



UNRAVELLING IDENTITIES AND BELONGING

**Criminal Gang Involvement
of Youth from Immigrant Families**

**Hieu Van Ngo
in collaboration with
The Members of the Collaborative Inquiry Network**

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Youth from Immigrant Families**

Prepared by

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Prepared for

Centre for Newcomers

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**The National Crime Prevention Centre, the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship,
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Foreign-born youth and Canadian-born youth from immigrant families have established a strong presence in Canadian society. They represent about 20% of all young Canadians under the age of 18, and are expected to reach 25% by 2016 (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006). The future of Canada is intricately linked to their healthy development. In recent years, however, there has been growing public concern about criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. Yet there is a notable lack of vibrant, informed public dialogue on criminal gangs in general, and on criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families in particular. The scanty research literature on children of immigrant families has not met the challenge of providing critical, in-depth information to inform public debate and policy and service development.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND DESIGN

This research sought to answer (1) why and how some youth from immigrant families have become involved in criminal gang activity, and (2) what strategies can be used to effectively support high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. It adopted the participatory action research and grounded theory methodologies. The research involved the interplay of two processes: the participatory group process of the collaborative inquiry network made up of 39 representatives from the community, social service, education, government, justice, health and media sectors; and the parallel one-on-one inquiry into the lived experience of 30 gang involved youth and former gang members from immigrant families.

PATHWAYS OF YOUTH FROM IMMIGRANT FAMILIES TOWARDS CRIMINAL GANG INVOLVEMENT AND OUT OF GANG LIFE

The inquiry into the lived experiences of the gang involved participants illustrated the complex pathways towards criminal gang involvement and out of gang life followed by youth from immigrant families, and the detrimental effect on the wellbeing and behaviour of these young people consequent upon the unraveling of their sense of identity and belonging. The gang involved participants either directly experienced pre-migration vulnerabilities or were indirectly impacted by their parents' pre-migration histories. Their life experience in Canada involved gradual disintegration of their interaction with their families, schools and communities. Subsequently, the participants experienced crises of identity and belonging, which propelled them towards forming friendships with other socially disconnected peers. They became involved in social cliques, and progressed towards membership in criminal gangs. Confronted with various turning points, some participants eventually chose to leave their gangs. They worked towards exit from the gang and reintegration into their families and communities.

PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUPPORTING HIGH RISK AND GANG INVOLVED YOUTH FROM IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Drawing upon their learning about the lived experiences of gang involved youth and former gang members, as well as their own professional experience and expertise, the members the

collaborative inquiry network proposed a practical framework for supporting high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. The practical framework would promote collaboration among stakeholders of diverse sectors and communities to support youth from immigrant families who are at risk or have a history of criminal gang involvement to develop a positive sense of identity and to achieve a healthy sense of belonging at home, school, and in the community. It would be guided by a set of principles that focus on identity development, equity, multi-sectoral involvement, coordination and collaboration, multiple approaches to youth services, the need to address multiple needs with multiple interventions, and timeliness and responsiveness. The practical framework would address the specific issues facing high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families prior to their involvement in social cliques and criminal gangs. It would also deal with the specific challenges pertaining to gang exit and reintegration of gang involved youth into their families and communities. This framework would promote coordination and comprehensiveness of home-based, school-based and community-based support for high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Grounded in the lived experience of gang involved research participants, this study has offered an in-depth understanding about the pathways of gang involved youth from immigrant families towards criminal gang involvement and out of gang life. It posits a practical framework for supporting high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families, articulates a clear vision and guiding principles, and outlines specific strategies for home-based, school-based and community-based support that address prevention, gang exit and reintegration of former gang members into their families and communities. The groundwork of the collaborative inquiry network offers a solid start for sustainable and coordinated multi-sectoral collaboration to support youth from immigrant families in Calgary. As stakeholders move forward with the planned multi-sectoral symposium on criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families, and continue with post-symposium collaboration to support these young people, we would recommend that stakeholders consider the following next steps:

1. Acquire and clarify shared understanding about issues facing youth from immigrant families.
2. Adopt the suggested framework as a starting point for collaborative planning, and develop a citywide action plan to support gang involved and high risk youth from immigrant families.
3. Establish a sound multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral infrastructure with a clear mandate and adequate resources to support the implementation of the action plan, and to ensure effective communication, coordination and collaboration among participating stakeholders.
4. Ensure big picture, balanced emphases on prevention and interventions; family-based, school-based and community-based support; and policy, practice and research.
5. Address specific programming for youth from immigrant families, as well as their access to general services and resources in the community.
6. Integrate an explicit focus on support for the development of positive self-concept, strong Canadian identity and empowering ethnic identity in all services for youth from immigrant families.
7. Support youth- and family-focused institutions and organizations in all sectors: review existing policies and services to ensure an explicit focus on diversity, cultural competence and support for youth from immigrant families.
8. Involve youth from immigrant families and ethnic communities in all collaborative efforts.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Foreign-born youth and Canadian-born youth from immigrant families have established a strong presence in Canadian society. They represent about 20% of all young Canadians under the age of 18, and are expected to reach 25% by 2016 (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006). The future of Canada is intricately linked to their healthy development. In recent years, however, there has been growing public concern about criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. Public discourse has focused solely on the reporting of and opinions on criminal and violent incidents (see CBC News, 2008; Cuthbertson, 2008; Fekete, 2008; McGinnis, 2006, 2009; Morgan, 2005; Rassel, 2003, 2006a, 2008, 2009; Rassel & Tsang, 2003; Richards, 2005; Semmens, 2001). The scanty research literature on children of immigrant families has not met the challenge of providing critical, in-depth information to inform public debate and policy and service development.

This research seeks answers to (1) why and how some youth from immigrant families have become involved in criminal gang activity, and (2) what strategies can be used to effectively support high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. The study adopts a multi-method approach to achieve its theoretical and practical objectives. It uses grounded theory methodology to describe and explain criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. It also capitalizes on the strengths of the participatory action research methodology to work with stakeholders in diverse sectors to pursue practical solutions to the emerging issues identified during the research inquiry process.

This introduction chapter locates the study in the local collaborative initiative to address criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families in Calgary. It then elaborates on the study objectives, and potential contributions of the study with respect to theoretical development and practice. It clarifies the key terms used in the research, and concludes with an overall roadmap for the report.

LOCATING THE STUDY IN THE LOCAL COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE

This study on criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families is an integral part of the *Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime* initiative in Calgary. Grounded in the local realities, the initiative was developed over the course of 2.5 years of intensive consultations with diverse stakeholders, research into and selection of best practice, and tenuous collaboration among the service providers, community partners and funding organizations. Drawing upon the Comprehensive Gang Model (see Spergel & Grossman, 1997), the multi-stakeholder initiative has established four key strategies to deal with criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families, namely community mobilization, provision of social intervention and opportunities, suppression and social control, and organizational change and development. The following section elaborates on the identified strategies.

