

could succeed if the targeted gang population gain representation in the system. Table 6 shows the shared opinions of the seven participants.

Table 6

Factors Preventing the NVRGTF Staff's Success

Participants	Interview extract	Initial Codes	Initial themes
2, 3, 6, 7, 8	We are missing our undocumented students and families; representation and fair practices not just by law enforcement and judges but also by agencies.	Representation, undocumented families not visible	Absence of Undocumented families and lack of representation
1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9	Language and culture barriers; immigration status; open for private or non-profit	Needs for representation to understand the targeted population	Lack of representation of the targeted population

Five of the seven participants contributed enough information to support the arguments under this theme. The following are the participants:

Participants 2 and 6

According to Participants 2 and 6, the targeted gang population does not have "fair representation," explaining that gangs do not have "professionals on the field that have the same background" like them who can "communicate" with them, "understand them," and offer them the "right services." According to the data, Participant 6 emphasized that if the targeted gang population is represented by a "police officer, probation officer, and judge intake officer or counselor," they could work together to

address the issue better. The participant also reported that professionals on the field do not "understand the language" of the gang population and that there are "no interpreters" on the field. When I asked Participant 6 about what barriers impede NVRGTF diversion or prevention program success in Fairfax County, the response was as follows:

I think it could be language barriers; we do not have more languages for these various gangs. The Latino gangs or those gangs don't have a fair representation of professionals in the field that have the same background or a kid dealing with somebody that looks like them, such as a police officer, probation officer, judge intake officer, or counselor. These things are needed. It's hard for kids to relate to a professional if they don't know their background, have never walked in their shoes, or are unfamiliar with some cultural norms. So, I think language and lack of representation of the population that's being targeted is a definite barrier.

Participant 6

Participant 6 argued that various agencies encouraging fair "representation and equitable practices" in the business would mitigate communication barriers in the gang neighborhoods and help "kids relate to professionals." The participant also stated that it's hard for children to "relate to a professional if they don't know their background" and that "kids relate to officers" on the field if they know their "background."

Participant 1

Participant 1 suggested that "we can prevent or be more successful" by "making sure that we understand that person, that child, or that family's culture to explain to them" the available services. The participant also stated that some of these gang populations and

their families have "language barriers" and do not have "legal status in the country" to receive an education, elaborating that due to this, when someone in authority tries to help them and their children, "they resist help," thinking that they might be "reported to the immigration authorities." Participant 1 stated:

I'm talking about the population I work with, the Hispanic families with minimal trust in the system. That's probably because some of them do not have legal status. So, when someone or the school official or someone in the community comes to offer them services or help their kids, they think that could impact their status in the country and could result in them being reported to the immigration authorities and having to leave the country. So, they have little trust, and I think that's a huge barrier to accepting help and starting to receive services.

Participant 1 and 8

Participants 1 and 8 explained that most families "do not understand English" and that officers are "providing services in their native language," stating that it is not only the "language barrier" that prevents effectively connecting to the gang immigrant population but also because they "don't know all those families very well" and do not "understand their culture" to better connect with them. Participants 1 and 3 believe that when "prevention and education efforts are implemented" to aid "language barriers" in the gang population, "we will see positive numbers in the reduction of youth that is involved in the gang."

Participant 3

Participant 3 stated that once these "programs have been implemented early" and begin "taking up juveniles" on time, "we're allowed to understand the actual things that come along with joining the gang." The participant also expressed that "diversion programs are meant to assist with giving juveniles alternative or safe places with different activities to involve themselves in to avoid being gang-involved or becoming gang involved."

Theme 6: Connect Undocumented Students with Private Or Nonprofit Services

I generated Theme 6 from the shared opinions of seven participants in Table 7.

Table 7

Barriers Impede NVRGTF Prevention or Diversion Programs' Success

Participants	Interview extract	Initial Codes	Initial themes
1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8	If we could strengthen partnerships with non-governmental agencies such as local non-profits or places of worship, it would help	Strengthen partnerships with non-governmental agencies	Encourage partnership with non-profit/private agencies
1, 2, 6, 7, 9	Some vulnerable families don't trust the system due to immigration and language barriers and have feelings of hopelessness	Immigration status, Language barriers, and issue trusting the system	Vulnerable Families open-up to private or non-profit for help with language barriers

The seven participants argued that gang prevention or diversion programs could help reduce youth gang membership if private or non-profit organizations are connected to the undocumented gang population or family. According to data, the seven participants

believe that undocumented gang families are vulnerable due to their immigration status and are open to private or non-profit organizations for services. The participants also believe that the NVRGTF and Fairfax County can help "connect the vulnerable families" and kids by introducing private or non-profit providers to the business. They also shared the argument that "private or non-profit" service providers in the system can help connect undocumented gang immigrants who are "resisting services" due to their immigration status. Four of the seven participants provided detailed information supporting the argument in Theme 6.

Participant 2

Participant 2 argued that many child-gang-involved students in Fairfax County are "undocumented immigrants," explaining that many of these "undocumented students and their caregivers are reluctant to accept support from entities connected to local government." Based on this, the participant believes that if the NVRGTF and Fairfax County "could expand partnership with the non-governmental agencies" such as "local non-profits or places of worship, that would help" connect the undocumented gang population to services.

If we could strengthen partnerships with non-governmental agencies such as local non-profits or places of worship, it would help. Many of the kids come here and may not have legal status in the country and feel hopeless. We should making sure that we understand that person, that child, or that family culture. These families are scared of receiving services. Language is a huge barrier; we don't understand their culture; parents may be worried about their immigration status

and working with outside providers. I think fair representation and equitable practices not just by law enforcement and not just by judges but also by agencies are needed.

Participant 9

Participant 9 argued that if we do not have "enough prevention programs" to accommodate the gang population, we will face a "potential waitlist for services." The participant elaborated that "there is only one intervention program and if that doesn't work," there "isn't another provider to send the student/families" to get some help. Participant 9 also expressed that "collaborating with outside providers" who are not connected with the local government will help gang youth parents who are "worried about their immigration status" report for services.

Participant 6

Participant 6 stated that having "more than one provider" would allow them to "tap into some resources" that can help them better serve kids. The participant also explained that "we need more than one provider" in the agency and that if there are other intervention programs available, we could tap into some resources and help those heavily-involved and moderately-involved kids or those just beginning to get involved in gangs.

