

8-19-2024

The Experiences of Decision Making in Gangs

Julian Geoffrey Harris
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Criminology Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Julian Harris

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Jessica Hart, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Jerrod Brown, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2024

Abstract

The Experiences of Decision Making in Gangs

by

Julian Harris

MSc, University of the West Indies, 2005

BSc, University of the West Indies, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

August 2024

Abstract

Gang violence and illicit gang activities continue to be a major problem to society and law enforcement. Gang violence is responsible for much of the violence death and illicit drug trade. The decision juveniles make to initiate into a gang increases these unwelcome behaviors. The ways in which juveniles make decisions about gang initiation and how to assess the ramifications of those decisions are understudied and reflect a gap in the literature. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to better comprehend the experiences of juveniles who make decisions to initiate into a gang and to better understand how they perceived the likely ramifications of their decisions. Interpretative phenomenological analysis tradition was adopted for this this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine ex-gang members ranging from age 18- 30 years old. This study was conducted through the lens through prospect theory. Analysis of the data resulted in eight major themes: survival and lack of opportunity, the need to belong and friendship, impulsivity; indifference lack of calculation, glorified violence, and power, the hope of favorable outcomes; scant regard for the repercussions of gang violence, and hopelessness. The findings were compared with current literature through lens of prospect theory and illuminated the aspects of gang culture that could be targeted to impact positive social change. This study has implications for researchers seeking to better comprehend decision making among juvenile initiation into gangs and for law enforcement and policy makers who wish to develop policies and interventions to reduce gang initiation.

The Experiences of Decision Making in Gangs

by

Julian Harris

MSc, University of the West Indies, 2005

BSc, University of the West Indies, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

August 2024

Dedication

I dedicate this research to my family and friends but especially to my mother who inspired me to pursue psychology and gave me unwavering support. I also dedicate this to those who may impact positively, to all the juveniles who are on a path to enlightenment and hoping to fulfil their dreams amongst the various struggles that lie ahead.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the creator and heavenly father for giving me life and keeping me thus far I would also like to acknowledge my mother Eilen Harris and Father Tellsworth Harris who gave me the opportunity to seek education and who always encouraged me and supported me. I would like to acknowledge my wife Nicola Harris who gives her unwavering support to my journey in this this dissertation. I would also like to acknowledge my brothers and sisters and close friend ss who support me in this course. I would like to also acknowledge my chairs Dr. Hart and Dr, Xuereb who also provided intense support for me and encouraged me to continue on this journey regardless of how challenging it was. I would finally like to acknowledge myself as I made a lot of sacrifices to get this far in my academic pursuit.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	3
Problem Statement.....	9
Purpose Statement.....	10
Research Questions.....	11
Theoretical Framework.....	11
Nature of the Study	13
Definition of Key Terms.....	14
Assumptions.....	15
Scope and Delimitations	16
Limitations	16
Significance.....	17
Summary	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	20
Literature Research Strategy.....	21
Theoretical Framework.....	22
Literature Review.....	31
Reasons For Gang Initiation.	33
Adolescents and Decision Making.....	38
Decision Making in Gangs.....	42

Ramifications: Perspectives and Experiences.....	47
Summary.....	51
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	53
Research Design and Rationale	53
Research Questions.....	53
Phenomenon of Study	53
Research Design.....	54
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).....	58
Role of the Researcher	59
Methodology.....	60
Participants.....	60
Instrumentation	63
Procedures.....	64
Data Analysis and Processing.....	67
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	69
Ethical Considerations	72
Summary.....	73
Chapter 4: Results.....	75
Settings.....	76
Demographics	76
Data Collection	76
Data Analysis	77

Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	79
Results	81
Theme 1: Survival and Lack of Opportunity	82
Theme 2: The Need to Belong and Friendship	84
Theme 3: Impulsivity	85
Theme 4: Indifference and Lack of Calculation	86
Theme 5: Glorified Violence and Power	86
Theme 6: Hope for Favorable Outcomes.....	87
Theme 7: Diminished Awareness of the Repercussions of Gang Violence.	89
Theme: 8: Hopelessness.....	90
Summary	91
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	93
Interpretation of the Findings.....	93
Survival and Lack of Opportunity	94
The Need to Belong and Friendship	95
Impulsivity	96
Indifference Lack of Calculation	96
Glorified Violence and Power	97
Hope of Favorable Outcomes	98
Scant Regards for the Repercussions to Gang Violence.....	98
Hopelessness	99
Prospect Theory	100

Limitations to the Study.....	103
Recommendations.....	105
Implications.....	107
Conclusions.....	109
References.....	112
Appendix: Interview Guide.....	133

List of Tables

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes.....79

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Gang violence has been a great nuisance to society at large. Violence is a central aspect of gang culture (Descormiers & Corrado, 2016; Moore, 2024). Around 21,000 people were fatally shot and killed in the United States in 2021 due to gun violence (LeRoy, 2024). Gang violence and gang involvement have been dated back to as far back as the late 1700s (Nicholas, 2018). Gangs have been defined as the association of at least three individuals and typically acknowledge and share a common identity with the intent to cause fear and intimidation (Bjerregaard, 2002). McMahon (2019) posited that gang membership is a way of life for many juveniles who are seeking to find their way in life. The prevalence of gang membership has increased in recent times and there has been a lot of violence that has erupted in the United States particularly in Chicago which has increased the anxieties and concerns over gang related violence (Madhani, 2016). Chicago Police Department reported that 468 murders were committed in 2015 which is a 12.5% increase from the year before (Madhani, 2016). In addition, there were also 2,900 shootings that year which was 13% more than the year prior, which is indicative of a general rise in gang violence in that region (Madhani, 2016). Crime reports in the United States revealed that from 2019 to 2020, firearm-related homicides increased by 39% for juveniles and young adults up to age 24 (Schellenberg & Walters 2023).

One of the phenomena that relates to gang involvement and gang violence is the way in which gang members make decisions about situations that they are likely aware may lead to violence or illicit behaviors. Research has shown that many youths are in favor of joining a gang as they believe that it will elevate their status among their peers,

and that they would likely be more financially independent than if they were to join a prosocial group (Dickon-Gomez & et al., 2017; Northman, 2023). These types of reasoning patterns and the experience of these juveniles as they make these types of decisions are understudied. There has been a call for gang activities to be studied further in depth to better comprehend the experiences of those who are involved and also to study the reasons they make certain seemingly unethical and immoral decisions. Police and the law in general have been trying to alleviate the problem by at least trying to minimize the number persons who initiate into gangs (McMahon, 2019). Gun violence and gang activities are major contributor to societal trauma, loss of lives and, poor academic achievement (Hureau, et al., 2023). Various strategies have been undertaken by law enforcement and policy makers to reduce and curb gang violence including increase police presence in at risk areas, draconian and punitive prison sentences which may serve as a deterrent to gang involvement and gang activities (Hureau, et al., 2023).

The aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of the gang members who make these decisions and how they experience the ramifications of those decisions that are likely challenging for them, so that researchers might have a greater understanding about what are some of the psychological influences that they struggle with. Understanding their experiences and their challenges may better help researchers, psychologists, and policy makers to render better and specific interventions that can aid in the reduction of gang involvement.

Background

Thomas (2024) investigated how juveniles who are at risk navigate their neighborhoods, and what strategies they applied to maintain their daily lives. Juveniles at risk are generally considered those that are more likely to developed problematic and delinquent behaviors stemming from poor circumstances highly correlated to poor academic achievement, substance abuse, low socioeconomic factors and even mental health issues (LeCroy & Anthony, 2017). Abrams and Terry (2014) found that gang members made calculated decisions about risk taking and the likelihood of financial benefits and that they considered the risk as they applied survival strategies. This research indicates that decision making is very meaningful to gang members, and that they understand that making important decisions on a daily basis could be the difference between having a poor quality of life financially or conversely meaning that they could acquire their dreams (Thomas, 2024).

Another research study revealed that juveniles are also more likely to take risks than their adult counterparts, which may shed light on the reasons juvenile which initiate in gangs whilst ignoring the likely ramifications of their illicit actions (Defoe et al., 2015; Swancott et al., 2022). Defoe et al. (2015) investigated the likelihood of adolescents taking more risks than adults using fuzzy trace theory and imbalance models. They posited that adolescents do take more risks than adults on certain tasks when evaluating loss versus rewards. The researchers pointed out that risk taking is similar but independent to expected value theory. The researchers reinforced the idea that juveniles take more risks than adults because they have a heightened sensitivity towards

rewards. This then suggests that juveniles may initiate in gangs because of the perceived advantages rewards that typical juvenile conceive as being beneficial for being in a gang. They also pointed out in their study that prospect theory argues that it is the fear of loss as opposed to high rewards that is more impactful on risky decision-making. (Defoe et al., 2015; Swancott et al., 2022). The researchers also demonstrated this concept of risk aversion in an example of fair coin toss. Swancott et al., (2022) suggested that people prefer to not lose when the gains are not much more significant than what they stand to win. Defoe et al. (2015) gives the example that in a fair coin toss, when heads are for \$10 if you win or you pay \$9 if it is tails and you lost the bet, they explained that a significant number of people would avoid such a bet because of risk aversion. Swancott et al. (2022) expounded that more people would rather participate in a bet if they only stood to lose half of the potential gains so in this example, they would be more likely to engage in the bet if the winning potential was \$10 and the loss potential was \$5. This is eye-opening example of how the fear of losing can impact one's decision-making.

Research indicates that executive functioning deficiencies may be linked to aggression and violent behaviors observed in some juveniles. Executive functioning refers to a set of cognitive abilities that enable individuals to plan, organize, strategize, pay attention to details, and manage time effectively (Swancott et al., 2022) These functions are primarily governed by the prefrontal cortex of the brain and are crucial for regulating behavior, making decisions, and controlling impulses. It is widely believed by experts that individuals with impairments in executive functioning may struggle with impulse control, have difficulty considering the consequences of their actions, and exhibit

poor decision-making skills. These difficulties can lead to conflicts with others and, in some cases, escalate to violent behavior (Cruz et al., 2020).

Metacognitive model is a theoretical approach which attempts to explain emotion dysregulation and others emotion-related issues such as anger and aggressive behaviors (Mansueto et al., 2022). The researchers found in their study that found that people having higher maladaptive metacognitive beliefs, for instance people who would normally make comments such as "I can't control my thoughts", were more likely to stimulate and sustain anger rumination. Salguero et al. (2020) argued that these individuals were also more likely to be involved in incidences that has higher levels of violence related activities were more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors. Researchers also found that adolescents who engaged in repetitive negative thinking were more likely to conjure metacognitive beliefs and experienced emotion dysregulation (Mansueto et al., 2022).

Researchers theorized that executive functions (EF) continued to develop throughout adolescence, with immaturity in EF considers to be a major factor for risk-taking behaviors (Mansueto et al., 2022). Ogilvie et al. (2020) found that that adolescents aged there were less likely to engage in risk taking behavior and that not all forms of risk-taking are associated with EF. Researchers also found that impulsivity could be directly related to maladaptive and disruptive behaviors especially during adolescence. They also found in their study that impulsivity is associated with behavioral and social problems and established a link between behavioral difficulties and neuropsychological

dysfunction of the prefrontal cortex. They noted that the prefrontal cortex was responsible for regulating impulse control and executive functions (Reynaga et al., 2020).

Some researchers argue that many juveniles are very impulsive and make emotionally charged decisions which leads to poor decision making. de Jesús Cardona-Isaza et al. (2022) argued that since cognitive theories were lacking in comprehensively explaining decisions making in juveniles, the affective process was embraced to illuminate the emotions that are involved which influences juveniles especially when exhibiting risks seeking behaviors. de Jesús Cardona-Isaza et al. posited that in contrast to the cognitive model, some juveniles are cognitively deficit during the adolescent stage of development. Affective processes models suggested that juveniles are hypersensitive during emotionally charged situations (de Jesús Cardona-Isaza et al., 2022; Weber & Johnson, 2009). While this reasoning may hold a lot of strength in the general sense that many juveniles are “hot-headed”, it does not explain how some young gang leaders are able to make salient but difficult decisions relating to gang activities.

Northman (2023) examined some of the reasons that juveniles initiating into gangs and was lens through social control theory. Norman revealed that many juveniles are of the belief that traditional forms of prosocial entities such as school and family have failed them in attaining their dreams and economic aspirations. Juveniles reported that they felt as though economic opportunities were limited through these channels and that they could find alternate financial support through groups like gangs (Dickon-Gomez & et al., 2017; Northman, 2023). The researchers pointed out that social control theory was not able to comprehensively explain all the reasons that juveniles initiate into gangs. The

study revealed however that many juveniles did not fully believe that prosocial norms and prosocial aspirations were always restrictive (Dickon-Gomez & et al., 2017; Northman, 2023). The research revealed that juveniles believed that they could fulfil their present economic needs through the gang for getting through tumultuous seasons and would consider going through prosocial means once they fulfilled their current need illicitly. They suggested that many juveniles who initiate into gangs believe that their tenure is seasonal and that once they were able to achieve their financial and emotional objective, they would eventually leave the gang (Dickon-Gomez & et al., 2017; Northman, 2023).

Another critical study that highlighted the experiences of juveniles' decision making in gangs among peers revealed that positive reinforcers for violence was indicative (Hansen et al., 2014). Hansen et al. (2014) revealed that the decision to engage in violent behaviors in gangs is reinforced by four major themes. The first theme revealed is the pursuit of respect among peers. The second theme is that youth seek respect from peers to gain safety. The third theme is fear of the pervasive risks that ensues and is preoccupied with firearms. The fourth and final theme is conflict and frustration arising from limited opportunities and pervasive danger (Hansen et al., 2014). When the researchers assessed the major themes identified by gang members, it was inferred that some gang members would consider safer alternatives to gang involvement if those safer opportunities and situations were available (Hansen et al., 2014).

To further appreciate some the factors that affect juvenile decision making and their experiences, researchers who assessed the efficacy of an intervention modality

geared towards adolescent's decision making were able to shed light on the ways these juveniles at risk could be assisted. Knight, et al. (2015) tested the effectiveness of Treatment Readiness and Induction Program (TRIP) on the quality of decision making among adolescents. The researchers posited that impulsivity was one crucial factor that affected juveniles when making decisions and often led them to make risky decisions. The researchers also suggested that peer pressure in the form of trying to gain the respect of their peers was also a critical factor that influenced decision-making among juveniles who initiate into gangs. One very important point that the research alluded to is that juveniles seem to have a tendency to ignore the consequences of their actions (Knight et al., 2015; Tostlebe, 2022). The decision to ignore consequences can be very dangerous for the gang members and others at large, because this can lead to physical harm. The TRIP intervention did yield some positive results revealing that when administered juveniles showed greater levels of precontemplation before making difficult decisions (Knight et al., 2015; Tostlebe, 2022).

Rigg et al. (2019) examined the perceptions of the male inner-city youths, especially Blacks and Hispanics, to see what factors most affected their community. They revisited the connection between poverty and gang involvement highlighting that there are many needs that are not being met which propagates gang activities in their community (Rigg et al., 2019). Jones (2017) posited that juveniles living within inner cities are at risk for poor psychosocial outcomes especially when they are faced with poverty. Jones' position was matched by Flèche and Layard (2017), who posited that poverty is a precursor for mental fatigue, despair, and hopelessness among juveniles in

inner-city areas like Chicago among Blacks and Hispanics. Juveniles who are looking to escape the gloom of poverty in their neighborhood may be tempted to initiate into gangs to alleviate that situation (Abrams & Terry, 2014). Jones also pointed out that the exposure to gang violence is also another risk factor for poor psychosocial outcomes.

Problem Statement

Illegal gang activity and gang aggression are major concerns for law enforcement and society at large. In some cities such as Los Angeles, gang-related homicides are responsible for up to 69% of homicides (Bhatt & Tweed, 2018) and around 21,000 people were fatally shot and killed in the United States in 2021 due to gun violence (LeRoy, 2024). The decisions that gang members make daily are crucial to their operations and survival (Dickson-Gomez & et al., 2017; Northman, 2023). Dickson-Gomez et al. (2017) reported that juveniles perceived initiating into a gang to be more financially beneficial than participating in regular prosocial groups. The way gang members make decisions is further highlighted by Gouveia-Pereira et al. (2017), who revealed that some juveniles in gangs are impulsive and are vulnerable to peer pressure, which affects some of their decision making and judgments. This finding is also corroborated in a study by Knight et al. (2015) who argued that juveniles' decision making is often affected by peer pressure and impulsivity. Knight et al. also illuminated the idea that these gang members often neglect the consequences and ramifications of their actions, and in some instances also took increased risks into committing illicit acts of violence and drug use. However, Northman (2023) revealed that many juveniles actually make calculated decisions about the risks as they maneuver through the neighborhoods after they have joined a gang.

Researchers have argued that some juveniles are more prone to a violent cognitive schema, a risk factor that makes them likely to be more deviant in their decision making while in a gang (Dickon-Gomez & et al., 2017; Northman, 2023). Their frequent justification for deviance and the ways in which they calculate risks on a daily basis may play an important role in how they handle the ramifications of their decisions. While there are many researchers that address risk analysis and decision making in gangs, very little is known about the experiences of how they make decisions in difficult situations as it relates to gang involvement and gang activities (Dickon-Gomez & et al., 2017; Northman, 2023). I helped fill the gap by focusing on the lived experiences of how gang members make their decisions in difficult situations it relates to gang involvement and gang activities and how they perceive the ramifications of those decisions. The difficult situations outlined this study refers to the challenging life circumstances that usually influence individuals to initiate into a gang or those difficult life circumstances that usually perpetuate their gang involvement such as dropping out of school, poor family background, and prior incarceration to name a few (see Calvete 2008; Williams 2024).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and to better comprehend the experiences of how gang members make decisions in difficult situations as it relates to gang involvement and gang activities, and to better understand their experience as to how they perceive the likely ramifications of their decisions (see Dickon-Gomez & et al., 2017; Northman, 2023). A qualitative design was used to address this gap. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is an approach used

in psychological qualitative research with an idiographic focus, which means that it aims to offer insights into how a given person, in a given context, makes sense of a given phenomenon (Robinson & Williams, 2024). This study is unique because it addresses the under-researched experiences of gang members' decision-making and how it affects risk analysis and ramifications.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the experiences of gang members when making decisions in difficult gang related situations?

RQ 2: How do gang members experience the ramifications of their decisions?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study was prospect theory. The theory is a probabilistic theory that describes how individuals weigh the risks of gains and losses (Kahneman et al., 1979). The theory describes how people make decisions about gains versus losses in a real-life situation that is specific to their experiences as opposed to absolute terms (Kahneman et al., 1979). Prospect theory is used in an attempt to explain how people make decisions when they have alternative options, but a risk is eminent along with the nexus of uncertainty (Kahneman et al., 1979). The theory predicts that in the face of a risk, when losses are eminent, the individual becomes risk averse (Kahneman et al., 1979). This theory in decision making, which was first developed for the field of economics, explains that individuals seem to prefer to avoid losses to the extent that they would rather not take any risks on an investment if the probability of winning is low (Kahneman et al., 1979). In other words, individuals prefer outcomes that

have a higher probability of gains, even if the rewards are lower than those possible outcomes that promise higher rewards but presents higher uncertainty or higher risks (Kahneman et al., 1979). Individuals seem to think of losses being more painful than gains, fearing losses more than gains especially if losses and gains can be measured as having equal values (Kahneman et al., 1979).

For example, if an investor is considering investing money that he has at his disposal and is faced with a low return from putting the funds in a commercial bank account, but with higher probability of a certainty of returns, they may choose that route as opposed to choosing the route of investing in the stock market which could pay more but have a higher risk attached. In that example, the individual who chose the commercial bank over the enticing stock market is considered risk averse (Kahneman et al., 1979). Juveniles who are willfully initiating into gangs seem to be the opposite of risk averse, apparently exhibiting risk-seeking behaviors. Comprehending why juveniles are not risk averse in their decisions to initiate into a gang would prove valuable to psychologists developing intervention strategies to reduced juvenile gang initiation.

Conversely, prospect theory explains how people develop risk-seeking behaviors. Individuals become risk seeking through loss aversion, that is, they indulge in risky behaviors to in an endeavor to recoup losses (Kahneman et al., 1979). Risk seeking behaviors are grounded on the idea that losses are more painful than gains in the realms of equal value. For example, an individual may be more hurt for losing \$10 than to have made \$10 (Kahneman et al., 1979). Similarly, it would be interesting to understand whether juveniles who are initiating develop risk behaviors on these principles.