Strategy #1: Community Mobilization This strategy initiates and supports collaborative efforts to build and share practical, action driven knowledge about criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families in Calgary, as well as to develop a coordinated, city-wide strategy to support gang involved and high risk youth from immigrant families. This study is part of strategy #1. Learning from this study has informed the development and implementation of all four strategies.

Strategy #2: Provision of Social Intervention and Opportunities This strategy uses the multidisciplinary team approach to (1) provide gang involved and high risk youth

from immigrant families with educational, life skill and employment related services and personal support; (2) connect gang involved and high risk youth and families to services and resources in the community to enhance their social wellbeing and connections, and (3) support former gang involved youth to develop and enhance leadership skills to make positive contributions to the community, particularly in the area of informed public awareness about youth gangs in Calgary.

Strategy #3: Gang Suppression and Social Control This strategy identifies culturally responsive opportunities and means to support the justice system in its efforts to address gang issues in Calgary. It also involves community stakeholders in identifying and coordinating collaborative activities that deter gang activities, and strengthen community safety.

Strategy#4: Organizational Development and Change This strategy supports participating organizations and institutions to examine their policies and practices, and to plan and implement strategies to provide culturally responsive services to gang involved and high risk youth from immigrant families.

The initiative has been funded by the National Crime Prevention Centre and administered by the Centre for Newcomers. It officially started in April 2009 and will be completed by March 2012.

RESEARCH GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the study is to facilitate in-depth understanding of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families in the Canadian context, and to explore collaborative action to address youth gangs in Calgary. The key objectives of the study include:

- To describe the pathways towards criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families, as well as their exit from gang involvement and reintegration into their families and communities;
- To develop a grounded theory that explains gang involvement of youth from immigrant families;
- To develop a practical framework to support high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families; and
- To involve multi-stakeholders (members of ethnocultural and geographical communities, social service providers, researchers, and representatives of institutions in the education, health, social service, government and justice sectors) to guide the study, to reflect upon emerging findings, and to develop strategies to address the identified issues facing youth from immigrant families.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

With public awareness about youth gangs in its infancy, the study can inform stakeholders, and serve as a catalyst for public debate on issues facing youth from immigrant families. Particularly, it encourages informed dialogues on the intersections of crime, immigration and intergroup relations, and invites critical examination of Canada's immigration and multiculturalism policies, and responsiveness of the existing policies and services for youth from immigrant families. This study can also inform the work of diverse policy makers, service providers, funding organizations and community partners to support youth from immigrant families. Institutions, service organizations and community groups can use the findings and suggested strategies from this study to guide their development of responsive policies and services.

DEFINING KEY TERMS

There is no consensus among scholars, policy makers and practitioners about the definitions of youth, immigrant youth, youth crime and gang. As these terms relate to evolving social constructs, their definitions and nuances often vary, and are contextualized within specific social, cultural, economic, political, philosophical and disciplinary perspectives. For examples, the term “youth” can be defined on the basis of age, biology, psychology or social development. In the current public discourse, there are diverse opinions about whether the term, “immigrant youth,” would include refugee youth or those young people born into immigrant families in Canada. Further, efforts to define “youth gangs” are challenged with definitional issues regarding differentiation between gangs and informal social groups, characteristics of youth gangs, and relationships between gang activities and criminal codes. In the field of criminology, such terms as “juvenile delinquency” and “youth deviance” have evoked uncritical moral judgment and simplistically pathologized complex social phenomena.

In the light of divergent perspectives on social constructs that are central to the study, it is prudent to establish the working definitions of various terms used throughout this study. The following section defines the common terms relevant to the examination of immigration and youth crime connections.

Youth The term, “youth” refers to individuals between 12 and 17 years of age inclusively. The selected age group is consistent with the definition of youth, as outlined in the Youth Criminal Justice Act (see “Youth Criminal Justice Act,” 2002).

Immigrant The term, “immigrant” refers to those who were born outside of Canada. For the purpose of this study, the term also covers refugees who arrived in Canada and were granted refugee status on humanitarian grounds. However, the study will use the phrase “immigrant youth with a refugee background” to highlight the unique circumstances experienced by refugee youth.

Immigrant youth The term, “immigrant youth,” refers to young individuals between the ages of 12 and 17 years who were born outside of Canada.

Second generation Canadian youth The term, “second generation Canadian youth” refers to the Canadian-born individuals between the ages of 12 and 17 years of age with at least one parent born outside of Canada.

Youth from immigrant families The term, “youth from immigrant families” encompasses both immigrant youth and second generation Canadian youth.

Crime/Criminal activity The term, “crime,” refers to behaviour deemed to be an “offence” by the Criminal Code of Canada (see “Criminal Code,” 1985).

Criminal Gangs The term, “criminal gangs” refers to those groups that are highly organized or semi-structured with identifiable leadership structures, and engaged in criminal activities. This definition does not include social gangs, which encompass social groupings without any involvement in criminal activity.

Criminal gang involvement The term, “criminal gang involvement” refers to active membership in a criminal gang.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report comprises six chapters. Chapter one elaborates the context for the study and its potential contributions to theoretical development and practice. Chapter Two provides a literature review on trends, issues and dynamics that are relevant to the social phenomenon of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. Chapter Three details the research design and inquiry process. Chapter Four describes criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families, and proposes a theory to explain this social phenomenon. Chapter Five then presents a practical framework to support gang involved and high risk youth

from immigrant families. The report concludes with Chapter Six, which discusses the implications of the study with respect to public discourse, effective practice and service development, and policy development, and suggests the next steps for collaborative efforts to address gang issues.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter critically assesses trends, issues, dynamics and theoretical perspectives that are relevant to the social phenomenon of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. Following an overview of youth from immigrant families, it elaborates on the trends in youth crime in Canada, and examines the social phenomenon of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. The chapter then critically examines relevant theoretical perspectives on youth crime, and determines the extent to which they have been used to explain criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. It concludes by highlighting the need to have an in-depth understanding about criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families in the Canadian context.

YOUTH FROM IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Demographics

In an in-depth analysis of the 2006 Census data, Chui, Tran and Maheux (2007) elaborated on the shifting demographics in Canada. In 2006, the foreign-born population in Canada was at its highest level in 75 years. In fact, 1 in 5 Canadians (or 19.8%) was born outside of Canada. Immigrants from Asia made up more than half of all newcomers (58.3%), followed by those from Europe (16.1%), Caribbean, Central and South America (10.8%), Africa (10.6%) and the United States (3.5%). A significant number of Canadian residents (6.3%) had been in Canada for 10 years or less. Further, between 2001 and 2006, Canada's foreign-born population increased by 13.6% - four times greater than the overall growth of the Canadian population (3.3%) during the same period. Immigrants had also contributed to the drastically increased visible minority population in Canada, at 16.2% in the 2006 Census, or roughly three times higher than the visible minority population in the 1981 Census (at 4.7%) (Chui, Tran, & Maheux, 2008). Among those immigrants who arrived in Canada between 2001 and 2006, fully three-quarters (75%) belonged to a visible minority group (Chui, et al., 2008). Looking into the future, Malenfant, Lebel and Martel (2010) projected that Canada's foreign-born population will reach between 25% and 28% and visible minorities will represent between 29% and 32% of all Canadians by 2031. They also forecasted that nearly 47% of all Canadian-born children of immigrants will belong to a visible minority group within two decades.