Participant 8

According to Participant 8, if we could uphold the values of these "small non-profits that are offering basic services" in Fairfax County, it would be "our strength and

our tool" to succeed. According to the data, these are some of the resources needed to succeed in gang prevention or diversion programs.

Theme 7: Lack of Funding

Theme 7 emerged during the coding process in table 8. According to the data, funding is critical for gang prevention or diversion programs to succeed in Fairfax County. The eight participants believe that lack of funding is preventing the success of the programs. According to them, the NVRGTF and collaborating partners "lack funding" to manage the "vulnerable youth" and "gang population" in the area. According to the eight participants, "more funding, staffing, access to support and services and continues resources" are critical to keeping the gang communities safe. They also argued that "more funding, staffing, and resources" will help ensure adequate service for the vulnerable youth population in Fairfax County.

Table 8

Factors Affecting Gang Prevention or Diversion Programs' Success

Participants	Interview extract	Initial Codes	Initial themes
2, 4, 5, 7, 8	Programs work, but we need more funding and more staffing, and resources	Funding, staffing, and resources	Funding, staffing, and resources are needed to meet the needs of vulnerable kids
1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9	It would involve access to resources; access to support or services; and lack of funding	Funding and staffing	Need for funding and staffing to enhance kids' programs

Many of the eight participants contributed more information to help understand their arguments. The following are the participants who contributed more ideas to support their opinions:

Participants 2, 3, and 9

Participants 2, 3, and 9 argued that the NVRGTF requires "more funding" and "more resources to enhance gang prevention or diversion programs and assist the gang population," stating that the increasing challenges of the gang population in Fairfax County prompt "more resources and funding" to move the "programs further along."

Participant 3 stated:

The gang population is remarkably high in the area. It only intensifies when you know other juveniles are being recruited faster than gang prevention and diversion programs and services are offered to these juveniles. Again, I would have to say that more resources and funding would aid in helping the programs further along. Not only that but the workforce of it to have more people able to supply the resources and the divergent services would be beneficial.

According to Participant 3, they cannot "stop services," explaining that when they stop services, "gang involvement" in crime will increase. The participant believes that achieving the goal is a "tedious task, and it's a service that can never stop." Moreover, the participant does not see how they "can be satisfied until or as long as they're still gangs, gang crimes, and gang involvement" or how they "can be satisfied with the current goal," saying:

It may not be a realistic goal, but the goal is always to be 100% compliant with 100% getting rid of gangs. So, I think it's a tedious task, it's an ongoing task, and it's a service that can never stop because as soon as we let up potentially, it will increase gang involvement and gang participation. So, as long as there's gang involvement, I don't think we can ever be satisfied.

While all seven participants believe that funding is the primary factor in the success of gang prevention and diversion programs, Participants 5 and 8 further argued that the most significant barriers to diversion and prevention program success are "access to resources and support."

Participants 5 and 8

Participants 5 and 8 argued that Fairfax communities lack a "support system." According to Participant 8, one of the contributing factors to kids getting involved in gangs is "socio-economic" reasons. The participant reported that the communities need a support system to help "integrate these kids" and their "families into the community," explaining that for the organization to connect gang youth to the community, they need "access to money" to implement a "support system" that supports kids' needs. Participant 8 had the following to say:

One of the most significant factors for kids to get involved in gangs is socioeconomic status. We need more support, more community-based support, or ways to integrate these kids in their families into the community and connect them with the district. We need access to money and access to implementing these inside the communities.

Participant 5

On the other hand, Participant 5 argued that implementing a "community-based support system" for the kids is critical, recollecting how a "member county" uses diversion programs to support youth and how much could be "implemented in other counties" to help kids. The participant emphasized that this approach is critical and offered some details:

Some member counties have a diversion as the first program that prepares them to provide support to those young people who find themselves involved with the court process. The continuation of that diversion program is critical. The work the member counties have done leaves those kids on the notification gang passports feeling optimistic about the work and the likelihood of success.

Theme 8: Prioritize Collaboration Across Agencies

According to the data, the barrier that impedes gang prevention or diversion programs' success is collaboration. According to the shared opinions of the eight participants in Table 9, it is critical for the NVRGTF to "collaborate" with other agencies in the Fairfax area. The eight participants on table 9 argued that gang prevention or diversion programs could be more successful if the staff could work together and collaborate on information across agencies. These eight participants believe the agency will do better if it "prioritizes collaboration." The eight participants said, "We have multiple agencies that make up the NVRGTF, but there are barriers to sharing information." They also shared the argument that the county has to take a "collaborative approach where everyone works together," stating, "We've got to have a collective effort"

and become more "involved with community stakeholders." According to the participants, the county and the agencies "don't collaborate well," explaining that there is "resistance on both sides of the county and the agencies to be more collaborative and connect the kids, families, and stakeholders."

The participants believed it would be beneficial if the county and the agencies could make it a "priority to inform their staff" that the work of "regaining reflection is a priority." They suggested "collective gang work regularly, including monthly meetings with police, community agencies, and schools."

Table 9*Barriers Affecting The NVRGTF Staff's Success in Ensuring Fidelity*

Participants	Interview extract	Initial Codes	Initial themes
2, 3, 5, 6, 8	We have multiple agencies that make up the NVRGTF, but there are barriers to sharing information	Collaboration across agencies	Allow collaboration across agencies to enhance partnerships
2, 5, 7, 8, 9	Better collaboration across county agencies; including mental health and family services; including community stakeholders and empowering them; we just don't have access to information	Involve other professionals with expert knowledge in the field, collaborate with community stakeholders	Partner with other professionals and community stakeholders and collaborate with them
2, 4, 6, 7, 8	Take a collaborative approach where everyone works together; become more involved with the community stakeholders	Collaboration, work together, involve community stakeholders	Allow staff to collaborate information across other agencies and work with the community stakeholders

A few of these participants individually contributed extensive insights to understand the arguments in Theme 8. The following are the participants who contributed more ideas to support their arguments:

Participant 4

Participant 4 argued that the agency should prioritize "collaboration" and "statistics" across other agencies in Fairfax County, stating that "continuing to take a collaborative approach" in the system where everyone "works together and focuses on their role" will help enhance the business. As the participant said:

Fairfax County Unit is doing an excellent job in gang prevention, education, intervention, and suppression work. We look forward to collaborating in our county amongst different agencies and focusing on what we want to work on to ensure that we have a county of professionals who know they are at the forefront of what they're doing.