A third major principle in prospect theory introduces the concept of the isolation effect, citing that people often tend to amplify differences over similarities, often causing them to miss out of crucial points when making decisions (Kahneman et al., 1979). If for example a person makes a list of 10 words, all with five letters each except for one that has nine letters, chances are people will tend to remember the one with the nine letters more. Juveniles might exaggerate differences between prosocial groups and gangs and develop biases based on those differences and not consider the similarities. There is also the possibility that juveniles who are initiated into gangs have not given much consideration to what they are about to do and the ramifications that lie ahead.

The major tenets of prospect theory can be used to express ways in which gang members make decisions about their gang involvement and the challenges related to the ramification of their actions. The theory can be used to evaluate how gang members become risk-averse or loss-averse. The theory also can identify their frame of reference for how juveniles weigh and evaluate what they feel are risks to the choices they make on a daily basis. This will be further developed in Chapter 2 and explained in more depth.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study is qualitative in design, and I used IPA. IPA is a qualitative method that emphasizes the perception and interpretation of the experiences of an individual (Creswell, 2014; Robinson & Williams, 2024). This method is unique in that it considers that the researcher could not truly comprehend the full extent of the participant's experiences, hence giving participant's experiences precedence and credibility over the perceptions of the researcher's possible bias (Alase, 2017). The IPA

tradition acknowledges that biases are inevitable in such an approach and therefore using a technique called bracketing to minimize the impact of such biases (Alase, 2017; Robinson & Williams, 2024). In-depth interviews were used to allow for a descriptive study, exploring the experiences of gang members who had to cope with the decision-making process while in the gang. It was important to understand these experiences by allowing the participants to express their lived experiences. IPA was deemed to be best suited for this study as this method focuses on the experiences and the context in which the phenomena occur, which best suits the topic I examined (see Smith, 2007). The idiographic approach of this method allowed for the close examination of a complex phenomenon, which was more suitable for the nature of this study than any other method.

Definition of Key Terms

Gang: A collective group of individuals, usually three or more, who identify that they are a part of a group by way of some sort of symbol such as a tattoo and whose motive is to generate intimidation, violence, and fear to gain economic favor, respect, take over territories, and advance their sinister motives (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011; Kerig et al., 2023).

Gang Involvement: An affiliation with and active participation in a gang. A gang is defined as three or more people who identify with each other as being affiliated to obtain a shared goal with usually through illicit activities involved (Bjerregaard, 2002; 2011; Kerig et al., (2023).

Initiation: Akin to a rite of passage with the intent to onboard individuals to a group, usually involving arduous tasks or obstacles in order for prospective members to demonstrate their loyalty (Descormiers & Corrado, 2016, Vecchio & Carson, 2023).

Loss-averse: A proclivity for individuals to prefer avoiding losses to attaining equivalent gains (Kahneman & Tversky, 1992; Walasek et al., 2024).

Ramification: A consequence of an action or event, especially when complex or unwelcome (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Risk seeking: Also called risk-lovers, it is defined as being inclined or eager to take risks (Cartwright & Edward, 2018).

Risk-Averse: A disinclination or reluctance to take risks, usually with a preference preserve gains over taking chances for higher returns (Thomas & Nguyen 2022; Werner & Jan, 2008).

Assumptions

There were a few major assumptions made in this study. One major assumption of the study was that juveniles who initiate into a gang are most likely aware that there could be some severe ramifications. There are many movies, documentaries, and news specials that endeavor to educate juveniles about the risks and ramifications of gang involvement. It is a fair assumption that a juvenile who is contemplating joining a gang would have been privy to such dangers such as violence and imprisonment, before entering the gang. Another major assumption of the study was that juveniles who participated in illicit gang activities are conflicted morally and hence may plan an exit strategy. This assumption is supported in part by Tonks and Stephenson (2019), who

revealed that juveniles disengage from gangs for several reasons citing such as maturational, sociogenic and narrative. Tonks and Stephenson posited that juveniles may disengage from gangs because they have identified a positive role model in society. Another major assumption was that participants would be upright and forthcoming about the responses to the interview. There are also concerns that the participants may not be completely honest or mindful of their own feelings. They may have been motivated to answer in a socially appropriate manner or attempt to report what they thought I needed to hear for this research.

Scope and Delimitations

The study's emphasis is on gang members and their lived experiences, who had difficult decisions to make and had to contemplate the likely ramifications of those decisions. One delimitation of the study was that participants were all adults who were initiated into a gang when they were adolescents. Ex-gang members, both male and female, were selected from the area and the interview was conducted in the same location for consistency. Juveniles were excluded from the study due to sensitivity surrounding the use of juveniles in research and getting consent.

Limitations

There were several limitations experience in this study. One of the major challenges I experienced was the encounter of accessing suitable participants for the study. I found that locating ex-gang members who wished to participate in my study was challenging. Some of the reasons that ex-gang members did not want to participate include issues related to confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy due to fear of retaliation.

Because of these barriers, people were cautious and apprehensive about participating in the study. Another limitation was the issue of researcher bias. I limited the intrinsic nature of researcher bias which is a part of qualitative study by keeping a reflective journal and exercised the use of bracketing while conducting the research.

Another limitation included using ex-gang members who depended on recall to reflect on the issues related to the topic and could have a cloudy memory of what they experienced. Poor recall could also lead to invalid and embellished reports of gang involvement. Ex-gang members could have also been dishonest as they could have had internal conflicts over violent acts they have committed in the past and having to come to terms with those actions. To address the issue of potential poor recall, I set the age limit for the participants to 30 years old.

Significance

The results of the study were significant and can begin to fill the gap in comprehending more about the decision making in gangs and their lived experiences of the ramifications that they faced as it related to their decisions related to gang activities. This study was unique because the experiences of how gang members make decisions have been drastically understudied and there is too little known about such an important phenomenon. This study is also unique because exploring the experiences of how gang members make decisions in difficult situations as it relates gang activities will illuminate the experiences of the challenges they face during those intense moments.

Based on the findings of this study, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners may now be better able to form interventions strategies that will address the importance

of decision making in gangs and the ramifications that followed. With insights into decision making experience of gang members, policy makers can now increase funding for prosocial groups, make scholarships more attractive and easier to access and possibly be more punitive for gang-related offenses. The implication for positive social change is significant because with a greater understanding of how gang members make their decisions, many gang initiation and gang activities can be averted, consequently reducing the number of gang violence and illicit gang activities in at-risk communities.

Summary

The decisions gang members make on a daily basis affect every member of society and often times the choices they make have ramifications for both them and everyone in society. Developing a better comprehension of the choices they make, and their experiences is very important hence the reason to address the gap literature was addressed. Gang members must make tough decisions as they try to acquire financial stability to maintain their gang activities and their perceived better lifestyle than prosocial groups (Dickon-Gomez & et al., 2017; Northman, 2023). I used prospect theory to lens essential tenets of the phenomena affecting decision making when gang members are faced with difficult decisions and illuminated the possible reasons they had risk-seeking behaviors that could lead to serious ramifications.

I presented the experiences of gang members seeking to maneuver their way, trying to make a better life for themselves through implementing difficult decisions that they face on a regular basis. Northman (2023) exposed the deficit that juveniles perceive in financial gains by being in prosocial groups as opposed to being in a gang, illuminating

a gap in the literature. The gap revealed that not enough is known about the experiences of how these gang members and how they make these decisions that they know are likely to have devastating ramifications. In the next chapter, I conducted a review of the literature and explored the experiences of gang members as they face difficult decisions as they navigate the likely devastating ramifications of those difficult decisions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Gang involvement and gang activities continue to be a major problem in the United States. Hautala et al. (2016) found that around 10% of their participants initiated into gangs between ages 10–12 and posited that juveniles are most vulnerable to gang initiation between age 13 and 15. It is believed that 98 % of all gang members are males (Boden, 2019). Research also indicates that 63 % of all juvenile offenders usually commit a crime within the first year of joining (Boden, 2019). This research illuminates the influence that gang involvement has on young gang members offending and causing nuisance to society. Many juveniles are lured to gang involvement for several reasons which may include financial benefits, a sense of safety, increased status and the need for love (Dickon-Gomez & et al., 2017; Northman, 2023).

Many juveniles appear to be risk seeking as they get involved in many dangerous and illicit activities while being in a gang. Young gang members who are faced with difficult decisions may or may not consider the serious ramifications of their choices. To obtain a deeper understanding of the subject, a thorough review of the literature was conducted. In this chapter, a thorough perusal of the background information and the theoretical framework of prospect theory are explored to assist in gaining a better understanding of the theory. I then applied the theory to the phenomena of decision making amongst juveniles who initiated into gangs and are faced with difficult decisions to make and how they perceive the likely ramifications in the aftermath.

I thoroughly explored the issues related to the lived experiences of gang members facing difficult decisions in this chapter as well as discussed, the likely ramifications that

they may have to deal with in regard to the difficult decisions they have made. The population of gang members was explored to provide context and greater understanding about the risk seeking behaviors that lead them to such a dilemma. I also discussed the areas in the gang activities that could be considered difficult situations and how they interpret these scenarios. I conducted an analysis of the extant literature to determine the strength of the research being reviewed and to identify gaps in the literature to provide a rationale to the current study.

Literature Research Strategy

The search for current and updated journal articles within the parameters of 2019 – 2024 was executed. Peer-reviewed journals using several online databases were searched to locate extant literature on the topic PsychoINFO, Google Scholar, SocINDEX, PsychARTICLES, SAGEJournals, and Walden University's library. The selected articles relating to decision making and gang illegal activities are described here. The keyword searched were *gang decision-making, gang judgments, ramification, consequences, juveniles, risks, Prospect Theory, qualitative, financial benefit, difficult situation, problems, challenges and prosocial group, belonging, and love and family* I wanted to have the most recent and relevant studies to increase the trustworthiness of the data therefore research parameters limited to a 5-year timeframe, 2019-2024. However, there were very important and pertinent articles that fell outside the range of the 5-year parameter that I used as they were very important to include in this study.

Theoretical Framework

Prospect theory is a theory developed in the discipline of economics by Kahneman and Tversky in 1979 mainly to challenge the expected utility theory (Shafir et al., 2002). The theory is a probabilistic theory that describes how individuals weigh the risks of gains and losses (Kahneman et al., 1979). Essential in comprehending this theory is that the model describes two sets of utility scenarios when decisions making involves risk about gains and losses. The gains and losses scenarios are distinctly described.

Kahneman and Tversky (1979) described how people make decisions about gains versus losses in a real-life situation that is specific to their experiences as opposed to absolute terms. Based on this theory, people will make decisions considering risks and usually calculate a better probability of winning than to lose. This theory was useful for my study as it allowed the platform to discuss gang members make decisions when they are faced with high-risk situations.

Patalano (2020) explained that an individual is more likely to choose higher outcomes related to higher risks. For example, according to accumulative prospect theory, an individual is more likely to choose a 50% chance for a bet paying \$300, over a bet that is certain to pay \$100. This indicates that individuals will prefer higher outcomes than taking certain bets that are lower in their outcome. When choices are made in within these parameters of a lot of is involved but they justify the risk based on the expected high outcome, thinking that the risk is now worthy than the safe bet The individual tends to downplay the value of the risk and romanticize the reward hence going for the higher

value outcome. Prospect theory is a theory that emphasizes the valuation of choices and how an individual assess their choices for the best subjective outcome.

Critical to the theory is comprehending the subjectivity in which individuals assess for better outcomes and the ways in which it can be flawed (Patalano 2020). Theorists explained that the value transformation is such that the outcomes are increasingly more attractive and skewed as the magnitude of the likely outcomes increases incrementally. When outcomes are favorable, the more subjective an individual will be, predicting favorable outcomes and likely to make poor judgment (Bhatia & Loomes, 2017). This highlights how irrational our decision-making process can be when individuals are desperate for favorable outcomes.

Also, critical to understanding prospect theory and how it differs from other choice theories such as rational choice theory, is that the choices made when risk are involved are made from a reference point as opposed to an absolute frame of reference. An absolute reference point is akin to a status quo, which defined a general bias for the current state of affairs, a mean or general accepted value on a product or phenomena (Liu & Han, 2020). Conversely, the reference dependence is the value placed on products and phenomenon based on having a bias from personal experiences or a deeper personal bias on the product or phenomena which deviates from the more popular status quo (Liu & Han, 2020). For example, a person invites a friend to a movie. The person has been to the movie theatre before and was impressed by the luxury of the theater. Upon arrival the prices of the products were reduced but the luxury has been reduced as well. The friend is appreciative of the price point while the inviter is disappointed that the luxury has been

significantly reduced. The friend is appreciative of the price point of the theatre based on a status quo while initial person is disappointed because their reference dependence.

This further increases the importance of understanding human perspective and human behavior in choice theories. In a similar study, prospect theory was used to assess the risky choices that prisoners would make upon release as opposed to those who remained in prison under supervision (Rolison et al., 2013). The researchers predicted that those who had less risky opportunities committed less risky criminal acts than those who remained in prison (Rolison et al., 2013). The findings in the study also revealed that ex-prisoners were more risk-taking than current prisoners because the sensitivity of the loss was perceptually reduced (Rolison et al., 2013). This result explains how risk-taking behaviors may affect the current study. Since individuals take more risk in situations where they perceived reduced losses than their counter parts, if juvenile gang members perceived that their losses are reduced over their prosocial group, then they are more likely to take risk to make gains not considering how seriously detrimental their actions will be. Peng et al. (2022) found that reduced sensitivity of losses as predicted by prospect theory may explain why some criminals seem to have feared the increasing chances of being caught for a crime than they feared the long sentences associated with the crime. If the reduced sensitivity to creating certain crime does increase the chance of individuals prolonging their risk-taking behaviors, it could also be one of the reasons juvenile's initiates into gangs and downplay the ramifications of their actions within the gang. Peng et al. also pointed out that some criminals were committing crimes based on

the subjectivity of what they value to be cost effective gains and rewards that would motivate them to do so.

Loss aversion is a cornerstone concept in prospect theory and is one of its first assumptions (Kahneman et al., 1979). Prospect theory indicates that when losses are looming, people typically become risk averse, inclining toward arrangements that increase the likelihood of recovering what has been lost by increasing risk taking (Morewedge et al., 2015; Peng et al., 2020). Researchers in this domain have argued that humans tend to think that losses are twice as powerful, psychologically, as gains. Loss aversion infers that one who loses \$100 will lose more contentment than another individual will gain pleasure from earning a \$100 (Morewedge et al., 2015; Peng et al., 2020). Loss aversion is similar in nature to the endowment effect. The endowment effect is popular in social psychology, and it suggests that individuals are more likely to hold on to an item they own than to obtain that same item when they do not own it (Morewedge et al., 2015; Peng et al., 2020). The bias to value a position or item and individual owns than to acquire another obtain of same or higher value is shown to occur even when there was little to no attachment involved (Morewedge et al., 2015; Peng et al., 2020). Harmon (2020) highlighted the similar conception of loss aversion. Harmon opined that those individuals who experienced loss aversion find it more painful to lose in a gamble that would have similar value in gains, for instance, they would find losing \$10 more painful than they could find it joyful to lose \$10. Consequently, people who are loss averse would prefer to make miniscule gains than to risk losing their possession. Juveniles who experience loss aversion when contemplating the risks of joining a gang may fear losing

all opportunity to make significant or astronomical wealth that illicit gang activity may bring as opposed working a low paying 9 to 5 job. Schwartz et al. (2017) pointed out that students with low academic achievement are more at risk for gang initiation than those with satisfactory or higher academic achievement. Tentama and Abdillah (2019) posited that low academic achievement often led to poor job outcomes and low employability. For these reasons juveniles may fear missing out on 'hitting the jackpot' with a potential lucrative gang involvement than going through the arduous journey and doubts of gaining a profitable especially if they have low academic performance and other risk factors.

In addition to loss aversion, prospect theory defines and embraces the idea of risk-seeking behaviors when risk is involved in a potential gainful transaction (Tentama and Abdillah, 2019). When losses are expected individuals may become risk seeking within that domain. The theory points out that leaders may become risk seeking under pressure.

posited that evaluated risk returns as underlined by prospect theory predicted that for returns beyond the objective, a substantial majority of individuals appeared to be risk averse but for returns beneath the target, a sizeable majority of persons appeared to be risk seeking. This finding cements the idea that individuals who have miss targeted goals may become risk seeing and may explain how some gang leaders get motivated to become risk seeking, if gang members and leaders alike have expectations and goals of becoming affluent through illegal activities, when those expectations are not being met, they may choose to up the ante in risk taking.

In my study, I attempted to identify the ways in which prospect theory predicts deviance in some individuals when they are faced with a potential loss. My study may

help identify possible reasons juveniles risk joining gangs and remain in the gangs despite their knowledge that there could be negative ramifications if gang members interpret losses to be more painful than gains of a similar circumstances. They may think that they have more to lose in a prosocial endeavor and risk gaining some level over certain losses. Juveniles may interpret that it is more painful to fail by only achieving a minimum wage job or not having a job at all by being enrolled in school income above minimum wage. Unemployment rates rose to 4 million in June of 2021, a rather troubling figure for juveniles who face the difficulty of getting a job after completing high school (The Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d).

This could also be made more significant to them when the effect of the status quo comes into play. The status quo or the reference dependence is the biased perceived point at which the individual interprets what they feel is a loss to them (Kahneman, 2011). Using this concept, one can imagine how juveniles who are weighing their options, seeking the best financial path for their future, might be tempted into risk seeking behaviors such as joining a gang; in order to satisfy the insecurity of an inclement and looming loss they perceived by the poor outlook of the incoming job market.

Another cornerstone of the theory is the concept which includes that prospect theory includes reference dependence as part of its explanation which contrast to other similar model of choice such as rational choice theory. As opposed to rational choice theory, prospect theory indicates that people's valuation of choices is deviated from a central and fixed frame of reference but rather from subjective frame of reference. They

assess gains and losses from the position in life which they see themselves, therefore a high level of subjectivity is included in how they perceive potential losses or potential gains when faced with a risky decision. Pickett et al. (2020) examined the applicability of reference dependence in prospect theory and how it would affect decision making in criminals. To test whether reference dependence had any significant impact of criminal decision-making Pickett et al. conducted a survey which asked questions about a potential criminal scenario. Pickett et al. asked participants to respond to a scenario where hypothetically they were starting a job where the salary was \$28K (status quo) but in Scenario A the company would now pay \$26K per annum due to cutbacks (loss) due to excessive expenditure throughout the year. In Scenario B, the company is now paying \$30K per annum, explaining that they were increasing salary due to significant growth over the last year (gains). Pickett et al. then asked whether they would take the offer from coworker to sell a batch of stolen iPhones. The researchers found that there were tendencies to sell the stolen iPhones (risk seeking) to compensate for scenario A where the reference dependence was in the loss domain. The research found however that the finding was not statistically significant. They concluded that reference difference had very little weight on decision making when they were committing illegal acts. Even though the values were not statistically significant, a qualitative approach could possibly shed more useful light on the importance of reference dependence on criminal decision-making.

However, Pickett et al. (2020) found that another aspect of prospect theory was applicable to criminal decision making. They stated that the *possibility effect* had more

influence on criminal decision making than reference dependence. The possibilities effect is a cognitive bias that influences individuals to inflate possibilities over probabilities, usually anticipating a positive outcome (Osbergh, 2017). Whenever an event of phenomena is not probable but has a possibility, individuals tend to give more weight to the possibility of the occurrence, usually magnified by the feeling of fear of loss or when they are excited and then become risk seeking (Osbergh, 2017). For example, people buying the lottery ticket experience the cognitive bias of the possibility effect because they are usually indifferent to the fact that the probability of winning is very low, but proceed with purchasing the ticket, fueled by the very large reward. They typically ignore the low probability of winning while giving more weight to having a chance of winning. The possibility effect may have an influence on juveniles who are initiating in gangs, overestimating the possibilities of economic freedom and gaining power over lucrative territories as portrayed by movies and even some local members.

While Picket et al. (2020) did not find any significant meaningful correlation between the reference dependence tenet of prospect theory and criminal decision making, I focused on exploring the experiences of gang members decision making and investigate how the reference dependence tenet of prospect theory played any part in their experiences. Thomas and Nguyen (2022) also revealed that they could not find any sufficient data to suggest that reference dependence could explain or account for deviant behaviors especially related to monetary gains. They however argued that reference dependence had a major impact on group influence (Thomas & Nguyen, 2022).