Consistent with the demographic trends, foreign-born youth and Canadian-born youth from immigrant families have established a strong presence in Canadian society. They represent about 20% of all young Canadians under the age of 18, and are expected to reach 25% by 2016 (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006). Our analyses of the annual immigration statistics for permanent residents between 1996 and 2009 indicate that foreign-born children and youth aged 0 to 24 make up an average of 37% of all permanent residents arriving in Canada each year (see Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005, 2009). A slight majority of these young people (56%) came to Canada under the economic immigrant category, followed by those who were qualified to migrate to Canada under the family class (27%). About 15% of all young permanent residents aged 0 to 24 arrived in Canada as refugees.

Furthermore, Canadian-born children and youth with at least one parent born outside of the country (second generation Canadians) represent a significant proportion of the population. The 2006 Census enumerated about 4.0 million second generation Canadians, an estimated 15.6% of the population aged 15 and over (those with both parent born outside Canada represent 7-8% of the population) (Chui, et al., 2008). Unfortunately, there is no public Census data for those who were under the age of 15. Overall, Canadian-born children of immigrants

made up about 30.2% of all visible minorities in Canada in 2006. Together with their foreign-born counterparts, Canadian-born children of immigrants aged 24 years and under represented about 38.1% of the visible minority population in Canada (Chui, et al., 2008). It is projected that by 2031, 36% of the population under 15 years of age will belong to a visible minority group, compared to 18% of persons aged 65 and over (Malenfant, et al., 2010).

An Overview of Immigrant Youth

Adolescence is commonly acknowledged as a challenging developmental period. In Canada, the experience of adolescence for first generation immigrant youth is compounded by complex linguistic, acculturative, psychological and economic challenges (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Beiser, 1999; Berry, 2006; Hamilton, 2005; Hernandez, 1999; Kunz & Hanvey, 2000; Pumariega, 2005; Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003). Immigrant youth often face cognitive and psychosocial challenges related to cultural adjustment and adaptation (Baffoe, 2007; Chapman & Perreira, 2005; Delgado, Jones & Rohani, 2005). They may experience difficulties in forming cross-ethnic friendships, overreliance on support from peers with similar cultural backgrounds, alienation and isolation, and limited access to positive role models and mentors (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; James, 1997; Shik, 2003; Tsai, 2006). Many school-aged youth have experienced discrimination at school or while looking for employment (Kunz & Hanvey, 2000; Taylor, 2006). Some immigrant youth, particularly those from visible minority backgrounds, have been subjected to ethnically based bullying and racism (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Hogarth, 2008; Khanlou, Koh & Mill, 2008; Madibbo, 2008; McKenney, Pepler, Craig & Connolly, 2006). Further, a significant number of immigrant youth are growing up in households impacted by a range of socioeconomic issues such as cultural and language barriers, unemployment or underemployment, social isolation, illiteracy, discrimination and limited civic participation (Cooper, 2003; Delgado, et al., 2005; Statistics Canada, 2003). According to Picot, Lu and Hou (2009), the low income rate among immigrant children and youth is higher than that of other immigrants and the Canadian-born (at 27% compared with 22% for immigrants of all ages and 15% of children of Canadian-born parents), and has increased at a rapid rate (from 16% in 1980 to 27% in 2005 or an increase of 66% over the period). Individuals who arrived in Canada during the last 5 years have a low-income rate of 42%, up from 28% in 1980.

In their transition into adulthood, immigrant youth, especially those who are visible minorities or refugees, are less likely than their Canadian-born counterparts to participate in the labour market and to have work experience (Kunz, 2003; Shields, Scholtz & Rahi, 2006; Wilkinson, 2008). They often lack the social connections to gain access to employment opportunities and those without post secondary education often engage in low skill service industry jobs with little chance for advancement (Yan, Chan & Lauer, 2009). In fact, immigrant youth have the highest unemployment rate in Canada, at 20% for those aged 15 to 24, compared to the national rate of 8% (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2001). They reportedly also have limited access to apprenticeship opportunities (Yee, Johns, Tam & Paul-Apputhurai, 2003). Furthermore, many immigrant youth struggle to achieve positive identity formation due to conflicting values at home and in the community and the pervasive impact of internalized racism (Desai & Subramanian, 2003; Khanlou, et al., 2008; Kurian, 1986; Malewska-Peyre, 1993; Sabatier & Berry, 2008; Sharir, 2002). Their wellbeing and development are intricately linked to their multiple identities and experiences at the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation (Khanlou, 2008; Khayatt, 1994; Racicot, 2002).

In the health arena, immigrant youth experience a range of physical and mental challenges. Those raised in families with disadvantaged socioeconomic status are at higher risk of malnutrition (Weissman, 1994). Some youth have been exposed to communicable diseases in their home countries (Cookson, et al., 1998). Youth from certain religious and cultural backgrounds also face cultural taboos and practices that prevent their access to sex education, and compromise their sexual and reproductive health (Elgaali, Strevens & Mardh, 2005; Orgocka, 2004). In terms of mental health, youth of refugee background who were subjected to

persecution, war, violence, loss of family members and trauma in their home countries or during migration are more likely than other immigrant youth to experience post traumatic stress syndrome (Craig, 2006; Derluyn & Broekaert, 2007; Hermanson, Timpka, & Thyberg, 2003; Pumariega, 2005; Silove, Steele, McGorry, Miles & Drobny, 2002). Recent research has also linked poor mental health among some visible minorities to their experiences of racism and discrimination (Davies & Stevenson, 2006; Zayas, 2001). In spite of their complex needs, many immigrant youth do not readily seek or make use of health services (Bridges, de Arellano, Rheingold, Danielson & Silcott, 2010). They have limited access to information as well as to culturally responsive services (Ngo, 2009; Silvio, 2006).

Regarding educational achievement, a few studies have reported favorable school performance among children of immigrant parents in Canada. Worswick (2001), for instance, compared the school performance of the children of immigrant parents to that of the children of Canadian-born parents based on the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY). The author found that children of immigrants whose first language was neither English nor French were at a disadvantage in the early years at school in vocabulary and to lesser extent reading in the grade 2 through grade 5 range. However, by age 13, these children's average performance was at least as good as the performance of the children of Canadian-born parents. In another study, Ronit, John and Parker (2003) explored the educational paths of immigrant students (mostly foreign-born Western European students) through a 19 year multi-wave panel study undertaken from 1976 to 1995 in suburban Toronto. They found that, although foreign-born students' educational achievement was not significantly different than their Canadian born counterparts, those who spoke English as a second language were 2.5 times more likely than those whose with English as a first language to attend university.