Participant 7

Participant 7 suggested that the two "elements" that the NVRGTF needs to consider to "improve" the work are "parental support and collaboration," offering the following suggestions:

I would say that two particularly essential elements could improve the work of NVRGTF gang prevention concerns. One would be better support for parents, and one would be better collaboration across county agencies, including mental health and family services.

Participant 8

According to Participant 8, "confidentiality" and "resistance" problems in the system prevent "collaboration" across agencies, reporting that both the NVRGTF and school system are not "collaborating" well due to issues of "confidentiality" in "keeping kids" protected. Due to this, the participant raised the problem of a "disconnect between

trusts and other community partners," expressing feelings of being overwhelmed by the "resistance" and "confidentiality issues" in the system. Participant 8 believes that if "we're not communicating," then "we're not working on a collective good." The participant further elaborated on a "couple" of issues to consider as factors:

I think there are a couple; I think there is resistance on both sides to be more collaborative due to issues like confidentiality and keeping kids from the schools. Many of us must be careful about what information we share, right? Because our kid's information is confidential, and we want to keep it that way, there's almost a disconnect between trusts and other community partners. If I can't talk about my client, how am I supposed to say this is the problem? See it? The schools want to protect the kids from becoming court-involved, which is good, but it's good to try to guard these kids against being incriminated. We're not communicating, and we're not working on a collective good.

Participant 8 argued that information is "not properly shared" across the agencies in the county in a way that can help "outside members and collaborators" bridge the gaps between the staff, community stakeholders, and the targeted population, saying, "We both want to be doing better, right, but how do we do that?" In the community, the participant reported that they are "focusing primarily on the immigrant community in the gang-involved areas," but the biggest issue is the "distrust from the community members." Furthermore, according to Participant 8, the communities do not trust the agency because they are not "anybody who's in the law enforcement, right?" Based on field experience, Participant 8 shared the following:

There's a lack of satisfaction from the outside members and those collaborators. You know these are people working with me, and I'm a representative of the Northern Virginia Regional Gang Task Force, and I'm passing on this good message. I'm educating people as they go, but we're not giving our stakeholders and collaborators the essential information and not being open and honest. There are a lot of levels of secrecy. We don't have access to information.

Participant 8 expressed that helping children stay away from gang involvement requires the "collaboration" of the system with "community stakeholders." The participant also believes that Fairfax County and NVRGTF will be successful with the help of these "community stakeholders." Based on field experience, Participant 8 further suggested:

I would say that my biggest concern for any gang intervention program is that we cannot do our work outside of the community stakeholders. We cannot do our work outside of the community, and we cannot be successful without that. Fairfax County would be detrimental to itself if it didn't start collaborating with those community stakeholders.

Participant 6

Participant 6 argued that it is critical to have an "interdisciplinary team" that foresees the operations in gang-involved areas. According to the participant, it is also vital to "incorporate something into the interdisciplinary team" that is specific and focuses on enhancing areas where gang "crime takes place," further suggesting that such a thing "has to be across the board and have each disciplinary team have the kids

participate." Participant 6 believes that if they "have an interdisciplinary team," it will help them "better understand what's going on with the kids and get the needs of these kids and families appropriately addressed."

Participants 6 and 9

Participants 6 and 9 shared the same views about incorporating interdisciplinary teams in the system. Participant 9 emphasized that "having a pyramid team that includes monthly meetings with the police, community agencies, and schools will be helpful," stating that "collaborating and understanding what is happening in our community is vital."

Theme 9: Set up Statistics

Theme 9 emerged during the coding process in table 10.

Table 10

Barriers Affecting The NVRGTF Staff's Success in Ensuring Fidelity

Participants	Interview extract	Initial Codes	Initial themes
4, 5, 6, 7, 8	Measure the success rate of gang prevention programs on a yearly basis; how do we quantify success; being able to know if you are successful; ways to track our referrals	Statistics	Gather statistics to track progress and measure success
2, 9	We do not know what happens to the students after they leave our school	Statistics/collaboration	Need for statistics and collaboration to track kids' improvement

According to the data, gang prevention or diversion programs' success rests on gathering data to track the services' progress. The seven participants believe that if data is available, they could "tap into it" for information to improve the programs. The seven participants also believe setting up statistics is critical for gang prevention or diversion programs' success. Setting up statistics is an area that requires development and is a view shared by the seven participants in Table 10. These participants argued that there are no systems to "measure the success rate of gang prevention programs yearly," elaborating that there are no ways to "track our referrals, quantify success, or know if you are successful in the perspective." The participants contributed personal views to support the need for statistical data in the systems to track the progress of the people they serve.

Participants 2, 3, 6, and 8

According to shared opinions of these participants, most of the vulnerable kids are "immigrant kids" and "undocumented" and do not have "legal status" in the country to pursue "high school education." These participants believe that some of these vulnerable children do not get to graduate from high school.

Participant 9

Participant 9 sincerely expressed concerns about "what happens to the students after they leave" the elementary school, emphasizing that they wish they knew "what happened" to those vulnerable or undocumented students but that there are no statistics due to "confidentiality" issues in the system. Participant 9 said, "I trust that the high school continues to engage" those vulnerable youth in their programs. According to the

participant, it would be excellent if "we could figure out a way to track our referrals to current programs."

Participant 6

According to participant 6, gathering data will help enhance education and collaboration. Participant 6 argued that "gathering data" will help them be "educated, continue to work on different trends, and collaborate with the police, community leaders, and other professionals." The participant said this would also help them "figure out what works and what doesn't work" in the system, stating that it concerned "implementing different programs and not having any statistics or follow-up numbers to know what is successful." As participant 6 said:

We must continue to be educated, work on different trends, work with the police, community leaders, and other professionals, meet with them, and figure out what works and what doesn't work. Also, it is critical to know if you are successful in the perspective. You can't work or implement different programs and do not have any statistics or follow-up numbers to understand what is successful and what's not or figure out some effective evidence-based practices, which should help.