Prospect theory also suggests that when people are making decisions or when faced with risks, they may experience a sort of cognitive bias known as decision weights. People tend to give different weights to gains versus losses, often placing more emphasis on the probability of gains (Kahneman, 2011). Pickett (2020) posited that some criminals may have been influenced by decision weights in criminal decision-making favoring potential gains of criminal activity while giving less weight on the possibility of punitive outcomes. Kahneman (2011) explained that people tend to ascribe excessive weight to occurrences with low probabilities and insufficient weight to measures with high probability. For example, people may unconsciously treat an aftermath with a probability of 99% as if its probability was 95%, and a result with probability of 1% as if it had a probability of 5%. This type of bias of underestimating and overestimating can have adverse effect for individuals when making further decisions about similar events in the future (Kahneman, 2011). For instance, a deviant person who escapes being caught by the police with a slim chance may overestimate their luck and may choose to continue to break the law due to the first cognitive bias in perception of the previous events.

Decision weights, first proposed by Ellias and later adopted by Kahneman and Tversky, suggests that people assign weight to decision making according to the importance of the probability relative to total loss or total gains (Jervis, 2004; Zilker, et al., 2020). Studies have illuminated an example that a person might not care much about an increased chance of winning a bet if it was increased from 95% to 98% but would be very much happier if those chances moved from 98% to 100% (Jervis, 2004). The theory proposed that people enjoy absolute certainty. The opposite is also true for losses. In this

regard, when losses appear to be a certain event people will engage in risk-seeking behaviors to avoid loss. This also could explain why some juveniles become involved in gangs, because if they perceived that their situation is leading to an absolute loss, then they will engage in risk seeking behaviors and participate in illicit gang activities.

Another interesting take aspect of decision-making and risk taking was purported by Tversky and Kahneman (1985) who introduced the framing effect of decision-making. Huizenga et al., (2023) examined the relationship of risk-taking behaviors against framing effects. Framing effects is described as the phenomenon that when a problem is ubiquitously accepted in its definition, the decisions that are made against the problem is maneuvered based on whether the challenge of the problem is presented as a possible loss or possible gain or seen as a misfortune as opposed to an addition (Tversky & Kahneman, 1985). Huangpu (2014) found that individuals responded differently to the framing effects when they were positive or negative. Framing effects had less of an impact on participants who had a greater propensity towards risk taking; taking risks in both negative and positive frame positions, whilst frame had more effects on people who had weaker risk-taking tendencies. It can be deduced from this study that gang members who have a higher risk-taking tendency inherently may indulge in riskier behaviors and decision-making regardless of the influence of framing effects.

Literature Review

The problem of gangs and juvenile gang involvement has been around for years. Gangs have long been thought of being an organized set of criminals who share a common goal of using intimidation and violence to achieve their sinister goals, usually

involving illicit activities to acquire and maintain territory and wealth (Fraser, 2017; Jennings & Gonzalez, 2016; Sriram et al., 2024). It is believed that about 90 % of all violent acts in the United States is carried out by gangs (Sonterblum, 2018). Researchers have argued that gang involvement occurs as a result of failed prosocial intuitions such as the family, school and church (Sekar, 2023; Spergel, 1995). Gangs have one of the highest correlations to criminal offenses and therefore are extremely problematic (Jennings & Gonzalez, 2016). It is also recorded that gangs have been around since the 1600s (Jennings & Gonzalez, 2016) Gangs have been reported terrorizing locals in London since that time (Jennings & Gonzalez, 2016). Sekar, 2023 believes that gangs most likely first emerged out of urban, overpopulated neighborhoods where children fought over scarce resources as small groups and small clans. The gang population steadily grew over time to be a formidable but negative force to reckon with. In 1970s there were only reportedly 19 states that had problems due to gang involvement (Hansen, 2016). The number rose drastically by the 1990s, with all fifty states reporting gang violence and gang involvement (Sekar, 2023).

Gangs are formed for many reasons, but illicit financial gains are probably the most prominent feature of gang activities (Dickon-Gomez & et al., 2017; Northman, 2023). Poverty among disconnected and disenfranchised youth is one of the main reason gangs get involved in illicit activities for money (Rosen, & Kassab, 2018). Over 70% of the world's population is worth less than \$10, 000 and survives on about \$1.60 per day (Rosen, & Kassab, 2018). The drug trade is the most common and lucrative way in which gang members organize and make money as depicted in popular films such as 'Breaking

Bad' and 'El Camino.' Street gangs, prison gangs, and motor vehicle gangs are noted as being the major drug distributors through the United States (Geldenhuys, 2020; Rosen, & Kassab, 2018). The 'kind of people' that join gangs are typically perceived as those who are raised up in low socioeconomic societies, typically from the working class and in the toughest environments. They are also usually thought of those associated with Latinos and Blacks, or those who 'fall by the wayside' with low academic achievements and are seeking to get rich quick (Rosen & Kassab, 2018).

Gangs in America are more prevalent among Hispanics and Latinos (National Gang Center, n.d.), with the police law enforcement reporting that 46% of total gangs in the USA are Hispanic/Latinos, while blacks made up 36% and whites making up 11% (National Gang Center, n.d.). Males predominantly make up gangs with a total of 93 % on average while females made up 7 % on average (National Gang Center, n.d.). Recent data have also revealed that gang involvement increased 11% from 2007 to 2012 with a 24% increase in gang related homicide (Henderson, 2021). Chicago Police Department reported that 468 murders were committed in 2015 which is a 12.5% increase from the year before (Madhani, 2016). In addition, there were also 2,900 shootings that year which was 13% more than the year prior, which is indicative of a general rise in gang violence in that region (Madhani, 2016; Sekar, 2023).

Reasons For Gang Initiation.

To better comprehend the lived experiences of gang members and how they make difficult decisions in a gang, comprehending the reasons they initiate into a gang in the first place is very useful. There are several reported and studied reasons for gang

initiation. One of the major reasons juveniles initiate into gangs so as to satisfy a financial goal (Dickon-Gomez et al., 2017; Northman, 2023). Gang members have explained that they believe that the illegal activities that they do in a gang will be more profitable than pursuing pro-social channels such as going to school and getting a job (Dickon-Gomez et al., 2017; Northman, 2023). Drug-lords and top-tier gangs are often portrayed in films and music videos living very lavish lifestyles and are also often depicted as making their money fast and easy (Geldenhuys, 2020). It also often romanticized in these films that hip/pop-culture and lifestyle of gangsters as easy lifestyle, marketed and portrayed on TV and on radio, is very influential to many juveniles considering to initiate in a gang (Van Hellemont & Densley, 2019). For disconnected and disenfranchised juveniles who are seeking financial security amidst challenging home and community environments may view gangs to be an attractive alternative to prosocial endeavors (Rosen, & Kassab, 2018; Sonterblum, 2018).

For many poor families in inner cities and juveniles who come from low socioeconomic societies, joining gangs for economic opportunities may not only be a way for the gains of quick cash, but may also be a means of survival for them as they are limited by the opportunities that are presented for them (Abrams & Terry, 2014). Some researchers argue that gangs often emerge as a response to social and economic hardships, serving as a means of survival for many individuals in marginalized communities (Ibrahim et al., 2023). They also argue that gangs provide sense of identity, protection, and belonging to their members, who might otherwise feel vulnerable and isolated (Ibrahim et al., 2023). For some juveniles, joining a gang is a way to secure

financial resources, garner social status among peers, and gain support that are scarce in their settings (Ibrahim et al., 2023). The structure and solidarity within a gang can offer a semblance of stability and control in the face of systemic inequalities and limited opportunities (Ibrahim et al., 2023). However, this path to survival frequently comes at a high cost and hence some juveniles may overlook the plausible ramifications that lie ahead (Ibrahim et al., 2023).

There is also a correlation to gang involvement and gang initiation among juveniles with low academic achievement (Higgins et al., 2018; Rosen, & Kassab, 2018). Along with the desire to gain fast cash, many of whom end up in gangs are underachievers academically (Rosen, & Kassab, 2018). In Latin America for example, over 20 million youths between 15 and 24 are illiterate and most of who end up in gangs are recruited because of their vulnerability and diminished opportunity for gainful employment (Higgins et al., 2018; Rosen, & Kassab, 2018). Schwartz et al. (2017) also corroborated this sentiment and suggested in their study that students with lower academic achievement are more likely to initiate into a gang than their peers with higher academic achievement.

Researchers interested in the way reading disabilities affected behavior discovered in their studies that dyslexia were positively correlated with total behavioral problems, internalizing behavioral problems, anxiety, depression, social and attention problem (Alne et al., 2020). In a similar study, researchers found that participants in their study who were diagnosed with dyslexia exhibited psycho-affective symptoms, especially anxiety and low self-esteem in social and academic situations more frequently

than the control group. The maladaptive behaviors were associated to reading measures (Zupardo et al., 2023).

There has also been a significant correlation between gang initiation and unstable homes. Sonterblum, (2018) pointed those juveniles that were raised in unstable homes, that is, those juveniles who had food insecurity, experienced poverty and those that had unstable housing were more at risk to initiate in gang. Sonterblum, (2018) references Maslow's hierarchy of needs as being essential in understanding how disenfranchised and disconnected youths could find gangs as a safety net. Sonterblum (2018) argued that when basic needs, as suggested by Maslow, such as needs for safety, love, food and shelter are not met, juveniles may likely to try fulfill them by any means necessary such as joining gang. The need for adoration from their own peers may even drive them to join gangs, further illuminating the importance of the feeling of belonging and how it can affect a person's decision-making (Descormiers, & Corrado, 2016). Research has also shown that when children are neglected by their parents, they tend to get involved in gangs which highlights the need for love and parental monitoring to steer vulnerable youth away from gangs (Kubik et al., 2019; Passi, 2019). Should Juveniles in these challenging situations succumb to the hardships of their environment and fall victims to gang recruitment or should they be expected to develop a certain tenacity that sees some juveniles from challenging communities excellent in life? Popular actors such as Morgan Freeman has argued that leaving the gang and moving to an area of prosperity may be one solution to the problem.

Another crucial fact associated with gang initiation among juveniles is the element of negative influences. Gilman et al. (2014) conducted research using 173 participants. Gilman et al. (2014) revealed in their study through survival analysis that living with a gang member significantly increased the likelihood of a juvenile joining a gang as opposed to those who did not live with a gang member. Besides living with a gang, research also indicated that when juveniles associate with peers that are in a gang or who exhibit violent behaviors, this also increased the likelihood of them joining a gang (Gilman et al., 2014; Kubik et al., 2019). Higgins et al. (2018) also found in their study that the odds of joining a gang and having gang increased when juveniles socialize with delinquent peers. Juveniles who also live in violent homes and violent communities tend to be influenced to join gangs (Maringira, 2018).

This phenomenon may best be explained by learning theories that suggest that people often model behaviors that they are exposed to. This suggests that some juveniles may be initiating into gangs by just their association with delinquent peers without or giving much thought to their actions. It is believed that some juveniles who are involved in gang activities were actually coerced into joining the gang (Finelli, 2019). It is believed that such coercion is on the rise and that stronger penalties need to be admonished in order to reduce this coercive gang recruitment of juveniles (Finelli, 2019). Finelli (2019) argued that juveniles are not able to make congruent decisions under the influences of coercion and manipulation of adults. Finelli (2019) argued that juveniles with immature and under-developed brains do not have the tenacity to effectively find their way out of these coercions and are very vulnerable under these circumstances.

Another important reason that juveniles join gangs may be for the hope of protection. Pyrooz (2022) argued that some that inmates joined gangs while they were in prison for personal safety, a sense of pride, and for a sense of belonging. He argued that they joined the gang to avoid being bullied. Kerig and Mendez (2022) posited that poor attachments styles that are formed from traumatic experiences may influence juveniles to pursue gang involvement seeking protect and social attachment simultaneously. Kerig and Mendez (2022) argued that trauma exposure and posttraumatic stress are also associated with three distinct outcomes which include gang engagement as a risk factor, gang involvement as an outcome, and gang desistance. They also argued that trauma could lead developmental deficits could lead to posttraumatic hypervigilance, emotional numbing, risk-seeking behaviors, futurelessness, perpetration of trauma, trauma triggers, and traumatic grief.

Adolescents and Decision Making

Decision-making is a critical aspect of human existence and occurs multiple times per day. Decisions making can be considered as a major pillar in human existence as it is central to the way we evaluate our options in life and guides the path our lives (Sadana et al., 2024). It is therefore critical for us to fully understand and comprehend major aspects of this phenomenon. Individuals make decisions in several different ways. One way that individuals make decisions is known as the strategic method. The strategic form of decision-making is thought to be essential to actions that require organization and also for areas of our life that depend on competitiveness (Calabretta et al., 2017; Timmer et al., 2021). This method involves both rational and intuitive form of decisions processes

(Calabretta et al., 2017; Timmer et al., 2021). Strategic decision-making is a core and valuable intelligent asset that also includes step by step planning analytic effort which are usually linear (Calabretta et al., 2017; Timmer et al., 2021). Researchers have suggested that intuition and rationality are two important aspects of decision-making (Elbanna & Child, 2007; Fischhoff & Broomell, 2020).

Intuition within the realms of decision-making is primal and his thought to be swift and utilizes rapid non-cognizant acknowledgment of examples and relationships to determine emotionally charged decisions (Dane & Pratt, 2007; Fischhoff & Broomell, 2020). On the other hand, rational thinking is contrasted to intuition, the instinct which is more rapid does not usually have the precision of a calculated and strategic decision (Barnard, 1983; Fischhoff & Broomell, 2020). These studies illuminate the challenges that juveniles who must make decisions as part of their gang involvement face on a regular basis. Some juveniles might be more intuitive and intrinsic in their thought patterns while others may be more linear, step by step and competitive in their quest to dominate the opportunities that are presented to them in their lives. Psychosocial and developmental factors are crucial in understanding how juveniles make decisions in their daily lives (Berryessa & Reeves, 2020; Grisso, 1996).

From its origin, the law and courts perceived youthfulness as a phase of formative adolescence and thus to be more immature and hence considered juveniles offenses being less culpable than those of grown-ups (Addams, 1925; Nagel et al., 2016). Researchers highlighted in his research that youths may have less dynamic skill than grown-ups in specific regions of their decision-making faculty, including areas of advice seeking,

adaptive goal setting, evaluation processes and in learning (Berryessa & Reeves, 2020; Byrnes 2002). Berryessa and Reeves (2020), argued that while juveniles share some common elements of decision-making with adults such as knowledge of options and in familiar areas or responding to certain moderating factors, it is the areas that they lack in comparability that lends them to risky decision-making. Some of the attributes include poor decision-making and may also derive from the lack of experience that some juveniles may have.

For explanatory purposes, it is useful to consider decision-making as comprising of a progression of four stages. The initial step includes defining an objective (completing school). The subsequent advance includes arranging choices for delivering that objective (e.g., studying and attending classes). The third step includes rank-requesting alternatives (e.g., getting an education is better than hustling in the streets). The last advance comprises of choosing the most elevated positioned elective which completes the processes (Berryessa & Reeves, 2020).

Juveniles might not be fully aware of the long-term consequences of their decisions and hence may not be sensitive to the extent of the ramifications of some of their actions. Zottoli and Daftary-Kapur (2019) posited that juveniles who are facing a plea deal may plea false guilty 27% of the time in comparison to their adult counterparts who are typically making false guilty pleas around 17% of the time. Zottoli and Daftary-Kapur (2019) argued that part of the reason juveniles take bad plea deals is because they are not able to assess the seriousness of the long-term ramifications of their decisions that they are making. This might explain why some juveniles get initiated into gang and find

themselves in serious trouble with the law, as they have not given enough consideration to the seriousness of the ramifications of such decisions.

Another reason juveniles may tend to make poorer decisions than adults are due to the fact that they have a higher affinity towards instant gratification in the face of adversity. Researchers found in their study that juveniles who make poor plea deals are sometimes influenced by the notion that they will ‘get to go home.’ (Daftary-Kapur, & Zottoli, 2014; Yeng & Mohamad, 2023). The desire is so strong among juveniles to be influenced by instant gratification that in some instances they take false guilty charges more often than adults do (Daftary-Kapur, & Zottoli, 2014; Yeng & Mohamad, 2023). Simane-Vigante (2018) highlighted H.J. Eysenck’s personality trait theory explained that criminal behavior is associated with the inability to curb instant gratification as well-adjusted individuals are usually more socialized to delay gratification.

Another critical reason that is associated with poor decision-making among youths is the underlined factor of mental health disorders among juveniles who exhibit delinquent behaviors. Nagel et al. (2016) illuminated the role that mental health plays in poor decision-making in adolescents. Nagel et al. (2016) highlighted that juveniles who have early onset psychological disorders such as schizophrenia, ADHD, Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Substance Abuse Disorders are more likely to exhibit delinquent behaviors. Nagel et al. (2016) revealed in their study that about three times as many juveniles who are in juvenile detention met the criteria for a mental health disorder as opposed to those who are in the community. Ozer and Akbas (2020) argued in their study pointed out that students who had lower IQs usually tend to have a poor length of stay in

school and were more likely to demonstrate violent and delinquent behaviors. Juveniles may be at risk for gang initiation due to the frustration that is associated with low IQ and mental health disorders. Gangs may be a sort of safe haven for juveniles who have these violent tendencies stemming from mental health complications as they relate more to the deviance that is usually associated with gang activities.

Psychologists found that childhood trauma was linked with internalizing and externalizing behavior problems among adolescents. They also found that executive function partly reconciled the relations between childhood trauma and internalizing and externalizing behavior problems. They also found that life events stress was observed to moderate the relations between childhood trauma and executive function and internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (Wei & Lü, 2023). Researchers also conducted a study to better comprehend the mechanisms through which academic achievement and externalizing behavior problems interact found that there were d negative long-term outcomes and found that children's low academic skills were likely associated with a variety of behavior problems and maladaptive outcomes throughout childhood and adulthood (Kulkarni et al., 2021).

Decision Making in Gangs

Decision-making in gangs is a very critical aspect of gang activity. According to Panuccio (2021), juveniles who are at risk navigate their neighborhoods and apply strategies to maintain their daily lives. They found in their study that gang members made calculated decisions about risk-taking and financial benefits and considered the risk as they applied survival strategies. Panuccio (2021), stated that many juveniles had to

assume adult responsibilities especially those of African American and Latino decent. Frequently incarcerated, juveniles from tough neighborhoods often come back in their communities and figure out a path to a financially successful life (Abrams & Terry, 2014; Panuccio, 2021). They are often torn between finding a job that can support their needs and going into a gang that provides both financial and emotional support. Researchers found that at-risk juveniles expressed that they made calculated risky decisions even though they could get into trouble but did it rationally for what they believed to be good reasons (Abrams & Terry, 2014; Panuccio, 2021). The research pointed out that one of their participants 'Tyrone', pointed out that he made calculated risky decisions for financial survival. They pointed out that Tyrone calculated that selling marijuana would lead to a lower level of charge and possibly avoiding felony charges (Abrams & Terry, 2014; Panuccio, 2021). If juveniles calculate risk and still join gangs for financial gains, it suggests that they value financial gains more than they fear getting into trouble. This type of risk-seeking behavior is explained by prospect theory but is usually associated with loss-aversion. If the theory is to fit, it would be good to theory to demonstrate how these juveniles interpret certainty of loss to risk such small gains.

Decision-making in gangs usually have hierarchal decision-making structures (Sullivan, 2002). Sullivan (2002) highlighted in his study of how drug cartels, street gangs and warlords develop and evolve. Sullivan outlined in his study that a part of the evolution of these gangs involved a sinister decision-making scheme that expands their influence and outreach. Some of the activities they decided to partake in includes "bribery, coercions and intimidation" (Sullivan, 2002). This further demonstrates the

importance of decision-making in gangs and the importance of maintaining the gang as a unit through these decisions.

Another important decision-making in a gang that is critical in understanding the experiences of gang member is the decision to disengage from a gang. Tonks and Stephenson (2019) highlighted that the idea that the decision to leave a gang is unique to the individual and that we should take into account their differing experiences. The decision to take part in illicit activities versus disengaging a gang is also a difficult decision to make as it comes with several threats of negative consequences for the individual as well. They may find that gang members threaten them that if they leave the gang, they will be harmed (Tonks & Stephenson, 2019). They also find that going back in the prosocial world presents to them all the challenges that they were trying to escape in the first place. Some of the trouble that they were trying to avoid in a prosocial environment is the misconception that one set of rules fits all. The difficulty in leaving the gang could mean going back to seek support from family and friends that were less supportive and understanding of their plight in the first place.