In contrast with the promising findings, however, most studies have raised concerns about the educational success of children of immigrants, especially those from an English as a Second Language (ESL) background. Although immigrant youth have positive attitudes towards school and are more likely to have university aspirations than their Canadian born counterparts (Taylor & Krahn, 2005), they often perform at levels significantly lower than their non-immigrant peers (Schleicher, 2006). Cummins (1981) suggested that ESL learners are two or more years behind their Canadian-born, English-speaking counterparts academically by the time they reach sixth grade. Watt and Roessingh (1994; 2001) tracked educational outcomes among ESL youth in a single, large urban school in Alberta for 10 years. They found that the dropout rate for ESL learners remained unchanged at 74%, more than double the average high school non-completion rate in Alberta. In their study of academic achievement among ESL high school students in one urban school board in Alberta, Derwing, DeCorby, Ichikawa and Jamieson (1999) reported that nearly 46% of high school ESL learners did not complete their studies within the K-12 system, compared to a 70% completion rate for all learners in Alberta. Latimer (2000) examined the 1996-1999 provincial achievement test scores of students in the Calgary Board of Education, and found that ESL learners in grades 3, 6 and 9 were between 16 to 28 percentage points behind other students in language arts. Ma (2003) analyzed the reading, mathematics and science outcomes of immigrant youth in Canada using data from the Programme for International Student Assessment. His study found no differences between immigrant and non-immigrant students in mathematics. Ma, however, found that immigrant students did not fare as well as their non-immigrant counterparts in reading and science. Based on a study of the academic performances of immigrant and non-immigrant students, Grayson (2009) provided glimpses into the future awaiting many ESL learners at the university level. His findings suggested that the communication skills of university students who are sons and daughters of immigrants, independent of length of time in Canada, are not as high as those of Canadian-born English speaking students. Grayson further asserted that, all else being equal the university grade-point averages (GPAs) of immigrant students of non- European origin were generally lower than those of Canadian-born students.

With respect to the justice arena, many immigrant youth, especially those who have experienced school failure, are vulnerable to gang involvement (Cooper, 2003; 2006). Those who are racial minorities are more likely to be victims of criminal activity (Collins, Noble, Poynting & Tabar, 2002) and, in the case of black males, experience relatively high homicide victimization rates (Wortley, 2004). When immigrant youth are in conflict with the law, they experience a range of issues in their contact with police and youth justice court procedures including racial profiling, distrust and fear of authority figures, limited knowledge about the Canadian justice system, lack of understanding of their constitutional rights, problems understanding and providing accurate information during investigation and court proceedings due to limited English, and cultural misinterpretation (Currie, 1994; James, 2002; Kawaguchi, 1994; Penn, Greene & Gabbidon, 2006; Tanner & Wortley, 2002).

An Overview of Second Generation Canadian Youth

The existing body of knowledge lacks a specific focus on second generation Canadian youth. The literature has predominantly emphasized the economic integration of second generation Canadian adults, particularly with respect to their educational attainment and participation in the labour market. According to several studies, Canadian born children of immigrants achieve high secondary school and university completion rates (Abada, Hou & Ram, 2008; Aydemir, Chen & Corak, 2009; Boyd, 2002; Corak, 2008; Kučera, 2008; Picot, 2008). As a group, their earnings are either equivalent to or better than those whose parents were born in Canada (Aydemir, et al., 2009; Corak, 2008; Palameta, 2007; Picot, 2008). Second generation visible minority Canadians, however, have achieved varying levels of educational attainment. For example, whereas children of Chinese and Indian immigrants demonstrate higher academic achievement than children of Canadian born parents, second generation Portuguese and African Canadians have relatively low university completion rates (Abada, et al., 2008; Abada & Tenkorang, 2009; Simmons & Plaza, 1998). Furthermore, second generation visible minorities are more likely to be unemployed and are less likely to participate in the labour force than those with parents born in Canada (Wannell & Caron, 1994). Among those who are employed, their earnings are not always commensurate with their levels of education (Mata, 1997). Those with parents from the Caribbean, Central and South America, Asia and Africa have earned less than those with parents from traditional source countries in North America and Northern or Western Europe, despite having equivalent levels of education (Aydemir, Chen, & Corak, 2005; Palameta, 2007).

Often finding themselves at the intersection of two distinct cultures - that of their parents and that of the dominant Euro-Anglo Saxon Canadian society - second generation Canadian youth are often confronted with competing expectations with respect to traditions, gender roles, religion and politics (Mokbel, 2005). They are also challenged with a complex process of creating and recreating multidimensional, shifting identities. Some South Asian youth, for example, actively make deliberate, strategic choices about whether to "brown it up" or "bring down the brown" in their interactions with other Canadians in order to attain specific goals or manage the challenges of living in a multicultural society (Sundar, 2008b). Many second generation youth have been subjected to discrimination and racialization and have struggled to achieve a strong sense of Canadian identity (Rajiva, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2003). Canadian citizens of Asian and African backgrounds are less likely than their French or English counterparts to identify "Canadian" as their sole ancestry (Thomas, 2005). Furthermore, second generation visible minority Canadians are less likely than those of non-visible minority backgrounds, and worse, their own first generation Canadian parents to feel a sense of belonging in Canada (Reitz & Banerjee, 2007).

In summary, the emerging literature reveals the complex, challenging realities facing both first generation immigrant youth and second generation Canadian youth born into immigrant families. First generation immigrant youth often face linguistic, acculturative, psychological and economic challenges. They experience barriers to equitable opportunities in Canada, and

encounter a wide range of obstacles and challenges in accessing services and support in the social services, education, health, and justice arenas. Although second generation Canadian-born youth, as a group, tend to fare well economically, those from a visible minority background experience significant inequities in their educational attainment and participation in the labour market. Second generation Canadian youth also experience tremendous sociocultural challenges with respect to competing cultural expectations, cultural identity and intercultural interactions.

YOUTH CRIME IN CANADA

General Trends in Youth Crime

Measures of youth crime have commonly relied on official records, self-reports and victimization surveys, each with some inherent limitation but together offering a more complete picture of youth crime (Doob & Cesaroni, 2004; Smandyck, 2001). In an analysis of the official 2008 police reported statistics, Wallace (2009) elaborated on the most recent trends in youth crime in Canada. In 2008, there were about 167,000 youth accused of committing a Criminal Code offence in Canada, down almost 11,000 from 2007. At 6,454 per 100,000 in 2008 (excluding traffic violations), the youth crime rate continued to decline steadily over the years, and was about 29% below the 1991 peak of 9,126 per 100,000 youth. The violent crime rate also declined 3% from 1,950 per 100,000 youth in 2007 to 1,887 per 100,000 youth in 2008. In Alberta, the overall youth crime rate (excluding traffic violations) and the violent crime rate among youth were 8,550 and 2,081 per 100,000 youth respectively in 2008. These figures indicate respective declines of 3% and 1% in the overall youth crime and youth violent crime rates from the previous year. At the municipal level, the Calgary Police Service (2009) has reported crime rates that are consistent with the national and provincial trends. For instance, the crime rates in Calgary have declined steadily in the last 5 years, from 5,438 reported offences in 2004 to 4004 reported offences in 2008, or a decline of 26%.