Theme 10: Set Up Ongoing Education for Professionals in The Field

Theme 10 emerged during the coding process in Table 11. Eight participants believed that professionals in the field need ongoing education. According to the data, the eight participants argued that it is critical for the system to supply "ongoing education for professionals" in the field. According to the data, setting up ongoing education for the professionals working in the field will help gang prevention or diversion programs to

succeed. The participants believe that gang prevention or diversion programs will not impact the youth gang population if the workforce is inexperienced in engaging with the vulnerable youth and their families and the community stakeholders. The eight participants explained that training professionals in the area will help the staff supply the "right services" and help them be "experts on the field." Moreover, "ongoing training" in the system will help staff be "consistent" and develop the "capacity to support evidence-based practices" across agencies. Table 11 shows the shared opinions of the eight participants.

Table 11

What The Staff of the NVRGTF Could Do to Ensure Fidelity

Participants	Interview extract	Initial Codes	Initial themes
1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	I think we need a lot of good trainings available for service providers, school staff, probation officers, and social workers; ongoing trainings; making sure we are consistent	Training for staff and service providers	Develop ongoing training for staff and service providers
6, 8, 9	From what I've seen, it could be the professionals' lack of education. I mean the professionals that are working on the field	Professionals in the field need education	Lack of ongoing training for professionals in the field

The eight participants have contributed personal views about "ongoing training" for staff. They have contributed the following arguments:

Participants 1 and 7

According to Participants 1 and 7, "ongoing training" for professionals in the field will help staff provide the "right services." It will also help staff tackle the community's frequent "gang change" tactics. Participant 1 argued that if all the "service providers, school staff, probation officers, and social workers" receive the same training, then the staff will have professional strategies to deal with "gang issues" in their community. The participant shared the following views:

We need a lot of good training available for service providers, including the school staff, probation officers, and social workers. I think there is training and not only once-a-year training but making sure we're following up because; gangs change a lot. So, a few years ago, when I started my career as a probation officer, there was a lot about the colors that the kids were wearing, the type of shoes, those were new dedicators, a new association, or affiliation, but those things are not anymore. Because the gang members found out that those were red flags for law enforcement, they don't wear anything that identifies them anymore. So, there must be ongoing training to ensure that we provide the right services and not profile kids who might not be gang members or missing those who aren't working.

Participant 5

Participant 5 argued that all staff or service providers must receive "ongoing training" to be equipped with "knowledge" on the field. According to the participant, it is critical to give staff opportunities to "learn and become true experts in their field."

Participant 5 believes that when staff "receive the most recent" and "professional development training," they will take what "they've learned and implemented in the field," emphasizing that the authority should not only "promote professionalism" across the board but also "support the members of the leadership team" and ensure that "regaining reflection" across the business is a "priority." Participant 5 shared the following views:

First and foremost, staff must receive the most recent relevant professional development training; they should be given opportunities to learn and become true experts in their field. The NVRGTF and Fairfax County should allow staff to take what they've learned and implement it in the area. In addition to that, I also believe that leadership should promote professionalism and do what they can do to support the leadership team members and make it a priority to inform their agency that the work of regaining reflection is a priority.

Participant 3

Participant 3 expressed that "ongoing training and services" will help with "consistent" services, according to the data. Additionally, being "consistent with the services" is a "major thing like anything else" to all "juveniles and residents." The participant believes that when "ongoing" pieces of training are provided, it will help with providing "consistent" services that can benefit both juveniles and residents. Participant 3 greatly emphasized the following points of consideration:

Like anything else, I think the major thing is that we have to make sure that we're consistent with the services we provide and what is being offered to ensure that

we're providing the same information and services to all juveniles and residents. To go above and beyond to be sincere and commit to delivering those diversion services to these juveniles. I would also say that ongoing training and services offered to the providers are beneficial.

When I asked Participant 3 what factors prevent NVRGTF's success in Fairfax County, the response was that "professionals lack education." The participant reported that "there are plenty of programs available," but professionals in the field lack the knowledge to "connect the kids and families" and other "stakeholders" to "those programs." Participant 3 also argued that it should not be a problem for a "professional or service provider" to offer assistance to a "kid that desperately needs" help, stating the following as barriers to programs' success:

It might be what I've seen; it could be just professionals' lack of education; I mean professionals working in the field. I think there are plenty of programs available, but it is important to be able to connect the kids and families to those programs and other stakeholders involved. I'll say fear and worry about servicing kids that engage in the gang are some of the factors. There is a worrying part that is more than an understandable safety concern, but that shouldn't tension you as a professional or service provider being able to help a kid that desperately needs it. I think that's important.

Participant 7

According to Participant 7, it is a challenge to think about introducing "consistency across the county" to have all "students" or "youth" in a "similar fashion."

Still, it is better to "gather data" and enable looking into "what happened." The participant also believes that consistency is about "gathering" data for a "year or two" and being able to see how "we've referred kids and what happened." Participant 7 commented the following on consistency:

Consistency across the county may be a little harder to think about; maybe how we can make sure that all students are served or all youth are served in the same kind of or similar fashion. I guess just better data gathering for a year or two years and seeing what we've referred kids and what happened ultimately will help.

Participant 8

According to participant 8, implementing "evidence-based programs into the side" is critical for the system to succeed. The participant also suggested that the NVRGTF needs to partner with professionals such as "gang experts, detectives, and other community partners" and examine which of these "evidence-based curriculums" are most "proper to use." Participant 8 expressed the following opinions:

We need mental health therapists, gang experts, detectives, and other community partners to sit down and look at some of these evidence-based curriculums and figure out which one is the most proper to use. First and foremost, we don't have that yet. We don't have an intervention program that I'm aware of, at least internally, that is evidence-based, or we can refer kids to and say, hey, this is something that works. We need to start getting some evidence-based programs into the side and implementing that as far as the deal.

Participant 8 also believes that when "evidence-based programs" are implemented in the system, the staff will engage with community "stakeholders with business experience" to ensure that communities receive appropriate services. Besides this, the participant believes that it will be helpful when "community intervention programs" are implemented where the "communities are involved" in the process, saying:

I feel like we don't have evidence-based programs yet. Once that happens, we need to continue having those stakeholders review this to see how we're doing. To also ensure that we're implementing it and not just studying it ourselves. I believe in the community intervention part in that the community is involved. They're the ones who would be able to speak to the people. We follow it, do what we're saying, and see it on the flip side. That is what outsiders wouldn't see, but those community members can see how it works.