Many juveniles are of the opinion that prosocial groups propagate slow and unsure paths of success (Dickon-Gomez & et al., 2017; Northman, 2023). This idea is demonstrated by the high dropout rate (high school dropout) among certain underprivileged groups. In 2018, there were 2.1 million status dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24, and the overall status dropout rate was 5.3 percent (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Many high school dropouts, low academics achievers and truant juveniles usually end up in low paying jobs and

usually experience low employability. According to Tentama and Abdillah (2019), those with higher academic achievement tend to be more skilled and resourceful and are more employable. Besides low employability and low paying jobs, there is a population who are those with low academic achievement, high truancy who are at risk for initiating gangs (Fritsch et al., 2017). For juveniles with lower IQs or a reduced affinity to academic pursuits, they may become frustrated with prosocial regime and opt for gang involvement and gang initiation for an easier alternative path (Ozer & Akbas, 2020).

The decisions to initiate into a gang are also influenced by poor monitoring of the child by their parents, early aggressive behaviors and maltreatment of the child as in their sensitive emotional years (Kubik, et al., 2019). This reflects the classic case of the abused becoming the abuser. Gangs usually use violence as a means of conflict resolution which may attract the abused and victimized juveniles. Maltreatment of juveniles, especially multiple incidences can lead to excessive risk taking and impulsivity (Docherty et al., 2018). The insights of this research indicate that the risk taking, and impulsivity seen in some gangs may be influenced by maltreatment and aggressive behaviors they experienced in earlier years, clouding their judgment. It may suggest that their aggressive decisions may be less calculated than was previously thought by some researchers.

Other researchers have indicated that some juveniles may have joined a gang due to sexual trauma and abuse in their early stage of development (Data on Psychiatry Reported by Researchers at Imperial College London, 2020). Studies indicate that antisocial males and gang members generally showed higher levels of sexual aggression and also were more likely have been sexually traumatized (Data on Psychiatry Reported

by Researchers at Imperial College London, 2020). These studies have shed light on the association of sexual abuse and gang initiation in juveniles. There seems to be a deep emotional trauma of sexual abuse that pushes some juveniles to seek comfort and restoration in violent gangs. The maltreatment of adolescents should be assessed and seriously thought of as a major factor that could influence their behavior, increasing their risky behaviors including sexual behaviors (Kubik et al., 2019). Since there is a risk associated for juveniles to become risk seeking due to maltreatment, there might an association that can be further research to see the extent to which maltreatment of juveniles may push them to initiate into gangs as a part of their new risk seeking tendencies.

McLachlan, (2020) described the transition route from adolescent to adulthood as a difficult path for juveniles to traverse. The authors explained that developing and forming a successful path to adulthood required life skills that were developed through the formative years. The authors insinuated that if those formative years are not developed properly and is affected in any major social way, then many adolescents may become vulnerable to joining a gang and becoming involved in gang activities under theses strenuous circumstances, often to make money or feel a sense of belonging to a peer group (Geldenhuys, 2020). The difficult situation for these individuals during the formative years is to contemplate whether to join the gang for their perceived benefits despite the dangers that involved joining a gang or to remain a more prosocial group.

Ramifications: Perspectives and Experiences

Juveniles initiating into gangs may or may not be aware of the likely ramifications of gang involvement and gang activities. With an estimated figure that around 90 % of all violent acts in the United States is carried out by gangs in some cities such as Los Angeles where gang-related homicides are responsible for up to 69% of homicides, it more likely that juveniles may be aware of the ramifications of gang activities (Bhatt & Tweed, 2018; Sonterblum, 2018). Ramifications of gang activities may include lengthy prison sentences and even death from gang violence (Patalano, 2020; Terry & Abrams, 2014). With such high stakes at risk, many juveniles who are initiating into gangs are likely to bet that the risks and tradeoffs of illicit gang activities are worth it and will likely be in their favor (Patalano, 2020; Terry & Abrams, 2014). In communities where juveniles are at high risk for gang involvement based on low socio-economic factors, dissipated infrastructures, and negative cultural influences, many of these juveniles opt for gang involvement citing that survival is more important than focusing on the ramifications of gang involvement (Patalano, 2020; Terry & Abrams, 2014). Using coping mechanisms such as avoidance may be a factor in the type of connivance that juveniles display when it requires them to think of the dangers and ramifications of gang initiation and gang involvement.

Immaturity cognition and immature way of thinking may also fuel the reasons behind why some juveniles tend to overlook the seriousness of the likely ramifications of gang initiation. Finelli (2019) argued that juveniles with immature and under –developed brains usually do not handle challenging situations well, especially regarding gang

involvement to make accurate decisions regarding their circumstances. Some juveniles are not fully capable of seeing through the entire big picture and see the sequences of the likely events that are likely to play out (Finelli, 2019). In these situations, they are likely to join a gang because they are unable to process the realities of the ramifications to come because the ramifications are usually far removed in time from their initial entry into the gang.

Prospect theory may also provide us with another explanation as to why juveniles seem to ignore the likely high-stake ramifications of joining a gang. Prospect theory suggests that people will become risk-seeking when financial gains appear to be high, over-estimating possibility over probability, known as the 'possibility effect' (Kahneman et al., 1979; Patalano 2020). For juveniles who are lured to gangs by the notion that gang involvement will be lucrative and will be an easier way of making money, they probably overestimate the possibility of making money and underestimate the probability of being arrested or being hurt. Many juveniles that were arrested for violent crimes appeared stunned by the lengthy prison sentences that were looming and usually taking bad plea deals just to get reduced sentences (Patalano, 2020; Terry & Abrams, 2014). Abrams and Terry (2014) highlighted in their study, juveniles who expressed that they were of their opinion that they could disengage from gangs before they ever faced any serious ramifications is a good example of juveniles falling victim to the possibility effect.

Juveniles who tend to ignore the seriousness of the likely ramifications of gang initiations and the dangers of gang involvement may also be experiencing cognitive bias known as optimism bias. Optimism bias is defined as a type of wishful thinking where

people tend to be overly optimistic about favorable outcomes and diminished the likelihood of unfavorable outcomes (Baron 1994; Fairley & Sanfey, 2020). People tend to think that the bad that happens to others will never happen to them (Baron 1994; Fairley & Sanfey, 2020). For this reason, many juveniles may be influenced by this bias when they are considering gang initiation, thinking the ramifications that they have witnessed happened to some others, such as long imprisonment, may not apply to them. One good example of optimism bias in criminal activity is the infamous story of the Loomis Fargo Heist in 1997 which was the largest heist in US history. Criminals watched on the news the heist of a bank robbery in Florida whose assailants were caught. The would-be robbers in North Carolina decided that they would pull off a similar heist, disregarding that the earlier robbers in Florida were caught by the police. They would eventually get caught as well.

Reaping the gains of gang activity while avoiding reprisals and being caught by the police is an optimal situation for many gang members. Those who seek to be initiated in gang activities may rely on tactics that gangs use to evade prison sentences and reprisals. Gangs often use violence and intimidation as one tactic to evade ramifications of their illicit activities (Finelli, 2019). Some gangs are deemed untouchable because of the high level of intimidation that they churn out in their territories. Gangs in Jamaica and Mexico, intimidated the police force, bragging about having far more powerful weapons than the police. This intimidation tactic, arrest rates, and low incarceration rates for some gang members in certain high-risk territories have created an enclave of lawlessness (Bunker, 2019). Juveniles that think they may be under the protection from these

powerful gangs may feel as though they are unlikely to experience any serious ramifications from gang initiation and involvement.

In some instances, gang members are known to pay off corrupt police in the form of collusion and connivance to elude the ramifications of being caught. Baltimore Detective was implicated in drug related case where he provided information to drug dealers about police whereabouts so that the drug dealers could avoid police route (Baltimore Man Sentenced to 188 Months for Participating in Heroin Trafficking Ring Protected by Corrupt Former Baltimore City Police Department Detective, 8, February 22). Bunker (2019) described in his book that drug cartels in Mexico paid-off corrupted police officers so that they can further their agenda. For juveniles who are considering gang initiation who learn that powerful gangs can be so wealthy and controlling that they are able to pay-off and corrupt police officers, maybe become optimistic that this will also be their experience and they would not have to worry too much about incarceration. In Jamaica where incarceration levels for gang members are very low, the punitive nature of the justice system does not pack enough power to deter would-be criminals or juveniles considering gang initiation.

Some gangsters are also known to get involved in witchcraft and the occult to increase gains and avoid ramifications of gang activities. Geldenhuys (2019) posited that juveniles have resorted to joining the occult in order to gain protection in gang activities. Gangs in Jamaica are also known to use voodoo to provide them with what is known as 'guard ring's that should protect them from dangers and the ramification from illicit gang activities." Juveniles who have been lured in by these claims may be drawn into the idea

that they could also gain protection using witchcraft while benefiting from the gains of gangster lifestyle.

Summary

Comprehending the decision-making process in gangs and the risks that they take in gaining from their gang involvement is crucial to understanding the ways that psychologists and policy makers can deter them from making immoral and irrational decisions. Many gang members have expressed that their decisions to be involved in a gang is to have financial gains that are more likely from gang involvement and less likely from being prosocial groups (Dickson-Gomez et al., 2017). The temptation to get the desired benefits from gang involvement seems to outweigh their fears of the serious ramifications that are likely to follow in the aftermath of their decisions. This research therefore fills the gap, highlighting and bringing attention to the experiences of those decision-making moments lens through prospect theory.

The study provided further insights into the risk-seeking nature of gang members and how they experience the ramifications and dangers of dicey situations and risk-seeking behaviors (Dickson-Gomez et al., 2017). There was limited research on the ways in which gang members experience and consolidate their potential immoral acts and the way in which they perceive these acts before they commit them. While there is ample research on the reasons juveniles initiate into a gang, they have seldom expanded on the experiences of the internal conflicts of their psyche of juveniles. Prospect theory was used to lenses this phenomenon as it has major applicability for how decisions are made when risks are involved and also addresses risk-seeking behaviors (Patalano, 2020; Terry

& Abrams, 2014). In the next chapter, the researcher reviewed the methodology of the current study, including the design of the current study, participant recruitment and data analysis.

Research demonstrated that some individuals may join a gang due the perceived power that the gang comes with. This may be very appealing to those who feel powerless and marginalized. According to (Bunker, 2019), Gangs in Mexico reportedly intimidated the police force, bragging about having far more powerful weapons than the police and were even able to cause the police to retreat because the gangs have more members and power in the community than the police.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of the study was to investigate the experiences of gang members as they make decisions about difficult, dangerous, and dicey situations and the ramifications of those decisions. The experiences of how gang members reconcile the conundrum of likely immorality of their decisions to earn an income while in a gang is extremely understudied (Dickson-Gomez et al., 2017). In this chapter, I discuss the population and sampling methods that were used to provide insight into the participants of the study. The potential for bias and the reflexive nature of the research is discussed to enable transparency in the research process and limit researcher bias. Details of the procedures and instrumentation are explained in order to facilitate future researchers who are interested in this project. The data analysis technique is outlined within this chapter. The chapter is completed by addressing the ethical dilemma and issues that were confronted during the research and how they were addressed and resolved.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the experiences of gang members when making decisions in difficult gang related situations?

RQ2: How do gang members experience and perceive the likely ramifications of their decisions?

Phenomenon of Study

The phenomenon I explored was decision making within gangs, especially in difficult situations and the ramifications they perceive and experience. Decision making

is at the heart of gang initiation and gang involvement (Dickson-Gomez et al., 2017). What gang members decide to do on a daily basis is affected by choices they are making consciously or unconsciously (Sutil-Martín & Rienda-Gómez, 2020). Another key concept I addressed was the ways in which gang members address the ramifications of their decisions. Gang members must handle the ramifications of their actions and understanding (Dickson-Gomez et al., 2017). How they experience these ramifications are critical developing a successful intervention that might deter them from joining a gang or leaving a gang.

Research Design

Qualitative research is best suited for phenomena that require further exploration (Creswell, 2013). The decisions that gang members make amidst difficult situations on a daily basis and the likely ramifications that they anticipate are underexplored. Exploring these issues has great implications for developing programs that will help at risk juveniles to make better decisions regarding gang initiations and gang involvement. A qualitative approach was best suited for the complexities that are involved to better understand the experiences for juveniles who must make these tough decisions as it relates to gang initiation and gang involvement. The lived experiences are very valuable and very difficult to quantify. In some instances, the qualitative design is more suitable not to quantify, but rather because the quality of the exploration would be reduced in such quantification efforts (Creswell, 2013).

After deciding upon a qualitative design, I selected the best type of qualitative approach to utilize for the study. There are several types of qualitative approaches

available to a researcher who is interested in exploring a particular phenomenon. Some of the most respected and used approaches that I considered included phenomenological studies, case studies, ethnographic studies, grounded theory studies, historical studies and action research (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Phenomenological studies are best described as a design that extrapolates the quality of the human experiences based on the description of the information that the participants provide about their own lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). To reduce bias and increase trustworthiness the researchers use *bracketing*, a skill used to guard against the research findings and assumptions about the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Phenomenological studies are revered for their ability to gather richer data from the participants than most other methods. Though this method offers deeper and more complete description of the participants, the data may be difficult to analyze which in term reduces its trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Grounded theory conversely to phenomenological studies, identifies a theory and used the data to derive a new theory through a process called constant comparisons. Data that is collected is repeatedly compared and analyzed and a theory is developed which is considered grounded in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this approach, essential data are identified and given codes that form a part of the new theory. Though the method allows for thick details and tends to find out what truly happened, the method is very time consuming and attracts researcher bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ethnographic studies typically are studies that involve the researcher collecting data from a group of people and usually the researcher lives with the group to study their culture (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The researchers usually identify key informants who are very knowledgeable of the culture to aid in their research. This format usually requires a long period of time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). While this method garners strength in building valuable relations between the researcher and the participants and is excellent at identifying additional needs of the participants, the method is also time consuming and can lead to cultural bias, and also bias from the forged relationship between the participant and the researcher (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Another useful qualitative approach is the historical studies approach. Researchers using this approach are interested in primary source of historical data that are of value to them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). They typically identify the locations of artifacts, evaluation, analysis and synthesis of data of the past that has intrinsic value (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Two core features of this approach is using external and internal critique (Creswell, 2014; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). External criticisms involve the analysis of the data to ensure that the data is genuine and authentic. This usually precedes the internal criticism which is more concerned with the accuracy of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The study is best suited for analysis of historical trends. The historical design is also vulnerable to excess bias and usually requires very skilled researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Case studies are in-depth and rigorous evaluation of a group of people of interest to a researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Case studies may also include the examination of institutions. Case studies are usually conducted over a long period of time and collect and evaluate the data through content analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Case studies have the advantage of having the ability to capture a lot of details on a phenomenon that other methods might not have the ability to do. With the intimate details garnered, new hypothesis may be derived from the data and is great for exploration. Conversely, the method can be very time consuming, unscientific at times, and lacks great degree of transferability/generalizability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Action research is that type of qualitative approach that requires action to improve the phenomenon of study. The action is examined and analyzed by the researcher to develop an effective theory about the phenomenon being studied. The process is usually collaborative between the researcher and the participants. This type of research can be extremely rigorous and typically lack a high degree of repeatability (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). I conducted an in-depth perusal and review of the various approaches previously discussed. I chose the IPA based on its advantages it offers in capturing the experiences of participants. Action research is valued for its inclusivity and its approach and its focus on collaboration. Such a high level of collaboration is suitable for managing changes. On the other hand, action research shows this method poses challenges in the area of repeatability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

To develop a better understanding of how gang members make difficult decisions and how they maneuver the psychology of the likely ramifications of their decisions, I adopted and implement the research methodology of IPA (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). This approach enables the researcher and the participants to conjure and embrace a coconstructed understanding of gang members' experiences (Creswell, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). IPA is founded upon the tradition of the hermeneutics traditions which places great value on human experiences. The method is inductive rather than deductive (Lowers & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). IPA emphasizes the quality of the experiences of the participant that the researchers is interested in. IPA values the subjective perspective of the individual about their own experiences and focuses less on quantifying phenomena. IPA is idiographic in nature, valuing each individual's experience as a unique set of experiences and exploring those traits. The approach is also emic in nature and values the account of the individual and how they interpret their culture, placing more value on the intrinsic experiences rather than the forces of external frameworks (Kottak & Conrad, 2006; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Qualitative research designs such as IPA have an added advantage because they have the ability to develop great insights because of their ability to explore (Alayse, 2017). IPA has invaluable advantages as the quality of the research is enhanced by the valuable relationship between the researcher and the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Additionally, IPA qualitative method conjures the best opportunity for the participants to share their

lived experiences from which others can get a great insight into their lives and what is important to the participants at the core (Alayse, 2017). IPA in contrast to other approaches, allows for participant-oriented perspectives and gives the participants the ability to share their lived experiences without any sort of data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Therefore, IPA was best suited for this research.

Role of the Researcher

I collected all data related to this study and coded and analyzed the data. I conducted the interviews using semi-structured interview method. I was cognizant of the reflexive nature of the interview process and allowed the participants to express themselves freely while adjusting to and updating my interview to allow a natural flow of conversation. The analysis and conclusions were processed based on the self-disclosure of the participants (Alase, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

IPA research tradition values the subjective lived experiences of the participants, and the researcher demonstrates curiosity while conducting the interview and made endeavors to avoid preconceived notions and other established hypotheses (Alase, 2017). I was also a researcher-participant who was mindful of the temptation to prove assumptions and theories but was able to be more reflexive in his approach to explore and discover the truths of the participants (see Smith, 2007).

I was cognizant of the possible biases that were likely to surface and I practiced bracketing and also used a reflexive journal to assist in setting biases aside while conducting the interview (see Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2012). Bracketing involves the effort

of the researcher to curtail preconceptions about a phenomenon recognizing that it is best that the properties and truth of the phenomena be revealed naturally, rather than to assign scientific criteria and categories to the phenomena being observed (Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2012). Though it is challenging to eliminate all values, prior knowledge and beliefs which make it difficult to bracket during research, the use of semi-structured interviewing, using the natural cue from responses of the participants, an acceptable level of bracketing may be achieved (Vicary et al., 2017). Bracketing can also involve the mindfulness of the researcher to avoid all preconceived notions throughout the research, from data collection to data analysis (Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2012; Vicary et al., 2017).

I used a reflexive journal to monitor and reduced any temptations of automatic assumptions (see Vicary et al., 2016). I was therefore able to recognize some assumptions including that decision making in gangs is often affected by the level of maturity of the decision maker. Another assumption that I was able to bracket was the assumption that juveniles would more frequently choose prosocial routes to financial stability rather than joining gangs, fearing that the likely ramifications of gang involvement.

Methodology

Participants

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of ex-gang members in North Carolina between the ages of 18 and 30. I chose that age group because of their experiences of gang involvement. The sample of participants by design was homogenous and I had nine participants, which satisfied the saturation requirements of qualitative study (Smith &

Fieldsend, 2021). IPA tradition recommends a compatible small sample size usually between six and eight participants to sufficiently explore the phenomena in detail (Alase, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

The participants located in North Carolina were recruited by networking with half-way houses, drug rehab centers, day support organizations, correctional institutions, and social networks such as Facebook. The participants were notified that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the ability to quit or end their participation at any time without any form of duress or any form of risk or harm. In order to keep confidentiality in the study, participants were given a number for filing, but no names were identified.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used for this research. Purposive sampling is best suited for IPA tradition (Smith 2007). Purposive sampling is defined as a nonprobability or selective technique used by the researcher to choose the candidates based on the researcher's judgment of what are the best characteristics that suits the research. Because IPA recommends that the participants who are selected for the study best represent the experiences which one wanted to study, purposive sampling and its inherent selectivity justifies this technique for sampling in this regard (Campbell et al., 2020). Also known as subjective of judgmental sampling, the technique offers a lot of benefits to a researcher as it may be less time consuming and is able to focus and capture quality and essential data relating to the population that researcher is interested in (Campbell et al., 2020). There are several types of purposive sampling, but for this study, I selected the homogenous

purposive sampling. Homogenous purposive sampling is a subclass of purposive sampling which focuses on the selecting participants for a study who share similar qualities or characteristics such as background, race or occupation (Rai & Thapa, 2015; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Homogeneous purposive sampling was selected for the sampling technique in order to capture participants who had a similar background to being in a gang.