It should be noted that the criminal justice system in Canada does not publicize race-crime statistics. Furthermore, official crime statistics have inherent limitations in presenting the reality of crime. As Doob and Cesaroni (2004) explained, what are loosely referred to as "official crime statistics" are simply counts of events at different stages of the following process: (1) An incident occurs, (2) someone must notice it, (3) it must be defined as a crime, (4) someone must successfully report the incident to the police, (5) the police must not only decide something is a crime, they must record it as such, (6) a suspect may or may not be identified, (7) a suspect may or may not be charged, (8) the offender will, presumably, be brought to court, (9) a youth court case is typically recorded for the youth entering the court system, and (10) the accused person may or may not be found guilty of an offense. Official statistics, therefore, are vulnerable to the lack of witnesses or reporting, subjective interpretation of the law and procedural judgment.

Other sources of information, including self-reported measures and victimization surveys, complement the depiction created by official statistics regarding trends in youth crime in Canada. In their analyses of the 2006 International Youth Survey of students attending selected junior high schools in Toronto, Zeman and Bressan (2008) and Fitzgerald (2009) demonstrated that in an average Toronto school, about 13% of students in grades 7 through 9 reported that they had committed at least one property-related act of delinquency. They also indicated the same proportion (13%) of youth reported committing at least one violent act of delinquency within the 12 months prior to the survey. Sprott, Doob and Jenkins (2001) shed some light on regional variation in self-reported delinquency among youth aged 12 and 13 in Canada. With respect to property-related offences, between 8% and 13% of the youth reported a high level of delinquency. Youth from the Atlantic provinces and British Columbia shared the lowest level of offending (8%) while those from Quebec reported the highest rate of offending (13%). With respect to violent acts of delinquency, between 9% and 14% of the youth indicated a high level of delinquency. Youth from Quebec and British Columbia reported the lowest level of

offending (9%) while those from the prairies reported the highest level of offending (14%). Results from self-reported surveys are often challenged with reference to methodological issues related to validity and reliability, as well as potential falsification of responses.

Victimization surveys further offer an additional perspective on the trends of youth crime in Canada. In their analyses of the 2000 General Social Survey, Doob and Cesaroni (2004) pointed out that while Canadian residents 35 years of age and older constitute 63% of the Canadian population age 12 or over, they are described by victims as being responsible for only 25% of the incidents. On the other hand, while youth 17 years of age and younger make up 9% of the Canadian population age 12 or over, they are identified by victims as offenders in 23% of the incidents. However, the young offender rate is no higher than that of young adults, age 18 to 24 (29%) and is comparable to that of the 25 to 34 age group (23%). Doob and Cesaroni further examined the relationship between the age of the victim and the victim's estimate of the offender's age. They found that young people are likely to victimize other young people, and that older offenders tend to victimize older people. Victimization surveys are also vulnerable to under-reporting, falsification or unreliable memories.

Overall, the official and unofficial data do not suggest there is a crisis in youth crime in Canada. In fact, the youth crime rates have declined in recent years, and most young people are law-biding citizens. With respect to the immigration-crime connection, there are no studies that specifically examine the crime rates among youth from an immigrant or visible minority background due to a lack of available statistics.

Youth Gangs in Canada

There is a distinct lack of a well-defined body of knowledge on youth gangs from the Canadian perspective (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2006; Wortley, 2004). In fact, Chettleburgh (2007) characterized the state of public and political awareness about gang issues as "fragile" (p.10). To complicate matters, there is very little consensus about even the definition of youth gangs. Arguments have focused on differentiation between youth gangs and other informal social groups, characteristics of youth gangs, inclusion/exclusion of criminal activity as a required criterion for youth gangs, and requirements related to group structures, names, symbols, patterns of communication, permanence and territorial control (Curry & Decker, 2003; Wortley & Tanner, 2006).

To date, the 2002 Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs is the only national study on youth gangs in Canada (Astwood Strategy Corporation, 2004). Drawing on the responses from 264 police agencies across the country, the survey estimated that there are 434 criminal youth gangs with a membership of 7,971 youth (defined as under 21 years of age in this study), and that the youth gang rate is about 0.24 per 1,000 population. The survey pointed out that youth gangs are ethnically diverse with the largest proportion of members drawn from an African Canadian background (25%), followed by those from First Nations (22%), Caucasian (18%), East Indian/Pakistani (14%), Asian (12%), Latino/Hispanic (6%), Middle Eastern/Arabic (3%) backgrounds. Totten (2008) noted that over one-third of gangs in Canada are composed of two or more ethnoracial groups (hybrid gangs). The 2002 Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs further indicated that while youth gangs are composed predominantly of young men (94%), increasingly numbers of young females are involved in youth gangs in some parts of the country. Chief criminal activities of youth gangs include assault, drug trafficking, burglary, vandalism and intimidation and extortion. In Alberta, the police agencies that participated in the survey reported the onset of youth gang activity in the province in the mid-1980s. Most believed that the problem of youth gangs is getting worse (80%). Interestingly, they identified youth gangs as consisting primarily of First Nations (58%), Hispanic/Latino (33%) and Caucasians (8%). While the 2002 national survey offered a useful overview of youth gangs in Canada, it only reflected the perspective of law enforcement officials and was constrained by various methodological issues such as standards of data collection, the extent of law

enforcement officials' knowledge about youth gang issues, politicization of responses, and subjective definitions of youth gang among the survey participants.

A handful of studies have further elaborated on the phenomenon of youth gangs in Canada. Wortley and Tanner (2006) surveyed 396 street youth and 3,393 high school students from 30 schools in Toronto between 1998 and 2000 to understand the extent and nature of youth gang activity. The findings indicated that 4% of high school respondents and 15% of street youth respondents were involved in criminal gang activity. Among the activities most frequently reported by current criminal gang members were physical assaults (91%), drug use (85%), possession of weapons (70%), drug trafficking (51%) and burglary (35%). Criminal gang members were more likely than all other youth to report that they had experienced criminal victimization, including major and minor theft, vandalism, physical threats, threats with a weapon, physical assault, assault with a weapon, and sexual assault. The study also found that criminal gang involvement was more pronounced among male high school youth, younger students, youth from low socioeconomic status or single parent households, and youth with low academic and career aspirations or who struggle with social alienation.

Mathews (1993) interviewed 12 gang involved youth (mostly males) between the age of 14 and 21 in Toronto. The author found that youth gangs can be unintentionally or intentionally formed, and that young people get involved in gangs for protection and safety, power and control, thrills and money. Based on the results, Mathews proposed a gang involvement cycle model, consisting of seven successive stages: awareness of individual needs; joining or forming a gang; fulfillment of individual needs and rapid transformation of self; crisis event for group cohesion; individual reassessment of membership; exit; or entrenchment. The proposed model was an early theoretical effort in Canada to conceptualize gang involvement as a process and to identify the various decision points and stages of commitment a young person experiences during the process of becoming involved in a youth gang. This linear model, however, did not account for complex interactions between youth and their environments and, in the context of ethnoracial diversity, the immigrant and/or racialized experiences that may affect young peoples' decisions to become involved in gang activity.