Participant 9

Participant 9 explained that when evidence-based programs are implemented in the system, it will be time to "set up goals with a timeline of when to meet them." The participant believes that when specific goals are set, it is easy for the staff to "meet them."

Theme 11: Allow Compulsory Participation of Vulnerable Families

I developed Theme 11 during the coding and analysis processes in Table 12. According to the data, gang prevention or diversion programs cannot affect vulnerable youth and their families if they are not willing to take part in the program. The participants believe that the vulnerable youth population should not have options to participate in the programs. Once they are vulnerable, they need to participate in the

programs, learn, understand, and be aware of the situation and benefits of completing the program.

Six participants argued that the NVRGTF and Fairfax County could help support the "compulsory participation" of vulnerable kids and parents in the program. The participants also claimed that some of the policies that "protect juveniles and their rights" impede program delivery on the field. According to the participants, many "parents and students" are not "willing to participate in the programs due to lack of compulsory participation." They also shared the argument that if the NVRGTF and Fairfax help modify "policies" that "fit and make the makeup of what's going on in today's culture," it would encourage "vulnerable family" participation. According to the data and shared information of the six participants in Table 12, the participants believed that once kids are "vulnerable," they will join gangs and commit crimes as authorized.

Table 12*Barriers Preventing The Staff Of NVRGTF Success*

Participants	Interview extract	Initial Codes	Initial themes
3, 5, 6, 8, 9	There are barriers put in place to protect juveniles and their rights that sometimes impede you from offering preventive services; lack of parent or student willingness to be involved in programs	Policy updates	Update policies to help encourage youth and parent participation in the programs
6, 7	I would also consider if there was a way to make participation mandatory; require students to take part; lack of parents or students' willingness to take part in programs	Policy updates	Update policy to encourage youth and parental participation

Some participants contributed extensive knowledge to support the arguments in Theme 11. The following are their opinions:

Participant 3

According to Participant 3, "there's still a level of confidentiality" to consider when discussing juvenile participation in preventive programs, arguing that they are "put in place to protect juveniles, and their rights" but prevent officers from "offering preventive services" to them. Participant 3 reported that once the "preventive services"

are voluntary, it is "difficult for some older kids" to compromise with program participation, saying:

It's not just about being able to come in and offer programs and services to juveniles. There are a few hoops, not necessarily hoops, but barriers put in place to protect children and their rights that sometimes impede you from offering preventive services. Again, a lot of it is at that stage voluntary! So it's a little bit more difficult for some older kids to get to buy into the program and services. I would say this is an obstacle.

Participation 7

Participant 7 stated that "many of the students working with us refuse to participate in many cases," and we "can't compel or force them." According to the participant, the students "just don't engage; they don't do anything, they don't work." Participant 7 further reported that "it's not just the kid, a lot is going on in terms of parents and provisions, or the like" that needs to be addressed. The participant believes that without policy updates to compel youth participation in programs, many children will not participate in "preventive services," suggesting the Family Services department as an alternate resource to reshape the NVRGTF:

I think the Department of Family Services has a lot they could offer through their support. I guess this would be presenting positive recreational options for leisure time in these toxic communities and if there's a way to enforce it. I don't know that there is a way. If there were, then that would be great because so many of these kids choose not to do anything.

Participant 6

Participant 6 explained that policy updates will help vulnerable kids achieve the "fundamental qualities" in learning and help staff stay current with "what is going on in today's culture," stating that "changing some of those policies that have been through the books from decades ago" will jumpstart the business. According to Participant 6, it is critical to consider policy updates to track the ongoing "gang activity" on the "social media," emphasizing the following to bring about policy change:

We are looking at or revamping some of those policies and laws that fit and make up what's going on in today's culture, such as a lot of gang activity on social media. So, looking at how you can address that within the juvenile court will be necessary as an attempt to reduce some of the activities on social media. Right now, law enforcement and the juvenile court, in my opinion, are a little bit behind in understanding what these kids are doing on social media and how that translates to the community, bioethics, and officers working on the field.

Participant 6 argued that kids need a role model to "show them what it is or what they need to do as a teenager transition" into a "young adult," explaining that many of these "vulnerable kids" do not understand the level of consequences involved in gang and gang crime and do not know much about how the programs could help them. Participant 6 believes that kids need to be educated and role-modeled into adulthood, emphasizing:

Need at least one person that can consistently take them and show them what it is or what they need to do as a teenager transition into or to become a young adult. If

they don't have that support system in their household, they can benefit from one person showing them the life skills they need to be successful.

Participant 9

Participant 9 had a shared belief with all the other participants that updating policies to allow compulsory kids' participation in programs is one of the best ways for children to succeed. When I asked Participant 9 what factors prevent the NVRGTF staff's success in the programs' goals in Fairfax County, the response was a "lack of parent or student willingness to be involved in the programs." The participant argued that the most significant barrier preventing children and their parents from participating in the programs is "reluctance to engage in these programs," reporting that children and their parents do not engage in programs because they are "in denial." Participant 9 further explained that parent participation in the program is critical to "make these programs successful." The participant believes that if the policy is updated to allow compulsory vulnerable-kid participation, it will help reduce the child gang population.

Summary

This qualitative study was to understand the success of diversion programs in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community. The guiding research question to understand the research problem was How could the members of NVRGTF measure the gang prevention or diversion programs' overall success regarding the prospects of reducing youth gang membership? I used a qualitative exploratory case study design to explore the participants' perceptions and experiences about gang diversion or prevention programs' success in Fairfax County.

I obtained the data from nine participants and transcribed them. I manually coded and analyzed the interview transcript and developed 11 themes that reflect the information in the transcript and the research question. I presented this evidence as trustworthiness and described credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. I also explained the data collection process, which has been divided into the following sections: setting, demographic, data collection and analysis, results, and summary.