For this study, participants were solicited from areas and organizations that are linked with gang involvement, gang activity, and interventions for gang involvement. Participants were selected based on the characteristic of between 18 and 30 years old and have been a part of a gang in the past. I also posted flyers near organizations that service the target population, soliciting persons who met the characteristics to join the study. Nine participants were selected for the interview as saturation was met at that time. As opposed to quantitative research where the design relies on a large number to increase its validity, IPA relies on the depth and quality of the data collected (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample of participants by design was homogenous ranging from using nine participants who identified themselves as being formerly involved in gang activities and acknowledges that they had difficult decisions to make regarding initiation and gang involvement in gangs (see Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). IPA tradition recommends a compatible small sample size hence saturation because there is greater value in the rigorous details of the participants' experiences rather than having a large number of participants and nine participants provided enough data to meet saturation (see Alase, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Therefore, the number of participants outlined was

sufficient and I reached saturation for the study. Saturation is defined as the point in which no new substantial can be derived from the participants to due high quality and sampling and in-depth exploration. (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Instrumentation

I used a Semi-structured interview that I developed to elicit the experiences of ex-gang members who had to make tough decisions and experienced the ramifications of those actions. The Semi-structured interview is one of the most popular forms of data collection tool for qualitative researchers (Kallio et al., 2016). Semi-structured interviews are adopted by many qualitative researchers due to their high flexibility and versatility in nature (Kallio et al., 2016). The versatility of this data-collection method allows for additionally rigorous data collection as the researcher is able to use flexibility to get further depths of experiences from the participants (Kallio et al., 2016).

An interview guide was developed which included a Semi-structured interview. I developed and refined the research questions through an interactive process. An interview guide assists the researcher in the process of developing a rigorous data collection process (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview was structured and designed to capture the lived experiences of the participants. The interview included questions that covered the participants' reasons for joining a gang, the difficult decisions that are associated with gang activities, and their perspective on how they managed the likely ramifications for their decisions. The interview questions appear in the appendix of this study.

Procedures

The essence of collecting data using IPA is to collect rich and dynamic data to elicit the experiences of the participants as the participants are viewed as 'self-interpreting beings.' (Kallio et al., 2016). To enable this rich dynamic process of data collection, the researcher outlined the procedures in a systematic way to enable repeatability of the research (Kallio et al., 2016). In the phase of the research, the researcher establishes marketing parameters to attract the most suitable participants via purposive sampling. The researcher met each participant once to complete the semi-structured interview. The researcher then scheduled a time and a place that is convenient for the participants to meet. The location will be in such that confidentiality is upheld and is convenient for the participants. The data was collected in reasonable time that was both conducive to the participant and the researcher, which was mutually agreed upon. All participants expressed that they were not comfortable being recorded with a recording device such as a phone or any other device that would record their voice for their safety.

A flyer containing all the necessary information regarding the study was posted near targeted facilities such as halfway houses. The flyer contained contact information for the researcher and was communicated that there would be a \$15 visa gift card given to participants as a form of appreciation for partaking in the study. The researcher provided essential contact information to the participants including a functional phone number and an email address. The participants were notified that they could use these media to contact the researcher for any additional queries or concerns that they may have. The

researcher contacted the participants prior to the interview via telephone to confirm their participation in the study.

The researcher enacted the inclusion criteria questions. Participants were asked to show their IDs to prove that they were 18 years old and older. Other inclusion criteria questions included asking participants whether they were a part of gang and if they had left the gang over a year prior to them joining the study. Eligible participants were selected for the study.

Participants received complete and informative overview of the research to increase trustworthiness in the research. The informed consent outlined the purpose, procedures, risks and benefits of the study. Included in the procedures was information regarding time commitment of the study. Participants were informed that they had the right to and freedom to decline participation at any time until data analysis starts. Participants opted for verbal consent to the study and expressed their concern that they did not wish to have their signature on file for fear of retaliation. The questions were developed using 12 interview questions. Participants were encouraged to ask additional questions to get the better clarity that they can in relation to the research and the objectives of the study.

The researcher explained the details of the level of confidentiality that the researcher would deliver in order to keep them safe from any research harm. The researcher explained to the participants that all related files to the research would be kept safe, password protected, coded, sealed, and locked away carefully. The researcher explained to the participants that the data would be shredded and discarded after three

years. The researcher reiterated that the participation in the study was voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time with punishments or repercussions.

Participants were notified that their information and identity would be kept confidential ensuring that no data from the research is associated with their identity. Raw digital data from the research were saved into Microsoft Excel and would be password protected.

The researcher took notes that were to be analyzed later on. The research will also ask open-ended questions, apply active listening and ask reflexive questions that allow participants to express their lived experiences in totality and with freedom of expression (Hammersley, 2009). Due to the reflexivity nature of the interview process, subcategories were developed which were not fully anticipated. This subcategory arose from additional information that was gathered through the effort of collecting an abundance of data, information that was not fully anticipated; the additional information that the participants provided through the natural flow of discussion and reflexive data collection process (Alayse, 2017). Additional data gathered identified during the interview was also recorded, analyzed and coded within existing or new themes. This allowed for more rigorous and more in-depth research that seeks to uncover the truths of the participants' experiences. The data was categorized in themes and broken down to its core meaning.

Participants were debriefed after the semi-structured interview was conducted. Participants were informed of the implications of the study. Member checking was conducted by summarizing the data and asking the participants questions to confirm the truthfulness of the data collected. The data that was collected and was then categorized.

After the data has been categorized, identifying patterns within the data was the next objective that was pursued. Data was assessed to assimilate meanings and interpretations that were used for further analysis. The data was operational codes which were used to develop critical themes for the research.

Data Analysis and Processing

The IPA tradition also required a rigorous and detailed effort to analysis and process the data (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Rigorous Analysis was applied through an iterative process and systematic process of developing meaningful themes (Creswell, 2013). The IPA tradition involves the triangulation of the data but leaned more on the finding truthfulness in the evocation of the participants who are experts on their own experiences (Suter, 2012). The data analysis process involved the techniques of finding coherent patterns and meaning categories that was used shed light of the research topic (Suter, 2012). A seven-step process was utilized in the IPA tradition to rigorously analyze the data (Smith et al., 2009). The seven steps are outlined below:

1. Reading and re-reading: The researcher submerged himself into the original data (Charlick et al., 2016). The researcher processed constantly and consistently while perusing the document for areas that need to be improved upon.
2. Initial noting: Refers to the use of free association and use of semantics. For example, the researcher writes notes in the margins of reflexive journal (Charlick et al., 2016). The researcher also keeps a reflexive journal and made notes as needed.

3. Developing emergent themes: Themes emerged, and chunks of relevant data were identified and converted into themes (Charlick et al., 2016). The researcher kept an open mind and looked for emerging themes as the research develops.
4. Searching for connections across themes: Refers to the process of abstracting and connecting themes (Charlick et al., 2016). The researcher was mindful to make any necessary connections that emerged as the study developed.
5. Moving to the next case: The researcher endeavored to bracket previous themes: allowing for new themes to be discovered uninterrupted (Charlick et al., 2016). The researcher made a mental note of preconceived assumptions theories and endeavored to not allow those to interfere with new data that emerges while keeping an open mind.
6. Looking for patterns across cases: The effort of finding shared patterns, looking for peculiarities and idiosyncratic instances simultaneously (Charlick et al., 2016). The researcher used the aid of the reflexive journal to make connections of the special phenomena that emerges in the study and make all necessary connections.
7. Taking interpretations to deeper levels: The process of deepening the data analysis by using multiple layers of analysis such as referencing other theoretical frameworks to lens (Charlick et al., 2016). The researcher utilized an eclectic approach to theory, including and explaining aspects of variety of theories and how they provide value in the study.

The researcher utilized the seven steps outlined as a guideline to analyze the data while managing reflexivity and subjectivity. The data analysis was conducted on the data that

was gathered from the semi-structured interview. The semi-structured was conducted to glimpse of the realities of others that we do not have the opportunity to directly observe (Patton, 1990). The data was reviewed and perused to identify and interpret valuable themes in the form of content analysis. Content analysis is the method of making a synthesis of qualitative analysis through coding that in an interpretation of the raw data (Creswell, 2013).

Data analysis further allowed for the researcher to obtain meaning full patterns that addressed the goal of the research (Neuman, 2003). Emerging themes were coded and categorized. The researcher used an open-coded system to the data starting line-by line then moving on the code the data phrase by phrase (Creswell. 2005). The researcher utilized. Additionally, the researcher coded the data manually by hand.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies establish trustworthiness through rigorous work by the researcher and are a contrast to the quantitative approach (Saunders et al., 2015). Qualitative research uses a different perspective than traditional methods to improve trustworthiness since issues of researcher bias is a common crisis in this method. To counter this challenge, qualitative research adopts three fundamental principles to establish trustworthiness. The principles include credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Elo et al., 2014; Guba & Lincoln 1994).

The most important tenet of trustworthiness in qualitative research is the aspect of credibility. To increase trustworthiness, researchers are asked to demonstrate that the research findings can be linked to reality (Saunders et al., 2015). To be credible, the data

should also demonstrate a high level of accuracy and should also be believable. The researcher will establish a high level of credibility by immersing himself in all aspect of the research, collecting very detailed data in a non-biased and reflexive manner. The researcher kept an open mind and followed the que of the participants throughout the interview process and captured their lived experiences and their truths while bracketing all preconceived notions.

Qualitative researchers describe transferability as the extent to which one's study is applicable to another population contextually which can provide insight for other research (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Researchers are invited to provide rich details in their research so as to allow for the applicability of places, times, people, and context (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Trustworthiness is enhanced if the findings extrapolated can provided valuable insight that can be transferred (generalized) to another group or setting.

Another method that is used to improve trustworthiness in qualitative research is dependability. Dependability is the effort made to ensure that the research findings remain consistent and also involves the efforts to make sure that the research as the ease of repeatability (Noble & Smith, 2015). Dependability was achieved in this research by providing ample details in chapter three relating to the processes and steps taken to carry out the research. This process should aid any researcher seeking to repeat the study.

Credibility is another criterion that is crucial to developing trustworthiness in qualitative research because each researcher has their biases, idiosyncrasies and biases therefore establishing confirmability is essential (Saunders et al., 2015). Confirmability is the extent to which the findings of the research can be corroborated and confirmed by

other researchers (Saunders et al., 2015). The researcher enhanced confirmability by conducting a data collection and data analysis audit at the end of the research and then perused the procedures for any presumed biases or distortions.

Trustworthiness can also be established in qualitative research by conducting very rigorous and meticulous record keeping (Noble & Smith, 2015; Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). Rigorous record keeping includes making notes of the participants' conversations verbatim as detailed as possible (Noble & Smith 2015). Besides rigorous record keeping, IPA tradition also encourages the researcher to monitor their own biases to ensure that the participants' truths are observed and not their own assumptions. This also helps to build trustworthiness in the study (Noble & Smith 2015). Recognizing and 'bracketing' these likely biases are expected to be an ongoing process during data collecting process which improves trustworthiness through the use of reflexive journaling and researcher reflection (Noble & Smith 2015). Achieving trustworthiness can be particularly challenging in qualitative research because there is not any clear set benchmark for trustworthiness (Noble & Smith 2015). Therefore, making all efforts to provide rich details is the best way to build trustworthiness in qualitative research (Saunders et al., 2015). In light of this perspective, the IPA tradition invites researchers to be even more rigorous in data collecting through cross examination of the participants, getting similar and opposing views of peers to get a deeper understanding of their lived experiences (Noble & Smith 2015).

Trustworthiness in qualitative research can also be enhanced through the process of triangulation (Verma et al., 2023). Triangulation is the process or method of using an

eclectic approach in techniques to improve the validity of a research (Creswell 2003). Triangulation utilizes various qualitative methods and perspectives to enrich the data collection and data analysis process (Noble & Smith 2015). Triangulation is meant to reduce the potential biases and shortcomings of any one technique that is used in research. Trustworthiness is also improved by the implementation of member checking. Member checking involves the undertaking of checking with participants at the end of the data collection process to ensure that their experiences and the appropriate themes have been truthfully represented (Noble & Smith 2015). Because qualitative research is more concerned with uncovering the lived experiences and truths of the participants, the trustworthiness of the research is dependent of the integrity of the researcher and the responses of the participants (Whittemore et al., 2001). Other areas that are very vital to the credibility of the study include areas such as authenticity, criticality, accuracy and integrity (Whittemore et al., 2001).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher sought permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research. The researcher attached the application along with the proposal and submit to the IRB. All participants were treated with respect and dignity. All APA ethical guidelines were followed with a focus on not causing any harm to the individual (American Psychological Association, 2011). Participants were briefed and informed of the details of the research and its implications. Participants were reminded that participation in the research is entirely voluntary and that they have the option to

withdraw at any time without punishment, not repercussions. All data relating to the participants were kept confidential.

Data collection can pose ethical challenges. An ethical concern that was addressed was the possibility of participants being overwhelmed with emotions as they could possibly relive traumas that they faced during their tenure of gang involvement. The researcher implemented measures in place to address any overwhelmed participants. The researcher was careful not to ask participants any questions about trauma or any questions intended to evoke traumatic memories. Participants were given access to a crisis line where they could call to have immediate counselling should they have felt overwhelmed due to any old trauma that was revisited through recollection.

The research took additional steps to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Each participant was approached in confidentiality with optimal privacy and was asked to join the study. Participant's confidentiality was preserved by interviewing each participant on alternate days so that no two participants were able to meet each other. Another method that was employed to maintain the highest level of confidentiality was to assign each participant with a code name such as P1, P2, and so on. Participants were asked to consent to terms of limitation to confidentiality which highlighted that they could possibly speak about crimes and scenarios that others in the study could probably recognize.

Summary

The researcher discussed the most effective and data collection tools, design and also the most suitable sampling technique for the study of ex-gang members and their

lived experiences in decision-making. Highlighted in the chapter was the IPA approach and how it guided the researcher to uncover the truths of the participants. Purposive sampling was deemed the most appropriate sampling technique that would satisfy the IPA tradition that would also mirror the characteristics of the participants required for the study. The data was gathered, recorded, transcribed and interpreted from the semi-structured interviews. And was analyzed. The researcher used triangulation to ensure that there was integrity and accuracy in the research. The proposal was submitted to the IRB for review and was accepted to be suitable to be conducted.

Chapter 4: Results

Gang violence continues to be a major nuisance and stress in the United States and its adverse effects are far reaching with a lot of debilitating effects. Gang violence has accounted for around 30 to 40 % of all homicides in the United States (Howell & Griffiths, 2018). The proliferation of gang initiation across the country is rather alarming and the process of gang initiation itself is rather dangerous (Murer & Schwarze, 2022). Some juveniles have reported that they had to attack a random person on the street as part of their gang initiation (Murer & Schwarze, 2022). The ramifications of gang violence have had a very adverse and overwhelming effect on the nation (Stuart, 2020). Raising awareness of the possible ramifications to would-be gang members may help to reduce the number of gang initiations that continue to plague society. I attempted to fill the gap by focusing on the lived experiences of how gang members make their decisions in difficult situations as it relates to gang involvement and gang activities and how they perceive the ramifications of those decisions. The research was the lens through the use of prospect theory. The research questions addressed were “What are the experiences of gang members when making decisions in difficult gang-related situations?” and ‘How do gang members experience and perceive the likely ramifications of their decisions?’

This chapter contains the essence of the research dealing with the settings and the demographics of the participants. Additionally, I discussed the data collection procedures and also unwrapped the methodology used for analysis. The matter of trustworthiness is explained in this chapter. I will also present the results of my study.

Settings

The interviews were conducted at an authorized partner location in North Carolina. The interviews were done in a very private location in an office with a lot of consideration and effort put into making sure participants were not scheduled closely or could see each other. There were no significant interruptions to the interviews. Participants reminded me that they needed the information to be kept confidential. I reassured the participants of the measures that were being taken to ensure that their confidentiality was being observed. There were no significant external factors that affected the data collection process. Participants were given a \$15 Visa gift card for their participation. The amount given as compensation to the participants falls within the minimum range and is deemed to be sufficient to not influence the participants in any significant way.

Demographics

A total of nine participants were interviewed. All participants were males and were over the age of 18 and under the age of 36. The participants identified themselves as being past gang members and were no longer in a gang for more than a year.

Data Collection

I sought approval from the IRB to conduct the research and approval was given. The approval number from the IRB is # 01-25-23-0726175. I advertised the study using flyers and social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Participants were told that they could reach me by phone if they wished to participate; my phone number was provided in the advertisements. A total of nine participants were

included in the study who provided the necessary information required for the research. A Semi-structured interview format was used to conduct the data. The participants all noted to me that they did not wish to have the audio of the interview recorded due to concerns that they feared that there might be repercussions if the audio were ever accidentally leaked. I respected their wishes and documented their responses in note style. I also reassured the participants of the rigorous measures being taken to maintain the highest level of confidentiality in the study.

The interviews were conducted in North Carolina at an authorized partner company. The interviews were done in a private office. Each participant was interviewed once. The sessions lasted on average 30 minutes but two of the interviews lasted for nearly an hour. I took notes as the participants spoke of their experiences. The sessions conducted were in line with how I intended it to be except that the participants did not wish to have their voice recorded.

Data Analysis

I collected data from nine participants. Based on the literature, the nine participants are sufficient for saturation (see Creswell, 2014). I was careful to adhere to all APA guidelines that were outlined in Chapter 3. There were no audio recordings as the participants all refused to use this method. Instead, I made notes of the conversations. I used a thematic analysis approach to analyze the data. I read and perused the documents of the interviews multiple times to be intimate and familiar with the data (see Alase, 2017). I commenced the analysis by generating initial codes, using short labels and tags that represent concepts, ideas, or patterns that could be found in the data (see Creswell, 2014).

I then grouped correlated codes to form potential themes that are wider, overarching patterns or ideas that capture meaningful aspects of the data. I divided and combined themes after reviewing them and refining them to enhance the connections among them giving greater clarity to the meaning of the narrative. I defined the themes and extracted meaningful excerpts that illuminated and justify the themes outlined. A thematic map was used to illustrate the connection among the themes created (see Creswell, 2014). The data was transferred to Microsoft Word, then various color highlighters were used to separate and categorize meaning data and create themes. Several iterations of the process led to emerging themes which created subthemes when major themes were identified, as seen in table 1.

Table 1*Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subtheme
Survival and lack of opportunity	Subtheme A: To obtain basic necessities Subtheme B: Protection and safety
The need to belong and friendship	
Impulsivity	
Indifference lack of calculation	
Glorified violence and power	
Hope of favorable outcomes	Subtheme A: Hope for wealth Subtheme B: Hope for recognition, love, and respect
Diminished awareness of the repercussions of gang violence	Subtheme A: Scant regards for the repercussions to gang violence
Hopelessness	

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in the research is a critical aspect of the study and I was careful and mindful of strategies to implement to achieve this fete. I focused on the five tenets of trustworthiness in the research: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and consistency of the data. To establish credibility, I used a variety of data sources to corroborate conclusions using interviews and observations as triangulation methodologies (see Creswell, 2014; Stahl & King 2020).

I also used peer debriefing to ascertain insight into the validity of the research process and the findings. I also engaged the participants in member-checking procedures

through the process. I sought feedback from the participants to ensure that the findings of the study resonated with the lived experiences. I also induced prolonged exposure to the participants and the data to ensure that the researcher was immersed in the work and gained enough insight to enhance the findings of the study. I used direct quotes from participants to increase the credibility of the study and provide a deeper understanding for those who have an interest in the study.

The matter of transferability was also addressed. I provided thorough and in-depth descriptions of the research context, participants, and data collection techniques so stakeholders could judge whether the findings could be applied to similar contexts. The purposeful sampling I used also increased the transferability of the research as it opens up the opportunity for diversity among the participants (see Creswell, 2014). Qualitative researchers seek to expand knowledge and understanding by transferring findings from one research to support the context of another (Stahl & King 2020). In this way, research findings in qualitative are useful and valuable in a similar way that quantitative research is valuable based on their reliability (Stahl & King 2020).

Reliability is essential to preserving the validity and reliability of the results in qualitative research (Verma et al., 2023). Researchers use a variety of tactics to attain dependability and consistency throughout the study. To ensure that their methods are well-documented and reproducible by other scholars, researchers meticulously record their procedures (Verma et al., 2023). Due to the transparency of the methods used, results can be verified, which improves dependability. Furthermore, the credibility of the research findings can be further established by the use of triangulation, which entails the

integration of multiple data sources or views (Verma et al., 2023). Reducing potential bias through regular member checks and peer debriefings, wherein participants can evaluate the research procedure and findings, further enhancing the dependability (Creswell, 2014; Verma et al., 2023).

To maintain confirmability, rigorous measures were employed which increased the validity of the research process. I used a variety of strategies and techniques throughout the research process which includes the use of clear and transparent data collection methods, such as interviews and observations, which are documented meticulously to establish a verifiable trail of evidence. I also engaged in reflexivity by acknowledging that I may be subject to biases and preconceptions and taking steps to minimize the impact on the research. Member checking, where participants review and confirm the accuracy of the data and interpretations, is often employed to enhance confirmability (Creswell, 2014; Verma et al., 2023). I diligently documented decisions, methods, and findings which allows for peer debriefing or external audit. I acknowledged and endeavored to demonstrate a level of high commitment to confirmability, ensuring that the study's outcomes are grounded in reliable and trustworthy data (Creswell, 2014; Verma et al., 2023).