In another Canadian study, Gordon (1993) reviewed the files of 41 gang members held in British Columbia's provincial correctional centres and interviewed 25 of these culturally diverse inmates to learn about their gang membership and activities. The members reported that they were not coerced or otherwise pressured into joining gangs, and that they gradually drifted toward gang involvement through their peer or family connections. Many came from backgrounds with persistent family and school problems. The members also indicated that they joined gangs for material and/or psychological rewards associated with membership. Though some of participants in the study came from immigrant families, Gordon did not elaborate on the connections between their experience as immigrants and ethnoracial minorities in Canada and their gang involvement.

Gang Involvement of Youth from Immigrant Families

While the overall youth crime rate in Canada has steadily declined over the years, there is a growing public perception that more youth from immigrant families are involved in criminal gang activity. Fuelled by sensationalized media headlines and reports on incidents of gang violence and the reoccurring suggestion that gang activities have escalated (see CBC, 2008; Chapman, 2006; Dawson, 1997; Mofina, 1992; Rassel, 2003, 2008, 2010; Rassel & Tsang, 2003; Semmens, 2001; Toneguzzi, 1989), the general public has expressed increasing fear of growing gang violence and concerns about criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. In a recent survey of Calgarians commissioned by the Calgary Police Service, Environics Research Group (2008) found that, in spite of the downward trend in crime rates in Calgary, 73% of the respondents felt that crime in Calgary has worsened, and that youth related crimes and gang violence were their greatest concerns. In another poll conducted by CanWest News

Service and Global TV in 2006 (see Rassel, 2006b), 47% of Calgarian respondents indicated that they fear that gang violence has increased in their community. About 67% of Calgarian respondents also indicated that they believe some ethnic groups are more responsible for crime than others. Unfortunately, the lack of public crime statistics related to immigration status, race and ethnicity has seriously impeded research efforts to inform the public about the prevalence, patterns of and changes in criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families.

At present, there are few studies examining the crime-immigration connection in Canada. Citing results from their 1998-2000 survey of 3,393 high school students and 396 street youth in Toronto, Wortley and Tanner (2006) argued that, contrary to the growing public concern about "immigrant youth gangs," serious youth activity is not imported from other countries into Canada. They pointed out that Canadian born high school students were slightly more likely to report current membership in a criminal gang (5%) than students born in other countries (4%), and that the likelihood of immigrant youth reporting current criminal gang membership increased with their length of time in Canada. Wortley and Tanner asserted that the issue of youth gangs is a domestic phenomenon with roots in the Canadian experience. The researchers, however, pointed out that although gang activity is not related to immigration status, gang membership is quite strongly related to racial background. Their data showed that black, Hispanic and Aboriginal youth were more likely to report gang activity than youth from other racial backgrounds. These findings are consistent with the results of the 2002 Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs, which indicated that a majority of gang members are visible minorities (about 60%) and Aboriginal (22%) (Astwood Strategy Corporation, 2004).

The assertion that serious youth activity is not imported from other crime prone nations is further supported by the results of the 2006 International Youth Survey. McMullen (2009) examined self-reported delinquency among Canadian-born (both parents born in Canada), second generation (at least one parent born outside Canada) and first generation (born outside Canada) youth between 13 and 15 years of age in grades 7 to 9. The analysis showed that Canadian-born youth reported the highest rates of property related delinquency, while immigrant youth who migrated to Canada after the age of 5 reported the lowest rates. With respect to violent delinquency, the results demonstrated that rates were highest for second generation youth, while both youth who migrated to Canada after the age of 5 and Canadian-born youth reported the lowest rates. McMullen's research provided further glimpses into the social realities facing youth of various generations. For some types of victimization, such as being bullied or having things stolen, second generation youth and foreign born youth reported higher rates of victimization than did Canadian-born youth. Also, rates of self-reported delinquency were lower for youth who aspired to a university education, who spent most of their time with their families and who, in the case of violent delinquency, reported having a close relationship with their mothers. The research, however, pointed out one exception: Given similar relationships with families and friends, second-generation youth remained at higher risk of reporting violent delinquency than their Canadian-born counterparts.

In a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with 125 known gang members of diverse racial backgrounds (mostly males), Wortley and Tanner (2008) identified racial differences in the reasons or justifications behind gang involvement. They found that the members attributed their gang involvement to neighbourhood, peer, and family influences; protection; support and companionship; status and respect; money; and racial injustice. Wortley and Tanner further pointed out that racial minority gang members were more likely to highlight racial injustice and social inequality as reasons for gang membership than their white counterparts. The authors concluded,

Thus, it appears that gang membership for some minority youth may be more than a simple quest for material goods, protection, and status. Our results suggest that gang membership can also be experienced as a profound act of pride, defiance, and rebellion. It is a means of expressing a belief that society is

fundamentally unfair – of demonstrating resistance to the rules of a racist, oppressive society.(p.205)

Though the Wortley and Tanner study offered some critical insights into the interactions between racial minority youth and the dominant Canadian society, it did not elaborate on the processes by which they gravitate towards gang activity.

Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) interviewed 12 representatives from social service agencies, community groups and the criminal justice and forensic mental health systems who frequently come into contact with immigrant and refugee youth involved in criminal and/or gang activity. The stakeholders identified a wide range of risk factors related to family functioning (settlement adaptation stress, family poverty, lack of family and social support, intergenerational gaps), individual experiences (pre-migration trauma, poor decision making and interpersonal skills, learning disabilities, risky behaviours, use of violence to solve problems, distrust of authorities, lack of personal and cultural identity, sense of powerlessness and hopelessness), peer relations (isolation and exclusion, peer pressure and influence), school challenges (academic, cultural and linguistic barriers, bullying) and community life (access to role models, intra-cultural differences and conflicts, lack of safe and affordable housing, inappropriate and inaccessible service programs). The stakeholders also identified various protective factors related to family support (extended family support, parents' education), individual qualities (cultural identity and belonging, gender, individual strength and resilience), peer relations (intercultural programs and relationships), school support (specific school-based ESL, life skills, employment programs, positive relationships with caring adults in schools, leadership opportunities), and community support (faith-based activities, cultural and youth programs, homework and educational programs, mentorship). Though the study presented a holistic approach to understanding the various layers immigrant youth's experience, it relied solely on the indirect accounts from stakeholders and lacked a coherent explanation of pathways or processes of gang involvement of immigrant youth.

In a follow-up study, Gordon (2000) interviewed 128 inmates of diverse cultural backgrounds in the correctional centers in British Columbia to determine why individuals become involved in criminal business organizations, street gangs and "wanna-be" groups. The author found that those who belonged to structured criminal business organizations tended to be older, educated, and foreign-born males who benefited from a sociocultural bond and alternative means to address their cultural and economic marginality in a predominantly Euro-Canadian environment. Gordon further elaborated that semi-structured street gangs tended to attract young Canadian- and foreign-born visible minorities who had low levels of education and came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These young adults became involved in gang activity to achieve a sense of belonging in a friendly, supportive and intra-ethnic social network. In addition, many sought to escape from, and find rewarding alternatives to, exceedingly unpleasant family lives. Gordon attributed the involvement of young teenagers who belonged to the loosely structured "wanna-be" groups to their desire to find a replacement for their absent or rejecting families.