In chapter five, I interpreted the findings from chapter four, including the limitations of this study, recommendations for future studies, and implications of positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

I used this qualitative exploratory case study to understand the success of diversion programs in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community. The guiding research question was: How could the members of NVRGTF measure the gang prevention or diversion programs' overall success regarding the prospects of reducing youth gang membership? To understand this, I explored the perceptions and experiences of nine participants from the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners in the Fairfax area. I used this information to help policymakers improve the programs and services and reduce youth gang membership and crime.

The topics I discussed during the exploration include the following: factors preventing the NVRGTF diversion or prevention programs' success in the Fairfax area, what NVRGTF staff and collaborating partners are doing to ensure fidelity, and how the programs could be more successful in reducing youth gang membership. This examination helped inform NVRGTF policymakers, including administrators and collaborating partners, about how they could improve the programs.

The coding process led to the generation of 11 themes as follows:

- Put pressure on early intervention
- Allow schools to help in the screening process
- Create community-wide educational programs
- Empower community stakeholders.
- Increase fair representation of the targeted population

- Connect undocumented students with private or non-profit services.
- Lack of funding
- Prioritize collaboration across agencies
- Set up statistics.
- Set up ongoing education for professionals in the field.
- Allow compulsory participation of vulnerable families.

I developed these 11 themes to address specific information reported by the participants. I used this in-depth information to aid the interpretation according to the research question.

Interpretation of the Findings

The study has contributed information beyond the expectations of the literature. Thus, interpretations are based on a critical analysis of the findings and literature. The interpretations are also based on Hirschi's (1969) SBT perspective of the study. The Hirschi's SBT perspective of Koepfel et al. (2018) serves as the theoretical foundation used to explain the data reports. According to Hirschi's SBT, youth participate in crime and delinquency when they develop a negative social relationship through involvement, attachment, commitment, and belief (Koepfel et al., 2018). This concept supplies multiple ways of interpreting and analyzing information from the literature review and findings.

Relationship Of the Findings to the Literature

The findings of this qualitative exploratory case study have contributed confirmable or extensible knowledge about gang diversions programs' success and the relationships between the themes and issues discussed in the literature in Chapter 2.

According to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the diversion program's primary goal is to promote a positive lifestyle for the youth and their families and help them overcome problems within their families, schools, peers, and workplaces (Radic, 2016). The study's findings confirmed that gang prevention or diversion programs are critical in helping vulnerable kids successfully integrate into the community as law-abiding citizens.

According to the diversion programs' history in child social bonding described in Chapter 2, child developmental challenges, family detachment, peer influence, and environmental risk factors contribute to youth gang involvement (Smith et al., 2019). The study's findings confirm this argument, revealing that most children involved in gangs and crime in the Fairfax County area have no bond with the community due to immigration status, lack of representation, or socioeconomic factors. The findings also support Zavala et al.'s (2019) argument that child social attachment defines the child's behavioral patterns, habits, social lifestyles, and characteristics. For instance, Participant 7 reported that when immigrant kids arrive in the country illegally, an inability to advance to better educational opportunities, such as transitioning from elementary to high school, leads to feelings of hopelessness. Consequently, they view joining gangs as a solution. This finding confirms that the lack of social attachment is associated with child gang involvement.

Wylie et al. (2019) and Pope and Jones (2020) argued that not meeting child criminogenic needs is a substantial contributing factor in child gang involvement. The study's findings aligned with this argument. During the study, Participant 8 argued that the programs often focus on the "kid changing behaviors" and not on some of the

"broader issues that caused them to get involved in that behavior." The study confirms that the gang prevention or diversion programs in Fairfax County do not address the "macro-level and multi socioeconomic issues that these kids often face." While I did not ask direct questions about the factors associated with child gang involvement, participant 8 reported this information while addressing the interview question.

While youth participate in diversion classes and community services to manage their risk factors and conditions, the JJS ensures that parents and community leaders support them (Basanta et al., 2018). Basanta et al. (2018) stated that the JJS encourages parents and community leaders to support the youth programs. However, this study showed that some parents and community members are unaware of the programs and must be educated and empowered to increase involvement. In particular, Participants 3 and 5 emphasized that the kids and community members must be educated about the programs to help support the youth, while Participant 7 expressed that "parental education and involvement" is one of the most significant pathways to overcoming youth gang involvement.

According to Goldstein et al. (2019), school-based diversion programs in Pennsylvania help schoolchildren participate in crime awareness and mentoring services at their various schools. The study did not confirm this argument because such practices were not present in Fairfax County. Participants 1, 3, 8, and 9 shared opinions suggesting that schools should be allowed to screen for vulnerable kids and direct them to appropriate programs and services. However, the study's findings revealed that

confidentiality issues at schools do not enable schools in Fairfax County to implement such a screening and referral process.

Thielo et al. (2019) argued that the U.S. public widely supports diversion programs. According to Thielo et al. (2019), the U.S. public favors treating offenders' criminogenic needs using diversion programs rather than prison for offenders. The study's findings confirm that diversion programs are critical for juveniles who engage in criminal justice and even expand this argument by suggesting early intervention programs for vulnerable kids at schools and communities in the Fairfax area.

Wong (2016) reported that U.S. law enforcement supports gang prevention and diversion programs in the community, with the literature indicating the extent of police support for such programs through their role in identifying and addressing risk factors that often reduce youth substance abuse and delinquency and directing individuals to help. Although I did not ask specific questions regarding law enforcement support in this regard, the findings confirmed that the county must collaborate with the police and community leaders. According to Participant 6, Fairfax County must continue to be educated, work on different trends, and work with the police, community leaders, and other professionals, for instance, by meeting with them and figuring out what works and what does not.

Chapter 2 also introduced the impact of EBP in the context of gang diversion programs. According to Cullen (2017), EBP gang prevention or diversion programs showed that parents' involvement in their child's participation in the program is critical to moving youth beyond delinquency. However, the data shows that the Fairfax area has not

yet formally implemented any evidence-based gang prevention or diversion programs. The study suggested that the county and NVRGTF implement EBP to involve parents and community leaders. Additionally, Participants 8 and 9 stated that implementing evidenced-based programs will help staff see the big picture of the entire business and develop a plan for managing it. Participant 8 confirmed, "First and foremost, we don't have that yet."