Results

There are two major questions that the research sought to address. Within these two questions, major themes and subthemes were identified and the researcher coded the findings of the study.

RQ1: What are the experiences of gang members when making decisions in difficult gang-related situations?

RQ2: How do gang members experience the ramifications of their decisions?

I used a Semi-structured interview guide to elicit responses to the two main questions of the research. I interviewed nine participants. The data gathered from the interview was then coded using qualitative methods such as content analysis and thematic analysis.

Theme 1: Survival and Lack of Opportunity

The results indicated that survival in fierce communities where there was poverty and a lot of gang activities, survival was a crucial factor that influenced juveniles to a join the gang. P1 stated that

In the community I grew up in, violence was pretty much everywhere, and no one was safe whenever the warring factions had an active feud going on. You could be innocent and still got shot because you lived in the opposing community, for that reason needed have protection, which the gang provided.

The finding in the study indicated that some juveniles who initiate into gangs usually have a perceived divide between some inner-city adolescent as opposed to this that those who live in suburbs who went to better school and lived in the perceived riche part of town. It was pointed that by P4

“Some juveniles like me who joined gangs sometimes had the perception that we didn’t have the same opportunities as some of the rich dudes. We were creating our own opportunities even though it was deemed illegal.”

Subtheme A: To Obtain Basic Necessities:

The results indicated that some juveniles may join a gang to resolve basic financial necessities, especially when they are from regions and enclaves of low socioeconomic backgrounds. Some participants in this study alluded to the lack of concrete job opportunities, frustration from political biases, and what seems to be an indifference and apathy towards minorities. P5 stated,

Gang money came easier than say, working at a fast-food chain or at a grocery store. It was big money and that was tempting. School and all that was going to take too long when the money was needed now.

P4 stated that “Where we are from, our culture and ethnicity at time get overlooked and ignored by our politicians, we have to make a way for ourselves.”

Subtheme B: Protection and Safety

The need for safety and protection in communities and enclaves where there is enormous and ongoing gang violence has been a critical area of reflection for many stakeholders who are concerned with community intervention for juveniles at risk. The apparent and eminent threat to cause harm to these community members who live in these garrison and communities with strong culture usually encounter reprisal shooting from opposition gangs. This theme was expounded upon in this research. P1 stated that

“We were like soldiers to our blocks and territories. We had to protect ourselves and our families from the opposing gangs. That is how we stayed alive. We had to patrol, ‘opps’ shopping, meaning we would try to make sure their powers were

reduced, less they men they had on their team was the better for us, if you get what I am saying”.

P2 also stated that

“We couldn’t allow them to take us out. We had to make sure we were always protected.” Additional support was found for the theme as

P4 stated that

“We lost gang members through reprisal shootings, it's an ongoing war, and we just had to stand our ground. We came up and saw a long running feud between gangs and we got caught up in that feud naturally. I don’t feel like I got on with the goofy goodies, I feel more comfortable with the people I grew up with. I don’t have too many opportunities.”

Theme 2: The Need to Belong and Friendship

The need to feel a sense of belonging may be even more critical in certain demographics. The gang provides the lack. Some gangs are just a bunch of friends who agree to be made into a gang. This is often the case. They are the core gang members and occasionally they recruit others. P9 stated that

“We are no different from say a biker gang or a driving crew. We are just friends trying to stay alive and making connections along the way.”

P2 stated that

“I didn’t join a gang in the way most people think you join a gang. I was just raised around gangs and people of that culture. They start showing you respect

and love, asking you for little favors, and being rewarded. I felt recognized and appreciated. I kept rolling with them.”

P8 stated that

“I lost my father at a very young age to violence. I had to be my father at a very young age. I had to find a way to protect myself and my mother. Without the guidance of a father, joining a gang felt like the best option, in fact, I formed my own gang in high school, and looking back I feel as though that might have been a major reason for that. The love I received from my friends and gang members felt real and welcomed.”

Theme 3: Impulsivity

One core theme as was extrapolated from the findings in this study the propensity for juveniles’ impulsivity may be a significant contributing reason for them, they join a gang. P1 stated that

“I was young and impulsive. Sometimes I was just angry, I just wanted to have fun and to be doing something that was meaningful to me.” This concept of impulsivity which affected juveniles’ decision to join and was also evident in

P7’s stated that

“I gave little thought before I acted, I didn’t give f#@k”. The theme was further strengthened with statements from other participants in the study. P3 stated that “I was just ready to blast someone if they messed with me or my friends. I was ready to go.”

P5 also opined that

“Sh#t, I just woke up being bad one day. I just kept on being bad.”

Theme 4: Indifference and Lack of Calculation

The result of the study indicated that some juveniles appeared to be indifferent to pain and suffering. It also appeared from the results that some juveniles who joined gangs and ignored the ramifications of gang activities may lack the care of the ability to properly calculate outcomes of their actions effectively.

P5 stated that

“I didn’t put much thought into anything really. I was just living my life with the people around me.

P4 also stated that “No one really cared. I never cared.” In addition,

P9 stated that “There nothing to think about, it's ‘kill or be killed’ type of environment, and ‘dog eat dog world’ if you know the saying.”

Theme 5: Glorified Violence and Power

Another major theme identified during the data analysis is the influence of glorified violence and power and how it influences juveniles to join gangs among juveniles who are exposed to gang culture.

P4 stated that

“I loved the feeling of being protected and watched over. I love the feeling of being untouchable. It gave me the feeling of being like a god. We felt superior to those that were not in a gang. The whole culture felt amazing. the way we would get the best of everything. We got respect from everyone in the community, we wore the best clothes, went to the best parties, and had the most fun and the drugs

only amplified the feeling. I had a blast; I didn't care about anyone who was getting hurt in the process! The movies we watched and so the music we listened was filled with qualifications of hardcore lifestyle and we loved it."

P6 stated that

"I was raided right, my mother would do everything to get me straight, but that was just the lifestyle I was drawn to. I just love the power it gave me."

Theme 6: Hope for Favorable Outcomes

Another theme that emerged from the data was the hope for favorable outcomes. The data analyzed revealed that many juveniles who joined a gang were often hopeful for their involvement in a gang would provide an overall better prognosis for a better quality of life.

P6 stated that

"We also imagined that being in the gang would be the way out for us, we had the hope that we would be the ones to have a better life than our parent or predecessors."

P1 also stated that

"I grew up with my mother and no father around. I had high hopes to give her a better life than I saw that she had, I wanted to turn things around for myself and also for her and the gang life was the only way for me."

Subtheme A: Hope for Wealth

The results in this study also indicated that there was a particular interest and hope of garnering wealth from illicit gang activities. Participants pointed out that the risk of being in a gang was worthy considering the potential wealth that could be generated.

P3 stated that

“I noticed that other juveniles who weren’t in a gang suddenly was flaunting money that they couldn’t have achieved legally, and I was hopeful to get some of that money as well. The money was good. I lived the best life during that time.”

P5 also intimated that “My hope of getting money from the gang become real; we robbed other drug dealers, we sold drugs, and we scammed people of their money. I had so much money and could do whatever I wanted and buy whatever I wanted.

It felt like it was worth it, even for a short moment.”

Subtheme B: Hope for Recognition, Love, and Respect.

Another interesting result of the study revealed that juveniles often were hopeful of getting recognition, love and respect from their peers and felt that they could achieve this by joining a gang. It was revealed that for many juveniles, the hope and love and admiration was a strong enough force to get them to overlook the risks of joining a gang.

P7 stated that

“The love and respect that was showed in the gang felt real especially in long to the fact that I had no father.”

P2 also pointed out that “My family didn’t have that much positive effect on me as they felt absent though were there at times, I felt a greater love and connection to my second family, the gang.”

Theme 7: Diminished Awareness of the Repercussions of Gang Violence.

The results of this study showed that some juveniles who joined gangs demonstrated a diminished sense of awareness of the repercussions of gang activities. Some of the participants were either not fully aware of the repercussions and others seemed to have given little thought to the likely outcomes. P7 stated that

“I don’t think about that, I just kept going.”

P1 also stated that

“I was more worried about the other gangs catching up with me, I was more afraid of them than the police. I was not really worried about anything else.” The lack of thought given to the ramifications was further evoked when

P6 stated,

“I just woke up being bad. That’s all I know.”

Subtheme A: Scant Regard for the Repercussions to Gang Violence

A theme of scant regard, a sense of apathy to pain and suffering, emerged as the data was further analyzed. Some participants expressed that they were not overly concerned with law enforcement, were too stressed to be concerned about outcomes or just did not care at all.

P8 stated that

“Getting caught didn’t bother me because I felt like a god, like I was untouchable.”

P3 stated that

“Even the cops were scared of us in my opinion, s what was there to worry about?” the experiences of were tenuous.”

P6 stated that

“I did a bunch and never got caught, so I felt like I’d never get caught.”

P7 stated that

“If you’re worried about that stuff, you weren’t meant for it.” And P1 stated that

“In some way the benefit at the time seemed to outweigh the costs. You see your fellow gang members go in jail and out of jail all the time. It's like no big deal unless your caught on a major crime.” This sentiment continued as

P2 stated that

“I was making enough money through the gang, selling drugs and making scamming phone companies, I figured if I got caught, I’d get a good lawyer that could get me off the case.”

Theme: 8: Hopelessness

After analyzing the raw data, a theme of hopelessness emerged. The hopelessness identified within the study revealed that many juveniles were insensitive to the likely ramifications of the gang involvement as they felt as they there with little hope for them. This seeming hopelessness seems to have promoted continued risk seeking behaviors.

P2 stated that

“There is little hope for some of us of make it out of the hood, without the gang, you could be killed by opposing gangs in the community whether you were innocent or not. More expressions of hopelessness were evocated by

P7 stated that

“Without the gang, you could be so impoverished that you’d be better off in prison anyways.”

P9 stated that

“Some of us who got the criminal background seems to have the most difficult time reintegrating, finding a job and so on, Joining the gang way of poverty. At threat time you don’t worry about consequences, as there are equally devastating consequences waiting for you in society.”

Summary

The aim of the study was to explore the ways in which gang members experience the decisions they are faced with on a regular basis. The researcher set out to conjure answers to the research questions: What are the experiences of gang members when making decisions in difficult gang-related situations and how do gang members perceive and experience the ramifications of their decisions? The sample consisted of nine participants who were all male, of mixed ethnicity, were previously gang-affiliated, and were no longer actively involved.

The data analysis resulted in identified eight themes and four subthemes. The eight major themes included survival and lack of opportunity, the need to belong and friendship, impulsivity; indifference lack of calculation, glorified violence, and power,

the hope of favorable outcomes; scant regard for the repercussions of gang violence, and hopelessness. The researcher will discuss the results in further detail in Chapter 5. The researcher will also discuss the strengths and limitations of the current study, implications for social change, recommendations, and conclusions of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of gang member and how the experience the decisions that they are faced with in light of the various challenges that come with those decisions I further explored how gang members experienced the ramification so those decisions that they make during initiation of while being in the gang. The data revealed eight themes and four subthemes after the analysis was conducted. The eight major themes included survival and lack of opportunity, the need to belong and friendship, impulsivity; indifference lack of calculation, glorified violence and power, hope of favorable outcomes; scant regard for the repercussions to gang violence and hopelessness. I commenced interpreting the data and applying the findings adding to the body of scholastic work to enhance positive social change in the community.

Interpretation of the Findings

There are several factors that affect decision making as it relates to gang violence and gang activities. There were eight major themes identified in the study addressing the lived experience of gang members' decision making and the reaction to those outcomes. The themes identified are discussed in relation to the literature reviewed the theoretical lens that was aligned with the study. The analysis and discussion illuminated the way in which the gap in literature was addressed. In this study, I identified eight main themes and four subthemes in relation to which unveiled the way in which juveniles make decisions about gang initiation, gang activities, and their ramifications. Subthemes are

also explored to discuss their meanings and demonstrate how they fill the gap in the literature.

Survival and Lack of Opportunity

Dickson-Gomez et al., (2017) revealed that many juveniles believed that they could fulfil their present economic needs through gang involvement. They also alluded to the fact that many juveniles initiated in gangs for survival. The results of this study corroborated this concept as participants explained that they felt as though they needed protection from the gangs to stay alive in some volatile and violent communities. Participants in this study explained that fear of reprisal was one the key elements that lead to gang initiation. Participants pointed out the traditional view that gang members are initiated in a systematically through rituals are not always accurate. Participants pointed that many juveniles who are in gangs found themselves only seeking protection from the imminent threat of gang reprisals and find that it would behoove them to be prepared for a war. These helps to fill the gap in the literature by showing that the decision process in gangs is not always straight forward and that some juveniles are not necessary always risk seeking when joining a gang but in some instances are seeking mere protection and survival from imminent danger and hardship.

The results of this study add to literature as it found that academia achievement may influence gang initiation and gang activity. Tentama and Abdillah (2019) posited that low academic achievement often led to poor job outcomes and low employability. One participant pointed out that low academic achievement may influence gang participation in two ways. He pointed out that in the first instance those who struggle to

keep up with their academic achievement may chose an alternative to way to success which is gang involved. The other way that gangs influence academia achievement was those who were coerced into a gang or just found themselves in a gang by association, may not have the right influence, get distracted, and lose focus, hence producing poor academic outcomes.

The Need to Belong and Friendship

Results from my study indicated that the need to belong and feel a sense of belong matters greatly in the decision to be a part of a gang. Studies have revealed that children who were neglected by their parents were more likely to get involved in gangs (Descormiers, & Corrado, 2016; Kubik et al., 2019; Passi, 2019). Participants in the study consistently spoke of the importance of being a part of a group, have meaningful friendship with those of similar qualities and background to the extent that they will commit illicit and dangerous acts to maintain those friendships. One participant reiterated that they felt more like they were a part a crew which a more positive way of talking about a gang as it felt more like a group of friends than a mechanical gang as portrayed by media. He pointed out that a crew or a group of friends who are proud to be associated with each other and to do things there that would make the crew gel and insisted that they believe most gangs are more like that in nature until they get really huge. Research has alluded to some individuals may have initiated into a gang to satisfy the desire for love and to feel a sense of belonging. Sonterblum (2018) argued that juveniles may likely try to fulfill their need to belong and be loved by joining gang. Recognition and love seem to

be currency in a transaction for gangs where they meet those needs for those who seek in return for loyalty to the gang.

Impulsivity

Some gang related gang decisions were seemingly affected by impulsivity. Researchers have posited that impulsivity was one crucial factor that affected juveniles when making decisions and often led them to make risky decisions. Knight et al., (2015) posited that impulsivity was one crucial factor that affected juveniles when making decisions and often led them then to make risky decisions. Finelli (2019) also argued that juveniles with immature and under-developed brains were vulnerable to poor decision making and impulsivity. The results in my study corroborated these ideas as participants explained that they were young and impulsive, reacting emotionally to a lot of situations related to gang activities. They also shed light on the fact that impulsivity also depended on the personality of the individual and the situation that they were in. Participants explained that some people are not able to make good choices as they were not intelligent enough to do so or they were never nurtured to make prosocial choices, hence they react in ways that appear impulsive. Other participants suggested that some dicey gang related situations required impulsive actions to save one's life or to maintain the respect of the gang.

Indifference Lack of Calculation

In some instances, juveniles seemed to lack the required judgment and care to comprehend the magnitude of their decision of initiating in a gang or being a part of a gang. Some gang members seemed to be indifferent to the consequences of their decision

to be in a gang and the consequent ramifications that await them. Some of these findings of indifference and poor judgment again may be attributed to this immaturity and undeveloped brain (Finelli, 2019). Those ideas have been corroborated by participant in this study stating that “I didn’t care.” about outcomes.

Glorified Violence and Power

The glorification of violence has always been a contributing factor for gang members to initiate in gangs or to continue through with their illicit and violent gang activities. According to Van Hellefont and Densley (2019), drug-lords and top-tier gangs are often portrayed in films and music videos living very lavish lifestyles and are also often depicted as making their money fast and easy. It is also often romanticized in these films that hip/pop-culture and lifestyle of gangsters as easy lifestyle, marketed and portrayed on TV and on radio. This portrayal is very influential to many juveniles considering to initiate in a gang. The title of one of the best-selling rap albums was titled *Get Rich or Die Tryin*, a seeming mantra for many juveniles who adhere to the gang culture. One participant in my study echoed similar sentiments, that he would rather be earning big bucks than living like a pauper: “I thought it was worth the risk at the time.” He argued that “gangster wore the best clothes in neighborhoods, drove the fanciest cars and had all the beautiful ladies.” This finding in my study revealed that most juveniles who enter into gangs are influenced by the glamorizing of violence, attention, money, and power that they perceive that gang to have and often feel as though would not get it elsewhere.

Hope of Favorable Outcomes

Gang members appear to be hopeful that they will have favorable outcomes. According to Osbergh (2017) the possibilities effect is a cognitive bias that influences individuals to inflate possibilities over probabilities, usually anticipating a positive outcome. Many juveniles who seemed to be drawn to the gang culture may have been affected by this principle. They are seemingly influenced by the promises of riches, admiration and even fame. Many famous rappers are also gangsters for example. One participant pointed out that the rapper called King Vohn was heralded as a legend in his neighborhood with a large mural to eternalize his glory. They pointed out that King Vohn was also wanted for over 12 murders. They pointed out that he would subsequent be acquitted of all his charges and truly live like a king in his neighborhood flaunting millions of dollars and supporting the violence in the neighborhood. Based in these findings, some juveniles are who witness others in their neighborhood who make a supposed fortune from gang activities become hopeful that they could also have the same favorable outcomes too id they initiate and participate in gang activity.

Scant Regards for the Repercussions to Gang Violence

The results of my study also revealed that many gang members seem to have scant regard for the possible ramifications of the decisions and gang related activities. This seemingly lack of regard for the likely ramifications may be attributed to the immaturity of the juveniles who have initiated into gangs. According to Zottoli and Daftary-Kapur (2019), some juveniles who are facing a plea deal may plea false guilty 27% of the time in comparison to their adult counter-prats who are typically making false

guilty pleas around 17% of the time. Zottoli and Daftary-Kapur argued that part of the reason juveniles take bad plea deals is because they are not able to assess the seriousness of the long-term ramifications of their decisions that they are making. One participant in the study revealed that when he was younger, he was more concerned about the fun and the money that comes with the gang and was either not able to think through all the scenarios that could get him into trouble, the seriousness of the matter and how decisions affected others.

Another participant explained that he felt God-like when he was part of that gang and that he felt untouchable, he explained that they had no concerns for any ramifications as the cops were afraid of his gang and they were the most powerful in town. One interesting finding is that as gang members matured, they started having children, they became more concerned about ramifications and started to plan their exit from the gang. This data was supported Tonks and Stephenson (2019), whose study revealed that juveniles disengage from gang for several reasons citing such as maturational and other sociogenic factors. This implies that not all juveniles who are initiated in gangs intend to stay in the gang. Some juveniles might possibly hope to exit the gang before facing the ramifications that gang culture leads to.

Hopelessness

One of the themes that was concerning was the theme of hopelessness among some juveniles who lived in hardcore regions. Kerig and Mendez (2022) opined that juveniles who are exposed to trauma may seek gang involvement whenever and may develop a perspective of featurelessness and hopelessness. Participants revealed that once

one lived in a certain (low income) neighborhood they were essentially dragged in gang culture and gang lifestyle because their life depended on it. They spoke of reprisal shooting and how it affected their decision to be a part of a gang. Participants reported that if one lived in the neighborhood revival gang members would shoot at them if they knew you belonged to a certain neighborhood and their goal is to reduce the number of potential oppositions that they have. They pointed out that it would be prudent to find protection from a gang in the community to keep them safe.

Prospect Theory

Prospect theory is a probabilistic and loss aversion theory that describes how individuals make decisions about risks of gains and losses (Kahneman et al., 1979). Prospect theory attempts to explain how people make decisions when they have alternative options, but a risk is eminent along with the nexus of uncertainty (Kahneman et al., 1979). The theory is a predominantly risk adverse theory, explaining that people detest losing their valuable than they enjoy gains, especially if they are of legal value (Kahneman et al., 1979).