Kwok (2008) focused on ethno-specific nuances in his examination of the experience of 15 Asian Canadian youth involved with the criminal justice system in Calgary. The findings identified various structural conditions that shaped the experiences of Asian youth in the criminal justice system. The participants reported that they had experienced discrimination at school and in their interactions with the police and correctional personnel in the detention centre. They indicated that cultural values such as saving face and respect for authority had prevented families from seeking help in the community and that their families attributed the young persons' wrongdoings to inadequate parenting rather than to misjudgments by institutions. The participants further elaborated on varying levels of family support, indicating strong support for those who committed crimes against persons, such as assaults, and weaker support for those who committed property-related crimes or belonged to criminal gangs. This particular study was attuned to the sociocultural realities of Asian Canadian youth and

provided an overview of the experience of Asian Canadian youth in the criminal justice system. The findings, however, were rather diluted due to a broad focus on the overall experience of Asian Canadian youth prior to, during and after their criminal involvement.

Outside of Canada, some contemporary studies have focused on criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. Choo (2007) combined participant observation and interviewing to study youth gangs among Korean Americans in New York and New Jersey. The researcher identified a three-stage group process of gang activity among Korean American youth: onset (the emergence of the group), persistence (maintenance of gang activities), and desistence (dissociation of group members from the group or breakdown of the group). Choo attributed gang involvement of Korean American youth to identity crisis, intergenerational gaps between youth and parents, deficient parenting (lack of supervision and long working hours), association with delinquent peers, problems in school, and street associations. Although the study offered some specific insights about gang involvement of Korean American youth, it focused disproportionately on intra-ethnic dynamics, and overlooked interactions between Korean American youth and their larger communities. The suggested group process, therefore, did not adequately elaborate on the specific experiences of immigrant and/or racialized youth.

In another U.S. study, Water (1999) used historical immigration data from California to explain why waves of youthful crime had emerged in some immigrant populations. The author suggested that waves of youth crime were not inherent to particular cultural groups, but rather had emerged out of intergenerational parent-child conflict due to the unusual suddenness and intensity of change associated with migration. Water further identified the process of shedding one set of pre-existing social norms in exchange for another, which inevitably involves misinterpretation and misunderstanding about the bases for normative action on the part of both of immigrants and the receiving community. The notion of “shedding” highlights a fundamental difference between Canadian multiculturalism discourse and American assimilation ideology and its influence on critical examinations of interactions between immigrant youth and the receiving society.

In conclusion, the body of knowledge on youth gangs in Canada is still in its infancy. Even though there is no evidence suggesting a youth gang epidemic in Canada, the increased media coverage of gang violence has contributed to an increase in fear and in concern about public safety. With respect to criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families, a limited number of Canadian studies have cursorily identified the risk factors related to family functioning, peer relations, school challenges, community life, and socioeconomic status. The current literature, however, lacks coherent explanations of motivation or of the pathways or processes leading to gang involvement of youth from immigrant families.

CANADIAN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CRIMINAL GANG INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH FROM IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Parallel to the limited research on criminal gang involvement among youth from immigrant families is a lack of contemporary theoretical explanations of the social phenomenon from the Canadian perspective. Among the few theoretical efforts to understand the immigration and crime connection is Wortley's synthesis of four explanatory frameworks: the importation model, the cultural conflict model, the strain model and the bias model (Wortley, 2004, 2009). The importation model focuses explicitly on the relationship between immigration and crime. It contends that some individuals, including those who belong to international criminal gangs or terrorist organizations, migrated to Canada with clear intentions to commit crimes. In the context of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families, the importation model would argue that those youth who came from crime-prone nations would more likely engage in criminal activity in Canada. This theoretical standpoint has been resoundingly proven irrelevant in the existing academic literature (see Martinez & Valenzuela, 2006; McMullen, 2009;

Wortley & Tanner, 2006). In public discourse, however, the importation model often has been used to disguise anti-immigration and racist sentiments. For instance, in his infamous speech delivered at the T.P. Boyle Founder's Lecture at the Fraser Institute in 2005, Gwyn Morgan, the former CEO of Encana, attributed gang violence to "lawless immigrants...from countries where the culture is dominated by violence and lawlessness" (Morgan, 2005). Another prominent public figure, Member of Parliament Lee Richardson, contended during the 2008 federal election campaign that

Crimes in Canada aren't committed by people that "grew up next door," but newcomers to the country...[who] don't have the same background in terms of the stable communities we had 20, 30 years ago in our cities...and don't have the same respect for authority or people's person or property. (MP Richardson as quoted in Klaszus, 2008)

The second explanatory framework, the strain model, focuses on tensions in relationships between immigrants/ethnoracial minorities and Canadian society at large that result in social, cultural, political and economic marginalization of immigrants and ethnoracial minorities, and subsequently push some people toward criminal activity. This model argues that some immigrant and ethnoracial minority youth, frustrated by lack of opportunities, racism and poverty, engage in criminal gang activity. An established body of literature has demonstrated the differential, unequal realities facing immigrants and ethnoracial minorities (Fleras & Elliott, 2006; Ngo, 2009; Ngo & Schliefer, 2005; Wortley, 2004). However, only a few studies have explicitly addressed how negative life experiences in Canadian society have contributed to the choice of some immigrant and ethnoracial minority youth to embark on criminal gang lifestyles (Kwok, 2008; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Wortley & Tanner, 2008).

The third explanatory framework, the cultural conflict model, focuses on the intersection of immigration and culture. It asserts that some recent immigrants maintain cultural or religious practices that contravene the laws or customs of Canada. Proponents of this theoretical standpoint argue that some immigrant youth came from cultures that condone certain practices, such as violence, prostitution, and use or sale of drugs that are not legally accepted in Canada. This framework is problematic since it simplistically equates certain policies and practices condoned by the existing government in power (often through undemocratic means) and/or byproducts of political and social upheavals as cultural practices. It does not account for the fact that, in spite of coming from diverse countries where aspects of the law may be in conflict with Canadian legal standards, immigrants are generally less likely to commit crimes than their Canadian-born counterparts (McMullen, 2009; Wortley & Tanner, 2006). The cultural conflict model, like the importation model, has been used to promote anti-immigration and racist sentiments in public discourse.