Moreover, based on EBP, Kilkelly et al. (2011) found that diversion programs lack transparent implementation and structure to ensure accountability; however, the study's findings could not confirm this argument as the results showed that there are no EBP diversion programs currently in the NVRGTF system in the Fairfax area. The study thus indicated that the county should implement EBP gang diversion programs to engage the targeted gang population.

The findings also confirmed the arguments of Kilkelly et al. (2011) and Smyth (2011) that the programs lack complaint data to assess information statistically. Five participants reported that the organization did not only lack EBP in the design but also lacked statistics to help them track their referrals and know they fared after moving from one school to another. The five participants confirmed that the lack of statistical data results from confidentiality issues in the system.

Furthermore, Kilkelly et al. (2011) and Smyth's (2011) report on EBPs indicated that the existence of gang prevention or diversion programs did not prove that parents understood the programs and were willing to engage with professionals to divert youth from criminal involvement. The findings confirmed this argument, showing that parents

and community leaders are not involved in the Fairfax area's gang prevention or diversion programs. According to Participant 7, parents need "awareness" to engage in the process effectively, further explaining that it is critical to help parents "understand the risk factors of their children" and give them support.

Chapter 2 also addressed the success and failure of diversion programs across the states. Liles et al. (2018) argued that courts in Arkansas ensured that offenders involved with the CJS were ordered to receive treatment in the diversion program, followed by their release into the community. According to Liles et al. (2018), most MH offenders ordered to complete the MH diversion program successfully graduated and became law-abiding community citizens. The findings indicated that vulnerable children in the Fairfax area are not mandated to participate in prevention or diversion programs. According to four participants, the programs are voluntary, which allows the older kids to opt out. Participants 3, 5, 7, and 9 shared arguments that the county should enact compulsory participation for all vulnerable kids and families. Thus, the findings confirmed that this would help youth learn and be aware of the situation.

Next, the literature review revealed that some diversion programs did not achieve their goals. For example, Coffman et al. (2017) proved that Georgia's diversion program did not create an effective pathway for women with mental health issues to receive treatment and prepare them for release into the community. The authors argued that while the program was designed for mentally challenged women to receive diversion treatments, resolve their pending charges with the court, and be released to the community, the diversion programs actually enabled the courts to impose jail time upon

them (Coffman et al., 2017). The findings suggested that Fairfax's gang prevention or diversion programs are progressing due to the county's inability to engage parents and community leaders and because evidence-based programs have not been introduced.

In the literature Review, I discussed the history of gangs, including gang identity, statistics, and culture in the community. McCarkle et al. (2019) revealed that many politicians, law enforcement, and news media profiled gangs by linking them to violence and murder in the community. At the same time, other politicians suggested that gang crises in most communities are manufactured by agencies that supply diversion or prevention services to obtain resources from the government and expand their authority (McCarkle et al., 2019; Sharkey et al., 2016). Even though I did not ask any questions about this argument, the findings did not indicate any support for it. The results showed that some communities in the Fairfax area are toxic because they are gang-filled, also revealing that someone could get killed in such gang-filled communities at any given time. According to Participant 7, "some of the neighborhoods are just toxic; there are so little cognitive things in the neighborhood that the children just get swept up in these negative influences of the gang."

Moreover, gang members are reluctant to reveal their identity on the street because a labeled gang member risks severe consequences (Sharkey et al., 2016), which inhibits the development of statistical data. There are currently no legitimate approaches to identify gang members and develop statistics to justify their population across the state unless by self-admission and tattoo recognition (Sharkey et al., 2016). The findings did not confirm this argument. However, I did not ask any questions about gang identity,

statistics, or culture. Still, the findings indicate evidence that some communities are gang-filled. According to Participants 3, 5, and 8, there are "dangerous neighborhoods kind of gang-filled ones" where parents' involvement in their children pursuing gangs is clear. Participants 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8 shared opinions that they will not be satisfied with the process until the gang is present and involvement and crime are reduced. The study also confirmed that gang recruitments are ongoing in elementary and middle school students or through friendships at an early age.

The literature revealed that gangs target the vulnerable youth population for recruitment because children have low monetary motives and do not resist authority (Maringira & Masiya, 2018; Prinz & Ehrmann, 2019). The findings confirmed that most of the vulnerable kids in the Fairfax area are often recruited by gangs or involved with the JJS. Participants 1, 3, and 8 shared the argument that due to the increasing vulnerable population in the Fairfax area, gang populations are far higher than what the local prevention or diversion programs can accommodate. The data confirmed that gang members most likely recruit venerable kids.

Limitations of this Study

The limitations identified by this study were the time-consuming processes during the research and data collection process. During the data collection process, it was impossible to determine what time the data collection was going to be over. Due to these time constraints, I could not predict when to finish the data collection process and analyze the data and draft the final dissertation.

Another limitation was one of the demographic and geographical locations where I conducted the research. Many counties in Virginia were impacted by gang membership and crime while they operated diversion or prevention programs simultaneously in their local communities. This situation limited my ability to generalize the research results in Fairfax County to the other counties with similar issues because; other jurisdictions may have policies that could impact the study results if the study were conducted in those locations. It implies that the data collection focused on the targeted organizations that supplied gang diversion or prevention services in Fairfax County.

Also, selecting a sample size of 10 to 15 NVRGTF staff, including the administrators and collaborating partners, was limited. Due to this sample size limitation, many qualified staff members' possibilities to exempt the interview were greater. The results from the sample size of 10 to 15 NVRGTF staff, including the administrators and collaborating partners, may differ from interviewing the entire NVRGTF staff.

Recommendations

The theoretical framework for this study was Hirschi's social bond theory (SBT). Hirschi's social bond theory (SBT) provided a theoretical lens for understanding the factors influencing gang recruitment decisions, such as family dysfunction, school failure, or poverty when they encounter youth to recruit (Bhatt et al., 2018). Hirschi's SBT provides a theoretical basis for explaining why youth crime rarely happens in well-structured environments, like schools, where conformity is the norm (Koeppel et al., 2018; Posick, 2015). According to Posick (2015) and Craig (2016), in well-structured environments such as schools, youth are compliant with the culture of the school. My

study exclusively reported that gang recruitment occurs at the preschool and elementary levels in the Fairfax area. I would recommend future researchers explore the success of school prevention or diversion programs in the success of reducing child gang recruitment at the preschool and elementary levels in Fairfax County.