Three major tenets of prospect theory are loss aversion, risk seeking, and point of reference (Kahneman et al., 1979). According Kahneman et al. (1979), people will loathe losses more than gain when the stakes are of similar value. Kahneman et al. also argued that people will become risk seeking if losses are perceived to be significant. Kahneman et al. posited that people were more likely to evaluate outcomes based on a reference point more often their current situation. Gains and losses are assessed relative to this reference point. The three major tenets were reflected in the finding of my study. The

first major tenet, which suggests people disliked losing their values more than taking the risk of a winning a bet of an equal value was observed in the discussions that the participants evocated. One participant pointed out that once they joined the gang, they found that they had love, protection, and money. They pointed out that losing that position and comfort to pursue a prosocial path that could offer an alternative status of comfort wealth was less appealing. They explain that perhaps the comfort of knowing what you already had as opposed to the unknown was more appealing.

The second tenet, risk seeking behaviors, was found in the finding of this study and could be explained by prospect theory. One participant explained that he became risk seeking and joined a gang when he saw what his other friends who joined the gang was gaining. He explained that he felt left out and felt as though he wanted the same wealth, protection and respect that his peers and friends were getting from the gang. Kahneman et al., (1979) also argued that people will become risk seeking if losses are perceived to be significant. For the participant, he perceived loss of opportunity influenced his decision to join the gang.

The third major tenet was also illuminated in this study which Kahneman et al. (1979) posited that people were more likely to evaluate outcomes based on a reference point more often their current situation. Participants in my study revealed that they were, at times, jealous of others making big strides in the community because of wealth they acquired through gang activities was usually from selling drugs. One participant admitted that even though his current life situation was not particularly difficult, he made the decision to join the gang to gain leverage on others who were seemingly moving ahead in

life and living the glamorous life. He explained that his decision to be involved in a gang was based on his perception of the reference point of where other was in their journey of perceived success more than the pressure of his current living condition. This point corroborated the concept that Kahneman et al. (1979) posited in their theory about the importance of the reference point influence on decision making.

Seung-Lark and Bruce (2015) also posited that evaluated risk returns as underlined by prospect theory predicted that for returns beyond the objective, a substantial majority of individuals appeared to be risk averse but for returns beneath the target, a sizeable majority of persons appeared to be risk seeking. Using prospect theory, participants revealed how points of reference may have influenced their risk seeking behaviors. When gang members perceived that if their gang rivals were wealthier than they were, they were more likely to have more ammunition and more guns, they became risk seeking to amass more wealth so that they could be more formidable opponents or *opps*. One participant pointed out that a Chicago rapper by the name of Little Durk was bragging on social media that he spent a million dollars on weapons to strengthen his gang. The participants pointed out that another famous rapper by the name of Baby was rumored to have offered another million dollars to fortify the block. The findings in my study indicated that juvenile may be risk seeking as they not only chase the perceived glamour and money that come with gang involvement but may also be influenced by their own reference point which makes them think that they are losing out in comparison to their friends or peers who are involved in a gang.

Limitations to the Study

The researcher utilized a qualitative approach IPA as the main methodological approach for the study. There are several limitations to qualitative research including vulnerability to subjectivity, bias, lack of generalizability, data analysis complexity and limited quantification among others (Creswell, 2014). One particular limitation to this study is that there were no female participants in the study. While all sexes and gender were allowed in the study, no females showed up for the study. These further limits the generalizability for the study.

Another limitation to the study was the small sample size of the study. The required for saturation for IPA is also an issue that reduces the generalizability of the research. (Creswell, 2014). IPA methodology is recommended a small sample size anticipating that saturation would be met (Goldman et al., 2014). The gang members communicated information that was very similar with a few differences and similar themes emerged. Saturation was met with nine participants. To combat this limitation the researcher provided a thorough and in-depth description of the research context, participants, and data collection techniques so stakeholders could judge whether the findings can be applied to similar contexts (Creswell, 2014).

Another limitation of the study is that the researcher was not able to determine to what extent the participants were truthful, they embellished any of the information or to what extent they had a solid recall of the events that occurred. The researcher was aware that some participants may embellish their stories to other say what they thought the researcher wanted to hear or may have exaggerate pieces of the information they shared.

To combat those issues of recall, the research included only participants that had recently exited a gang and who were also no older than 30 thirty years old.

Another limitation to the study is the inherent nature of qualitative research to attract bias from the researcher. In IPA, the researcher tries to put themselves in the participant's shoes, suspends prejudice, and examines their own responses and inclinations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The researcher acknowledged that his own interest in the effects of gang culture and experiences working as a therapist may influence the concept of confirmation bias, seeking to find what he had originally intend to investigate. In this study, the researcher utilized several strategies to reduce the impact of personal bias. To prevent any likely bias in the data collection and analysis process, the researcher kept to the semi-structured interview and used a reflective journal (Creswell, 2014). I was conscious of my own prejudice toward treating this community differently and unfairly, as well as my empathy for their difficulties upon reintegration.

To reduce the level of the researcher bias in this study, the researcher applied bracketing techniques. Bracketing involves the effort of the researcher to curtail preconceptions about a phenomenon recognizing that it is best that the properties and truth of the phenomena be revealed naturally, rather than to assign scientific criteria and categories to the phenomena being observed (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The researcher achieved bracketing in this research by conducting a thorough self-reflection before conducting the study, turning over all likely biases and refraining from them during the study.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, there are several recommendations for areas for future research opportunities. The literature reviewed in the study and the response from participants confirmed the theme of survival being a crucial reason that juveniles are joining gangs they are less worried about the ramifications that come with gang activities. For some juveniles who are living in impoverished communities, areas of low socioeconomic background who are of the opinion that only change activities can provide the financial rescue that they need, it is recommended that special intervention activities that includes providing subsidies for their education and food.

The study also revealed that many juveniles are more likely to be too immature to fully comprehend the full dangers of joining and gang and fully comprehending the ramifications. The researchers recommended that additional educational programs are conducted in schools that highlight the dangers and consequences of gang involvement. The weather recommend that the interventions are made attractive to juveniles, possibly consulted in media that teens find fun and entertaining such as the use multimedia, videos, and even plays. It also recommended to conduct awareness campaigns to educate teachers, parents, and community members about the signs of gang initiation and how to take early action.

The findings in the study revealed that most of the participants pointed to the fact that when parents are absent for the family, the risk of joining a gang increased significantly. I recommend that parental involvement should be encouraged and should participate more in the lives of their children, including regular communication and

participation in their activities. Stakeholders should provide support and resources for parents who may be struggling with their own challenges. Stakeholders should also establish mentorship programs that pair at-risk juveniles with positive role models. They should also involve local community leaders, teachers, and law enforcement officers as mentors. To reduce gang activities, stakeholders should also consider including activities such as sports, arts, and vocational training to engage juveniles in positive pursuits. Stakeholders should also provide and encourage after-school programs that give youth a secure and productive environment. Stakeholders should also incorporate sports, the arts, and vocational education to get young people interested in constructive activities.

The findings in the study revealed that many juveniles who imitate into gangs are often diagnosed with mental health disorders. Stakeholders should make sure at-risk youth and their families have access to mental health and counseling services. It is also prudent to deal with underlying problems that could lead to gang initiation, such as trauma, family issues, or substance addiction. Another way to reduce gang activities is to collaborate with local businesses to create job training and employment opportunities for young people. Stakeholders should empower juveniles with skills that can lead to meaningful employment and a sense of purpose which would lead them away from negative paths.

Another avenue to reduce gang activities is to promote community policing strategies that involve law enforcement officers building positive relationships with community members. Focus on creating a sense of trust and collaboration rather than intimidation. It would be advantageous to provide support and resources for parents who

may be struggling with their own challenges. There is also an implication for exploring the topic with additional theoretical framework, rationale choice theory. According to rational choice theory, individual actors' decisions will result in aggregate social behavior (Harbeck, 2021). Preferences are the key tenet of an individual's cost beneficial analysis (Harbeck, 2021). Comprehending preferences of juveniles who demonstrate risk seeking behavior and ignore serious ramifications may provide insight into what appears to be apathy to pain and suffering or ignorance to the likely ramifications of gang violence (Harbeck, 2021). In summary, by addressing the many variables connected to gang involvement, research on gang initiation can be extremely important for developing laws, programs, and interventions that support constructive social change.

Implications

Research on gang initiation has social change implications that can contribute to addressing and mitigating the challenges associated with gang involvement. Some potential implications include the creation of focused prevention initiatives that target the underlying causes of gang involvement and dissuade prospective recruits can be guided by research finding. Understanding the initiation process can help legislators modify juvenile justice laws so that rehabilitation efforts take precedence over punitive ones, resolving the root causes of gang membership. Community leaders and groups can create outreach programs to engage at-risk adolescents and offer alternatives to gang involvement by having a better understanding of the mechanics of gang initiation. Research findings can be used by educational institutions and community organizations

to create curricula that educate students about the negative effects of gang participation and encourage healthy alternatives.

The research results can help law enforcement organizations better understand how gangs are formed, which will facilitate the collection of intelligence and the implementation of preventative measures. Implementing community policing strategies that build trust between law enforcement and communities can be informed by research to create a collaborative approach to reducing gang activities. Based on the knowledge gathered from initiation research, social assistance can be customized to meet the unique needs of those who are at risk of joining a gang. The insights gleaned from initiation research can be used to customize social services to meet the unique needs of those who are at risk of joining a gang. Recognizing the role of mental health in gang initiation can lead to the development of mental health services and support systems to address underlying issues.

Research findings can be used in public awareness campaigns to debunk myths surrounding gang initiation and raise awareness about the social, economic, and psychological factors that contribute to gang involvement. The research can be a basis for advocating for increased resources for social programs, community development, and education to address the systemic issues that contribute to gang initiation. Government agencies, non-profit organizations, schools, and communities can collaborate based on research findings to develop comprehensive strategies that address the multi-faceted nature of gang initiation. Research-Informed Programs: Working together, researchers

and practitioners may make sure that programs and treatments are continuously modified in response to new study findings and are grounded in empirical data.

Conclusions

A major goal of this study was to add to the current body of literature that addressed decision making in gangs and fill the gap to better comprehending the experience of gang members as they traverse those lived experiences of the ramifications that follow. The intention of the research was to better comprehend the thought process, decision making of juveniles as they initiate into gangs and whether they consider the likely ramifications of those decisions. Part of the researcher's assumption was that when juveniles consider the likely ramification of joining a gang, they should be deterred, hence the needed to be further exploitation as to the reasons they continued to join gangs. The methodology utilized in the study, IPA, allowed the researcher to probe acutely into the experiences of past gang members, and to explore more intimately the phenomenon of decision making and the attitudes toward ramifications of illegal activities. The selection of the IPA approach was grounded in its alignment with the researchers' ontological, epistemological, and methodological convictions. Despite the limited sample size, this study shed light on numerous significant challenges confronted juveniles who face tough decision about gang initiation and gang activities, issues that conventional quantitative methods either cannot address or have yet to explore. The study highlighted that in some instances there were misconceptions about the reason juveniles form gangs. They explained that sometimes there are blurring of lines when for gang initiation and gang activities, where in some instances, a clear demarcation of joining a gang is

challenging to know. Participants shared that on some occasions they were just in a gang by the just bring friends with people who were already thinking like gangsters. The study also highlighted that for some persons who initiated in a gang, the consequences of not being in the gang outweigh the likely distasteful ramifications that were mostly likely waiting for them. For some participants, the threat that loomed over the heads from the rivals made it worth joining the gang for protection; not joining the gang could have greater consequences for them in their opinion.

Perhaps most importantly, this study has provided grounds for the past gang members to share their lived experiences about the ways in which gang initiation, gang activities, and the ramifications of those decisions really play out for them. Their own words and experiences were given a platform to vocalize their experience. The data from this study will assist in developing strategies to address those issues, providing a way to reduce gang initiation and gang activities. In particular, this study demonstrated that their multiple factors affecting the reasons that juveniles initiate into gangs and seeming ignore the likely adverse ramifications that lie ahead in light of their participation.

While many of the reasons were corroborated by the literature reviews such as the need to feel a sense of belonging, financial gains and for protection, what was more revealing was that many juveniles did not initiating into gangs in ways that we are more familiar with but a lot of them felt as though they were just being loyal friends to people they grew up with whether those individual were doing bad, they felt as though they were going with the motion and did not make a traditional decision making about joining a gang. This makes it difficult for them to accept that they are joining a gang until it is too

late, and they find themselves practicing activities that bring negative outcomes their way. The study also revealed that many of the participants were indifferent to pain and suffering and hence they were indifferent to the likely ramifications that are likely to follow whenever they were involved in dicey and illegal gang activities. The most importance conclusion drawn for the study is that strategies designed to intervene into early gang initiations and increasing awareness of the ramifications of gang activities are essential to the reduction of gang violence across the United States.

References

- Addams, J. (1925). *The child, the clinic and the court*. New Republic.
- Abrams, L. & Terry, D. L. (2014). “You can run but you can’t hide”: How formerly incarcerated young men navigate neighborhood risks. *Children & Youth Services Review, 47*, 61–69. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2014.03.012>
- Alase, A. (2017). The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies, 5*(2), 9–19.
- Alne, R. A., Azzam, A. A., Shadi, M. S., El-sady, S. R., & Aboelella, E. I. (2020). Psychiatric co-morbidity among learning-disabled children. *QJM: An International Journal of Medicine, 113*, i74–i75. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qjmed/hcaa047.002>
- American Psychological Association. (2011). *Specialty guidelines for forensic psychology*. <http://www.apa.org/practice/guidelines/forensic-psychology.aspx>
- Baltimore man sentenced to 188 months for participating in heroin trafficking ring protected by corrupt former Baltimore city police department detective. (2018, February 22). *States News Service*.
- Baron, J. (1994). *Thinking and deciding* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Barnard, C. (1938). *The function of the executive*. Harvard University Press.
- Bjerregaard, B. (2002). Self-definitions of gang membership and involvement in delinquent activities. *Youth & Society, 34*(1), 31–54.

- Bhatia, S., & Loomes, G. (2017). Noisy preferences in risky choice: A cautionary note. *Psychological review*, 124(5), 678.
- Berryessa, C. M., & Reeves, J. (2020). The perceptions of juvenile judges regarding adolescent development in evaluating juvenile competency. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology (1973-)*, 110(3), 551-592.
- Bhatt, G., & Tweed, R. (2018). University and community acting together to address youth violence and gang involvement. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, 59(2), 151–162. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1037/cap0000149>
- Boden, T. (2019). What can the lived experiences of gang members tell us about that what occupies the “black box” that mediates gang membership and offending? A systematic review. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 36(1), 74–88
- Botero, J. D., Guo, W., Mosquera, G., Wilson, A., Johnson, S., Aguirre-Garcia, G. A., & Pachon, L. A. (2019). Gang confrontation: The case of Medellin (Colombia). *PLoS ONE*, 14(12), 1–19. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0225689>
- Bunker, R. J. (Ed.). (2019). *Narcos over the border: Gangs, cartels and mercenaries*. Routledge.
- Byrne, M. (2001). Data analysis strategies for qualitative research. *AORN Journal*, 74: 904-905. doi:10.1016/S0001-2092(06)61511-1

- Byrnes J. P. (2002). The development of decision-making. *The Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 31(6 Suppl), 208–215. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1054-139x\(02\)00503-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1054-139x(02)00503-7)
- Cabantous, L., & Gond, J. P. (2011). Rational decision-making as performative praxis: Explaining rationality's Éternel Retour. *Organization Science*, 22, 573–586.
- Calabretta, G., Gemser, G., & Wijnberg, N. M. (2017). The interplay between intuition and rationality in strategic decision-making: A paradox perspective. *Organization Studies*, 38(3–4), 365–401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840616655483>
- Calvete, E. (2008). Justification of violence and grandiosity schemas as predictors of antisocial behavior in adolescents. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 36(7), 1083–1095. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1007/s10802-008-9229-5>
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 25(8), 652–661. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1177/1744987120927206>
- Cartwright, E. (2018). *Mr. Abingdon*. Routledge
- Chadee, A. A., Chadee, X. T., Chadee, C., & Otuloge, F. (2022). Violations at the reference point of discontinuity: Limitations of prospect theory and an alternative model of risk choices. *Emerg. Sci. J*, 6, 37-52.
- Charlick, S. J., Pincombe, J., McKellar, L., & Fielder, A. (2016). Making sense of participant experiences: Interpretative phenomenological analysis in midwifery research. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 11, 205.

- Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Cruz, A. R., de Castro-Rodrigues, A., & Barbosa, F. (2020). Reprint of “executive dysfunction, violence and aggression”. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 54*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2020.101404>
- Daftary-Kapur, T., & Zottoli, T. M. (2014). A first look at the plea deal experiences of juveniles tried in adult court. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health, 13*, 323–336. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14999013.2014.960983>
- Pyrooz, D. C. (2022) The prison and the gang. *Crime and Justice 51*, 237-306.
- Dane, E., Pratt, M. G. (2007). Exploring intuition and its role in managerial decision-making. *Academy of Management Journal, 32*, 33–54.
- Data on Psychiatry Reported by Researchers at Imperial College London (Gang membership and sexual violence: associations with childhood maltreatment and psychiatric morbidity). (2020). *Mental Health Weekly Digest*.
- Defoe, I. N., Dubas, J. S., Figner, B., & van Aken, M. A. G. (2015). A meta-analysis on age differences in risky decision-making: Adolescents versus children and adults. *Psychological Bulletin, 141*(1), 48-84. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038088>
- Descormiers, K., & Corrado, R. R. (2016). The right to belong: Individual motives and youth gang initiation rites. *Deviant Behavior, 37*(11), 1341–1359. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1080/01639625.2016.1177390>

- Docherty, D., Kubik, J., Herrera, C. M., & Boxer, P. (2018). Early maltreatment is associated with greater risk of conduct problems and lack of guilt in adolescence. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 79,173-182. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.01.032>
- Dickson-Gomez, J., Pacella, M., Broaddus, M. R., Quinn, K., Galletly, C., & Rivas, J. (2017). Convention Versus Deviance: Moral Agency in Adolescent Gang Members' Decision.
- de Jesús Cardona-Isaza, A., Jiménez, S. V., & Montoya-Castilla, I. (2022). Decision-making styles in adolescent offenders and non-offenders: Effects of emotional intelligence and empathy. *Anuario de Psicología Jurídica*, 32(1), 51-60.
- Egley, A., Jr., Howell, J. C., Harris, M., & US Department of Justice, O. of J. J. and D. P. (2014). *Highlights of the 2012 national youth gang survey. Juvenile justice fact sheet in office of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Elbanna, S., Child, J. (2007). Influences on strategic decision effectiveness: Development and test of an integrative model. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28, 431–453.
- Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522633>
- Fairley, K., & Sanfey, A. G. (2020). The role of demographics on adolescents' preferences for risk, ambiguity, and prudence. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 179, 784-796.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2011). 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment –

- Emerging trends. Retrieved from
<https://www.fbi.gov/statsservices/publications/2011-national-gang-threat-asses>
- Finelli, G. A. (2019). Slash, shoot, kill: Gang recruitment of children and the penalties gangs face. *Family Court Review*, 57(2), 243-257.
- Fischhoff, B., & Broomell, S. B. (2020). Judgment and decision making. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 71, 331-355.
- Flèche, S., & Layard, R. (2017). Do more of those in misery suffer from poverty, unemployment or mental illness? *Kyklos*, 70(1), 27-41.
- Fraser, A. (2017). *Gangs & Crime: Critical Alternatives*. Sage.
- Fritsch, E. J., Caeti, T. J., & Taylor, R. W. (2017). Gang Suppression Through Saturation Patrol, Aggressive Curfew, and Truancy Enforcement: A Quasi-Experimental Test of the Dallas Anti-Gang Initiative. In *Gangs* (pp. 471-488). Routledge.
- GANG HUANGFU. (2014). Individual Differences in Risk-Taking Tendency and Framing Effect. *Social Behavior & Personality: An International Journal*, 42(2), 279–284. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.2224/sbp.2014.42.2.279>
- Garbarino, E., Slonim, R., & Villeval, M. C. (2019). Loss aversion and lying behavior. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 158, 379–393.
<https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2018.12.008>
- Geldenhuis, K. (2020). When street gangs hijack communities. *Servamus Community-based Safety and Security Magazine*, 113(2), 18-25.
- Geldenhuis, K. (2019). The satanic gangsters of the Free State. *Servamus Community-based Safety and Security Magazine*, 112(3), 10-17.

- Gilman, A. B., Hill, K. G., Hawkins, J. D., Howell, J. C., and Kosterman, R. (2014). "The Developmental Dynamics of Joining a Gang in Adolescence: Patterns and Predictors of Gang Membership." *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 24, 204–219.
- Goldman, L., Giles, H., & Hogg, M. A. (2014). Going to extremes: Social identity and communication processes associated with gang membership. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 17(6), 813-832. doi:10.1177/1368430214524289
- Gouveia-Pereira, M., Gomes, H. M., Roncon, F., & Mendonça, R. (2017). Impulsivity mediates the relationship between future orientation and juvenile deviancy. *Deviant Behavior*, 38(1), 34–46. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1080/01639625.2016.1190591>
- Grisso, T. (1996). Society's retributive response to juvenile violence: A developmental perspective. *Law and Human Behavior*, 20(3), 229–247. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1007/BF01499022>
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2(163-194), 105.
- Hammersley, M. (2009). Mixed method data collection strategies – By William G. Axinn & Lisa D. Pearce. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15(1), 200–201. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2008.01537_26.x
- Hansen, L. O., Tinney, B., Asomugha, C. N., Barron, J. L., Rao, M., Curry, L. A., ... Rosenthal, M. S. (2014). "You get caught up": Youth decision-making and

violence. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 35(1), 21–31. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1007/s10935-013-0328-x>

Harbeck, K. (2021). *Deviance and social control: Rational choice theory*. Salem Press Encyclopedia.

Harmon, A. (2020). Loss aversion. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*.

Hautala, D. S., J. Sittner, K., & Whitbeck, L. B. (2016). Prospective childhood risk factors for gang involvement among North American Indigenous adolescents. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 14(4), 390-410.

Henderson Jr., C. (2021). The ongoing surge in youth gang-related crime in large US cities.

Higginson, A., Benier, K., Shenderovich, Y., Bedford, L., Mazerolle, L., & Murray, J. (2018). Factors associated with youth gang membership in low-and middle-income countries: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 14(1), 1-128.

Howell, J. C. and E. Griffiths. 2018. *Gangs in America's Communities*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications

Huangfu, G. (2014). Individual differences in risk-taking tendency and framing effect. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal*, 42(2), 279–284. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.2224/sbp.2014.42.2.279>

Huizenga, H. M., Zadelaar, J. N., Jansen, B. R., Olthof, M. C., Steingroever, H., Dekkers, L., ... & Agelink van Rentergem, J. (2023). Formal models of differential framing effects in decision making under risk. *Decision*, 10(3), 197.

- Hureau, D. M., Braga, A. A., Lloyd, T., & Winship, C. (2023). Streetwork at the crossroads: An evaluation of a street gang outreach intervention and holistic appraisal of the research evidence. *Criminology*, *61*(4), 758–794.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12353>
- Ibrahim, O. M., Okuonghae, D., & Ikhile, M. N. (2023). Optimal control model for criminal gang population in a limited-resource setting. *International journal of dynamics and control*, *11*(2), 835-850.
- Jennings, W. G., & Gonzalez, J. M. R. (2016). *Gangs*. In K. Heilbrun, D. DeMatteo, & N. E. S. Goldstein (Eds.), *APA handbooks in psychology®. APA handbook of psychology and juvenile justice* (p. 307–324). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14643-014>
- Jervis, R. (2004). The Implications of Prospect Theory for Human Nature and Values. *Political Psychology*, *25*(2), 163–176. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00367.x>
- Jones, C. (Ed.). (2017). *Urban deprivation and the inner city*. Routledge.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking fast and slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux
- Kahneman, D. & Tversky, A. (1979). Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk" (PDF). *Econometrica*. *47* (2): 263–291. [doi:10.2307/1914185](https://doi.org/10.2307/1914185). [ISSN 0012-9682](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1914185)
- Kahneman, D. & Tversky, A. (1992). Advances in prospect theory: Cumulative representation of uncertainty. *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty*. *5* (4), 297–323.
[doi:10.1007/BF00122574](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00122574). S2CID 8456150.

- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 72(12), 2954–2965. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1111/jan.13031>
- Kerig, P., & Mendez, L. (2022) The role of trauma in the developmental trajectories of gang-involved, Taylor & Francis. Available at:
[xmhttps://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003242734-6/role-trauma-developmental-trajectories-gang-involved-youth-patricia-kerig-lucybel-mendez](https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003242734-6/role-trauma-developmental-trajectories-gang-involved-youth-patricia-kerig-lucybel-mendez) (Accessed: 31 March 2024).
- Kerig, P. K., Mendez, L., Alexander, A., & Chen, S. (2023). Psychopathology as a cause or consequence of youth gang involvement. *The Handbook of Gangs and Society*.
- Knight, D. d. knight@tcu. ed., Dansereau, D., Becan, J., Rowan, G., & Flynn, P. (2015). Effectiveness of a Theoretically-Based Judgment and Decision-making Intervention for Adolescents. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, 44(5), 1024–1038. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0127-6>
- Kottak, Conrad (2006). *Mirror for Humanity*, p. 47. McGraw-Hill, New York. ISBN 978-0-07-803490-9.
- Kubik, J., Docherty, M., & Boxer, P. (2019). The impact of childhood maltreatment on adolescent gang involvement. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 96. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104096>

- Kulkarni, T., Sullivan, A. L., & Kim, J. (2021). Externalizing behavior problems and low academic achievement: Does a causal relation exist? *Educational Psychology Review*, 33(3), 915-936.
- LeCroy, C., Anthony, E. (2017). Youth at Risk. *Oxford Bibliographies*. DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780195389678-0112.
- LeRoy, W. (2024). Understanding policing in the aftermath of gun violence: Examining investigatory stops and crime in Chicago. *Journal of Public Economics*, 234, 105117.
- Lin, X., Cheng, L., & Ma, L. (2014, June). Exploring the strategy of controlling software piracy based on prospect theory. In *2014 11th International Conference on Service Systems and Service Management (ICSSSM)* (pp. 1-5). IEEE.
- Liu, J., & Han, F. (2020). Investigating Reference Dependence Effects on User Search Interaction and Satisfaction: A Behavioral Economics Perspective. *Proceedings of the 43rd International ACM SIGIR Conference on Research and Development in Information Retrieval*, 1141–1150. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3397271.3401085>
- Madhani, A. (2016). Chicago homicides mark a grim toll. USA Today. Making. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 52(5), 562–573. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1080/10826084.2016.1245339>
- Mansueto, G., Marino, C., Palmieri, S., Offredi, A., Sarracino, D., Sassaroli, S., Ruggiero, G. M., Spada, M. M., & Caselli, G. (2022). Difficulties in emotion regulation: The role of repetitive negative thinking and metacognitive beliefs. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 308, 473–483.

Maringira, G., & Masiya, T. (2018). Persistence of Youth Gang Violence in South Africa.

The African Review, 45, 164-179.

McLachlan, K., Flannigan, K., Temple, V., Unsworth, K., & Cook, J. L. (2020).

Difficulties in daily living experienced by adolescents, transition-aged youth, and adults with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. *Alcoholism: Clinical and*

Experimental Research, 44(8), 1609-1624.

McMahon, M. (2019). Gang Membership. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). Qualitative research: a guide to design and

implementation (Fourth edition.). Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Brand.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Ramification. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved

June 26, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ramification>

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded*

sourcebook. sage. Mittal, S., Kapitan, S., & Silvera, D. H. (2019). Go big or go

home: Risk seeking for experiential choices. *Journal of Consumer*

Behaviour, 18(2), 97.

Moore, C. L., & Stuart, F. (2024). What Is Gang Culture? *The Oxford Handbook of*

Gangs and Society, 375.

Morewedge, Carey K.; Giblin, Colleen E. (2015). "Explanations of the endowment

effect: an integrative review". *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. 19 (6): 339–

348. [doi:10.1016/j.tics.2015.04.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2015.04.004). [PMID 25939336](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25939336/). [S2CID 4619648](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/4619648/).

- Murer, J. S., & Schwarze, T. (2022). Social Rituals of Pain: The Socio-Symbolic Meaning of Violence in Gang Initiations. *International Journal of Politics, Culture & Society*, 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-020-09392-2>
- Nagel, A. G., Guarnera, L. A., & Reppucci, N. D. (2016). Adolescent development, mental disorder, and decision-making in delinquent youths. In K. Heilbrun, D. DeMatteo, & N. E. S. Goldstein (Eds.), *APA handbook of psychology and juvenile justice*. (pp. 117–138). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14643-006>
- National Gang Center (n.d.). National Youth Gang Survey Analysis. Retrieved January 17/2022 from <https://nationalgangcenter.ojp.gov/survey-analysis>.
- Nicholas, S. (2018). Gang Involvement. *Gang Involvement - Research Starters Education*, 1–5. https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.3331/ors_edu_1641
- Neuman, W.L. (2003) *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Allyn and Bacon, New York
- Noble H, Smith J. (2015). Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research
- Northman, R. (2023). Survival in the city streets: An autoethnographic analysis challenging the criminalization of urban street gangs. *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal*, 16(1), 4. *Evidence-Based Nursing* 18:34-35
- Ogilvie, J. M., Shum, D. H., & Stewart, A. (2020). Executive functions in late adolescence and early adulthood and their relationship with risk-taking behavior. *Developmental neuropsychology*, 45(7-8), 446-468.
- Osberghaus, D. (2017). Prospect theory, mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

Journal of Risk Research, 20(7), 909–930.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2015.1121907>

Owen, M., & Greeff, A. P. (2015). Factors Attracting and Discouraging Adolescent Boys in High-Prevalence Communities From Becoming Involved in Gangs. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice*, 15(1), 1.

Ozer, M. M., & Akbas, H. (2020). The Predictability of IQ on Delinquency: A Structural Equation Model (SQM). *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences*, 15(2), 283-297.

Pachur, T., Schulte-Mecklenbeck, M., Murphy, R. O., & Hertwig, R. (2018). Prospect theory reflects selective allocation of attention. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 147(2), 147–169. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1037/xge0000406.supp> (Supplemental)

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Administration and policy in mental health*, 42(5), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>

PASSI, D. (2019). Socio Ecological Determinants of Drug Use. *Indian Journal of Adolescent Medicine*, 11.

Patalano, A. L., Zax, A., Williams, K., Mathias, L., Cordes, S., & Barth, H. (2020). Intuitive symbolic magnitude judgments and decision-making under risk in adults. *Cognitive Psychology*, 118. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1016/j.cogpsych.2020.101273>

- Panuccio, E. (2021). The expectations and challenges of youth Reentry. In *The Palgrave international handbook of youth imprisonment* (pp. 379-411). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Pietkiewicz, I. & Smith, J.A. (2012). A practical guide to using interpretative phenomenological analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne, 18*(2), 361-369. doi:10.14691/CPJ.20.1.7
- Pickett, J. T., Barnes, J. C., Wilson, T., & Patrick Roche, S. (2020). Prospect Theory and Criminal Choice: Experiments Testing Framing, Reference Dependence, and Decision Weights. *JQ: Justice Quarterly, 37*(6), 1140–1168. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1080/07418825.2018.1531142>
- Rai, N., & Thapa, B. (2015). A study on purposive sampling method in research. *Kathmandu: Kathmandu School of Law*.
- Reynaga, L. Q., Aldana, G. G., Bonilla, J., & Barajas, B. V. R. (2020). Relationship between executive functions and impulsive behavior in adolescents: Comparative study. *Salud mental, 43*(4), 175-180.
- Rigg, K. K., McNeish, R., Schadrac, D., Gonzalez, A., & Tran, Q. (2019). Community needs of minority male youth living in inner-city Chicago. *Children and Youth Services Review, 98*, 284–289. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2019.01.011>
- Robinson, C., & Williams, H. (2024). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Learnings from Employing IPA as a Qualitative Methodology in Educational Research. *Qualitative Report, 29*(4).

- Rolison, J. J., Hanoch, Y., & Gummerum, M. (2013). When Opportunity Matters: Comparing the Risk-Taking Attitudes of Prisoners and Recently Released Ex-Prisoners. *Risk Analysis: An International Journal*, 33(11), 2013.
- Rosen, J. D., & Kassab, H. S. (2018). *Drugs, gangs, and violence*. Springer.
- Sadana, U., Chenreddy, A., Delage, E., Forel, A., Frejinger, E., & Vidal, T. (2024). A survey of contextual optimization methods for decision-making under uncertainty. *European Journal of Operational Research*.
- Salguero, J. M., García-Sancho, E., Ramos-Cejudo, J., & Kannis-Dymand, L. (2020). Individual differences in anger and displaced aggression: The role of metacognitive beliefs and anger rumination. *Aggressive Behavior*, 46(2), 162–169. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21878>
- Saunders, B., Kitzinger, J., & Kitzinger, C. (2015). Anonymising interview data: challenges and compromise in practice. *Qualitative research: QR*, 15(5), 616–632. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794114550439>
- Schellenberg, M., & Walters, A. (2023). The uprise of gun violence in the United States: consequences of a dual pandemic. *Current Opinion in Anesthesiology*, 36(2), 132–136.
- Schwartz, D., Hopmeyer, A., Luo, T., Ross, A. C., & Fischer, J. (2017). Affiliation With Antisocial Crowds and Psychosocial Outcomes in a Gang-Impacted Urban Middle School. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 37(4), 559–586. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431615617292>

- Sekar, D., & Bhuvanewari, M. (2023). Family, Gang Affiliation, Peer Group Pressure, and Substance Misuse: A Qualitative Research Study of Indian Juvenile Offenders. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 25(3).
- Seung-Lark eLim, and Amanda S Bruce. 2015. "Prospect Theory and Body Mass: Characterizing Psychological Parameters for Weight-Related Risk Attitudes and Weight-Gain Aversion." *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (March).
doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00330.
- Shafir, E., & LeBoeuf, R. A. (2002). Rationality. *Annual review of psychology*, 53(1), 491-517.
- Simane-Vigante, L., Plotka, I., & Blumenau, N. (2018). Research of the relationship of criminal violence, adult attachment styles and personality traits of violent male offenders. *Rural Environment, Education, Personality*, 11, 128-139.
- Smith, J.A. (2007). Hermeneutics, human sciences and health: Linking theory and practice. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, 2, 3-11
- Smith, J. A., & Fieldsend, M. (2021). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In P. M. Camic (Ed.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design.*, 2nd ed. (pp. 147–166). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000252-008>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, method and research.* London, UK: Sage Publications.

- Smith, J. A., & Shinebourne, P. (2012). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. *American Psychological Association*.
- Spergel, I. A. (1995). *The youth gang problem. [electronic resource]: a community approach*. Oxford University Press.
- Sonterblum, L. (2018). Gang involvement as a means to satisfy basic needs.
- Sriram, K., Gupta, D., & Parikh, R. (2024). Movement of insurgent gangs: A Bayesian kernel density model for incomplete temporal data. arXiv preprint arXiv:2401.01231.
- Stahl, N. A., & King, J. R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of developmental education, 44*(1), 26-28.
- Stuart, F. (2020). *Ballad of the bullet: Gangs, drill music, and the power of online infamy*. Princeton University Press.
- Sullivan, J. P. (2002). Drug Cartels, Street Gangs, and Warlords. *Small Wars & Insurgencies, 13*(2), 40. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1080/09592310208559180>
- Suter. (2012). *Introduction to Educational Research: A Critical Thinking Approach*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.4135/9781483384443>
- Sutil-Martín, D. L., & Rienda-Gómez, J. J. (2020). The Influence of Unconscious Perceptual Processing on Decision-Making: A New Perspective From Cognitive Neuroscience Applied to Generation Z. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*.

- Swancott, L., Kloess, J. A., & Heyes, S. B. (2022). Adolescent Risk-Taking and Decision Making: Qualitative Investigation of a Virtual Reality Experience of Gangs and Violence.
- Tentama, F., & Abdillah, M. H. (2019). Student Employability Examined from Academic Achievement and Self-Concept. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, 8(2), 243-248.
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics (n.d). *News release*. U.S. Department of Labor.
<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>
- Thomas, K. J. (2024). Rational Choice, Gang Membership, and Crime. *The Oxford Handbook of Gangs and Society*, 444.
- Thomas, K. J., & Nguyen, H. (2022). Status gains versus status losses: Loss aversion and deviance. *Justice Quarterly*, 39(4), 871-896.
- Timmer, A., Antonaccio, O., & French, M. T. (2021). Hot or cool processing? Adolescent decision-making and delinquency. *Justice Quarterly*, 38(6), 961-994.
- Tonks, S., & Stephenson, Z. (2019). Disengagement from street gangs: a systematic review of the literature. *Psychiatry, Psychology & Law*, 26(1), 21–49. <https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1080/13218719.2018.1482574>
- Tostlebe, J. J., & Pyrooz, D. C. (2022). Are gang members psychopaths? In *Psychopathy and criminal behavior* (pp. 311-331). Academic Press.
- Trochim, W.M. and Donnelly, J.P. (2006) *The Research Methods Knowledge Base*. 3rd Edition, Atomic Dog, Cincinnati, OH.

- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2020). *The Condition of Education 2020* (NCES 2020-144), [Status Dropout Rates](#).
- Van Hellefont, E., & Densley, J. A. (2019). Gang globalization: How the global mediascape creates and shapes local gang realities. *Crime, media, culture, 15*(1), 169-189.
- Vecchio, J. M., & Carson, D. C. (2023). Understanding the role of violence and conflict in the stages of gang membership. *Youth violence and juvenile justice, 21*(1), 27-43.
- Verma, S. J., Gulati, P., Dhiman, V. K., & Pandian, J. D. (2023). Rigor and reliability of qualitative research conducted in various languages: fundamentals and their application. *The Qualitative Report, 28*(3), 960-975.
- Vicary, S., Young, A., & Hicks, S. (2017). A reflective journal as learning process and contribution to quality and validity in interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice, 16*(4), 550–565.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325016635244>
- Vicary, Young and Hicks, 2016, A reflective journal as learning process and contribution to quality and validity in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. *Qualitative Social Work, 16*(4), 550–565.
- Walasek, L., Mullett, T. L., & Stewart, N. (2024). A meta-analysis of loss aversion in risky contexts. *Journal of Economic Psychology, 102740*.

- Weber, E. U., & Johnson, E. J. (2009). Mindful judgment and decision-making. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, 53–85. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163633>
- Wei, X., & Lü, W. (2023). Childhood trauma and internalizing and externalizing behavior problems among adolescents: Role of executive function and life events stress. *Journal of Adolescence*, 95(4), 740-750.
- Werner, Jan (2008). "Risk Aversion". *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*. pp. 1–6. doi:10.1057/978-1-349-95121-5_2741-1. ISBN 978-1-349-95121-5.
- Whittemore, R., Chase, S. K., & Mandle, C. L. (2001). Validity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 11, 522–537.
doi:10.1177/104973201129119299
- Williams, H. V. (2024). Policy Solutions for Juvenile Cyber-Deviant Behaviors: Insights from Criminological Theory.
- Yeng, K. Y., & Mohamad, Z. S. (2023). A Case Study on Peer Influence and Peer Pressure in Juvenile Delinquency. *Int J Academ Res Busin Soc Sci*, 13(8).
- Zuppardo, L., Serrano, F., Pirrone, C., & Rodriguez-Fuentes, A. (2023). More than words: Anxiety, self-esteem, and behavioral problems in children and adolescents with dyslexia. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 46(2), 77-91.
- Zottoli, T. M., & Daftary-Kapur, T. (2019). Guilty pleas of youths and adults: Differences in legal knowledge and decision-making. *Law and Human Behavior*, 43(2), 166–179. <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000314.supp> (Supplemental)

Appendix: Interview Guide

The Interview**What are the experiences of gang members when making decisions in difficult gang related situations?**

1. What are the reasons you joined a gang?
2. Please describe any considerations you gave in finding an option to joining a gang that could have met your needs.
- 3.
4. Please describe any hesitations you had about joining the gang?
5. What were some of your fears prior to joining a gang?
- 6.
7. Please describe how joining a gang reduced your fears?
8. How did you define success back then?
9. What do you consider to be financial success?
10. How important was financial success to you?
11. How did financial success influence your decisions to join a gang?
12. How did you weigh the pros and cons of joining a gang?
13. To what extent did academic regimen influenced your decision to join a gang?
14. To what extent did family influence your decision to join a gang?
15. To what extent did the desire to have respect and recognition from your peers influence your decision to join a gang?

16. Describe ways in which a marketed glamorous gang lifestyle as depicted in movies and music videos influenced your decision to join a gang.

How do gang members perceive and experience the ramifications of their decisions?

17. Describe any experience that you are knowledgeable of where coercion was a contributing factor to gang initiation.
18. How did you reconcile the idea that you might have to break the law while being in a gang?
19. How concerned were you about the possible ramifications of your gang related activities?
- 20.
21. Please describe how you prepared for the likely ramifications for your gang related decisions?
22. How concerned were you about the ways in which your actions could affect others?
23. What made you leave the gang?