Second, the theoretical view of Hirschi's (1969) SBT helped me understand that only prosocial activities, such as gang diversion or prevention programs, can promote a child's relationship with their parent and community. My study reported an extreme increase in the youth gang population in most communities in the Fairfax area due to a lack of prosocial activities to engage kids. Seven participants suggested that various stakeholders across the county can create different activity programs to divert the kids' attention from gang activity. Another recommendation would be that future researchers examine how prosocial activities can help divert youth attention from gangs.

Hirschi's SBT of this study contributed to the understanding that the dominant factor that constrains children's intrinsic criminality is how bonded they feel to the conventional society (Peterson et al., 2016). Peterson et al.'s (2016) findings on Hirschi's SBT indicate child development, delinquency, and crime in the community are influenced by youth's psychological adjustment to such a social environment. My study reported that the current NVRGTF gang prevention or diversion programs do not address the macro level and multi-socio-economic issues these kids often face. Five participants argued that socioeconomic factors are the most significant cause of kids' involvement in gangs, emphasizing that vulnerable kids join gangs because of their socioeconomic status. The recommendation for investigation is that future researchers could explore

whether socioeconomic status is linked to child behavioral problems in the community. Hirschi's theory principles indicate that child development and psychological domain center on child social bonding with family, community, and business (Craig, 2016).

Implications

Hirschi's concepts of involvement, attachment, commitment, and belief explain the social change implications of the findings at various levels of this study. Hirschi's concepts of involvement and attachment showed that gang prevention or diversion programs are the community bridging tools that can bring families and community leaders together (Koeppel et al., 2018). The findings recommended family involvement during the child learning process in gang prevention or diversion programs. According to the study, parental involvement in a child learning program enhances the child's learning process. The study indicates that child-parent relationships help improve gang prevention or diversion programs' goals. In addition, such engagement will promote a positive lifestyle for the youth and their families and help them overcome problems with their families, schools, peers, and workplaces (Radic, 2016).

At the organizational level, the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) and education (DOE) in Fairfax County can incorporate the findings of this study into their departmental and daily practices. The findings of this study suggested that the organizations can incorporate the results of these findings to improve the gang prevention or diversion programs in the system and help enhance the lives of vulnerable kids, targeting the gang population across communities in the Fairfax area. The findings of this study also suggested continuous reform of the programs to engage families and

community partners to develop a positive bond that will help bridge child, family, and community gaps. Such improvement can help eliminate criminal behavior in the lives of the community's children and their families, enhance the youth's criminal mindset, and empower them to overcome their criminal challenges (Radic, 2016).

The study's potential impact on societal or policy aspects was derived from Hirschi's principles of beliefs. The beliefs in Hirschi's principles reflect how people value individual opinions, respect the law, and esteem personal well-being. According to the findings, the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners, can feel empowered to establish and maintain a mutual relationship with the vulnerable families and community partners using evidence-based programs. In this way, the findings suggested that the NVRGTF staff and Fairfax County can gain the vulnerable families and community leaders' commitment to sharing information and helping youth develop a strong social bond with their families (Quoquab et al., 2017).

Conclusion

This qualitative exploratory case study was to understand the success of diversion programs in reducing youth gang membership and crime in the community. The guiding research question was How could the members of NVRGTF measure the gang prevention or diversion programs' overall success regarding the prospects of reducing youth gang membership? To answer this, I explored the perceptions and experiences of nine participants from the NVRGTF staff, including administrators and collaborating partners in the Fairfax area. The results helped me understand that the rising gang population in

Fairfax County is the community's nightmare. It indicates that one gang member in the community is too many because of the potential to commit a crime.

The study's findings supplied valuable information about how gang-filled communities are toxic due to the potential of losing lives. Further, it has been identified that a greater understanding of the specific issues and challenges in interacting with the youth gang population and vulnerable kids in the community using gang prevention and diversion programs is critical in understanding the issues that are disenfranchising the communities of freedom.

The social change implications of the findings at various levels of this study focus on Hirschi's concepts of involvement, attachment, commitment, and belief. These four principles of Hirschi's theory showed that gang prevention or diversion programs are the community bridging tolls that can bring families and community leaders together (Koeppel et al., 2018). According to the study, parental involvement in a child learning program enhances the child learning process and child-parent relationships, thereby improving gang prevention or diversion programs.

In this way, the findings affirmed that the NVRGTF staff and Fairfax County could gain the vulnerable families' and community leaders' commitment to sharing information and helping youth develop a strong social bond with their families. It will not only help bridge the gap between family and community, but also it will reduce youth gang membership, crime, and violence and keep the community safe.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

CALLING ALL THE STAFF OF THE NORTHERN
VIRGINIA REGIONAL GANG TASK FORCE,
ADMINISTRATORS, AND COLLABORATING

PARTNERS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Do you work in a gang prevention or diversion programs' environment? Do you work in collaboration with gang prevention programs? Do you want to volunteer and be part of the research that assesses the experiences and perceptions of gang prevention or diversion programs' success? Are you over 18 years old? If your answer is yes to any of these questions, please call or email me through the following information for eligibility and interview recruitment.

This study is being conducted by Francis S. Laari, a PhD student at Walden University. I am conducting this study for my Walden dissertation. This interview and research are entirely voluntary and confidential

Appendix B: The Focused Research Questions

1. How could gang prevention or diversion programs help reduce youth gang membership in Fairfax County?
2. What are the NVRGTF members' perceptions about the success of the gang prevention or diversion programs regarding the prospects of lowering child-gang membership?
3. What are the NVRGTF staff experiences about the success of the gang prevention or diversion programs regarding child-gang involvement and crime?
4. What barriers impede NVRGTF prevention or diversion programs' success in reducing child gang membership and crime in Fairfax County?
5. How could gang prevention or diversion programs become more successful in reducing youth gang membership and violence in Fairfax County?
6. What factors prevent the NVRGTF staff's success, including the administrators and collaborating partners, regarding the programs' goals in Fairfax County?
7. What can the staff of the NVRGTF, including administrators and collaborating partners, do to ensure gang prevention or diversion programs implemented with fidelity?
8. How are the team of the NVRGTF, including administrators and collaborating partners satisfied, regarding the success of the gang prevention or diversion programs in Fairfax County?