The fourth explanatory framework, the bias model, argues that over-representation of certain ethnoracial groups in crime statistics is due to systemic discrimination and bias in the criminal justice system. Crime, in this theoretical context, is a racialized experience for some ethnoracial groups. Differential treatments of ethnoracial minorities in the criminal justice system have been well documented (Chan & Mirchandani, 2002; Currie, 1994; Henry, Hastings, & Freer, 1996; Penn, et al., 2006; Roberts, 2001; Roberts & Doob, 1997; Satzewich, 1998; Tonry, 1995, 1997). For example, the Commission on Systemic Discrimination in the Ontario Criminal Justice System established that Canadians of African descent are over-represented in the correctional system and are more likely to be stopped and detained by the police, and to receive differential outcomes in sentencing (Williams, 1994). In a survey of 251 officers in two cosmopolitan cities in Canada, Ungerleider (1992) found that 25% expressed confusion and irrationally negative attitudes toward minorities. A survey of residents of Ontario found that the majority of Chinese, white and black respondents agreed that blacks are treated differently from whites by the police in Ontario, and that black respondents who reported having direct contact with the police were more likely to perceive injustice in the Canadian justice system (Wortley, 1996). The 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey further indicated that, among

the 1.6 million Canadians who reported experiencing discrimination either sometimes or often, 12% felt that they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment when dealing with the police or courts in Canada during the past five years (Statistics Canada, 2003). The survey also found that among those who had sometimes or often experienced discrimination in Canada, visible minorities were twice as likely to report unfair treatment or discrimination by the police and courts as their non-visible minority counterparts (17% versus 8%).

Overall, there is a lack of coherent theoretical examination from a specifically Canadian perspective of the emerging social phenomenon of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. The four prominent models, namely the importation model, the cultural conflict model, the strain model, and the bias model, have provided some insights into underlying assumptions about immigration, and in varying degrees have accounted for intergroup dynamics in contemporary Canadian society.

PROMINENT THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON YOUTH CRIME

Criminological research and theory development is in its infancy in Canada. In contrast, a definite body of theory and research to explain youth crime has been developed in the United States. While theories and research are confined within particular social, cultural, political, economic, geographical and historical contexts, it is worthwhile to review how prominent schools of thought on crime in the United States might extend their explanations to youth gangs. Since this study views criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families as a psychosocial and sociological process, the following review of prominent explanations of youth crime will be limited to psychological and sociological theories.

Learning-Behavioural Perspective

From the perspective of the learning-behavioural school of psychology, criminal behaviour develops through the learning principles articulated by Pavlov and Skinner, including conditioning, extinction, reinforcement and modeling. In one of the earliest theoretical works based on behaviourist tenets, Sutherland (1939) posited a differential association theory arguing that criminal behaviour is learned in the process of communication and interaction within intimate personal groups. Sutherland focused on two basic elements of learning, the content of what is learned (techniques for committing crimes, appropriate motives, drives, rationalizations, attitudes and other factors favourable to violation of the law) and the process by which the learning takes place. Decades later, Bandura and Walter (1963), drawing upon reinforcement principles, stipulated that when aggression at home is rewarded rather than punished, chances for aggressive youth behaviour in the community increase. Aker (1973) linked criminal behaviours of youth living in socially impoverished areas to the availability of conventional reinforcements that encourage unlawful behaviours. More recently, Centerwall (1989) argued that children who have exposure to a great deal of violence in the media are likely to model those aggressive behaviours.

Ecological Perspective

According to the ecological perspective, rapid social change results in social disorganization defined as a decline in stable values and diminished effectiveness of localized institutions and informal social control forces in communities and neighbourhoods (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Such phenomena are conducive to the development of geographical areas of crime. Drawing upon the study of plant and animal ecology, Park (1925) articulated a theory of human ecology based on race, ethnicity, income, occupation, and/or geographic divisions. According to Park, the North American city as a super-organism with many natural areas where different types of people live. Park suggested that the balance of nature might change through the interactive processes of invasion, dominance and succession. Burgess (1925) devised the concentric zone

model, which portrayed the city as a series of five rings, namely Zone I (central business district), Zone II (transitional area populated by unskilled workers, recent immigrants, etc.), Zone III (working class homes), Zone IV (middle-class homes) and Zone V (commuter suburbs). Burgess hypothesized that it was in Zone II that crime would flourish due to the disturbance of biotic balance and social equilibrium. This hypothesis was supported by Frederic Thrasher in his influential study of gangs in Chicago. According to Thrasher (1927), most gangs would be found within the transition zone and operate within this zone's relatively sophisticated structures and traditions. Thrasher argued that gangs exist to serve as substitutes for what society fails to give to individuals.

Almost two decades later, Shaw and McKay (1942) extended the concentric zone model in their study of delinquency and proposed that the root problem of delinquency is normative conflict in a geographical community due to physical status, economic status and population composition. They developed the notion of a "delinquency area" into a cultural transmission theory of delinquency. Theoretically, according to (Shaw & McKay, 1942), particular forms of crime become a cultural norm within transitional areas (Zone II) and therefore are learned and passed on through the generations in the same way that language, roles and attitudes are transmitted.

Strain Perspective

According to the strain perspective tensions and discrepancies in social structures are conduits to crime and delinquency. Embracing the belief that crime is normal and necessary for social change, Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, laid the foundation for the strain perspective with his theory of *anomie*. According to Durkheim, certain individuals, feeling a loss of orientation and not able to identify with societal norms and values, feel free of the restrictions of the society and consequently are prone to commit crime (Durkheim, 1897/1952). Building upon Durkheim's theory of *anomie*, Merton (Merton, 1938, 1957) examined two aspects of society to explain delinquency: culture and social structure. Merton contended that there are contradictions between cultural goals, which emphasize amassing of accumulated wealth by all members of society and cultural means or institutionalized structures, which limit the possibilities of certain groups reaching such goals. Such discrepancies cause strains, which then lead many individuals to resort to crime and delinquency to achieve material success.

Subsequent scholars have proposed versions of strain theory, some with a focus on gang subcultures. Cohen (1955) proposed the middle class measuring rod theory, contending that lower class children, experiencing difficulty achieving success in an educational system dominated by middle class values, feel rejected and inferior. Therefore, they form groups with other rejected lower class youth, including criminal gangs, in order to give meaning to their lives. Walter (1958) went further, asserting that the values of lower class culture produce deviance because their six characteristic focal concerns, namely trouble (getting into fights), toughness (masochism), smartness (ability to con), excitement (thrill seeking), fate (luck as key ingredient for success), and autonomy (being in control) are naturally in discord with middle-class values. In their differential opportunity structure theory, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) also posited that marked discrepancies between culturally induced aspirations among lower class youth and the possibility of achieving them by legitimate means pressure youth to form delinquent subcultures, including criminal gangs, conflict-related gangs, and drug-related or retreatist gangs.

Social Control Perspective

The social control perspective is unique in that instead of focusing on what motivates individuals to commit crime, it seeks to understand the controlling factors that restrain individuals from partaking in criminal activities. Reiss (1951) and Reckless (1961) contended that both personal controls such as a good self-concept, goal directedness, realistic objectives,

tolerance of frustration and identification with lawfulness, and social controls such as family and peer influences, act as the intervening forces to prevent an individual from committing criminal acts. Arguing that crime does not always occur due to a complete disconnect between young people and social norms and values, Sykes and Matza (1957) and Matza (1964) proposed the concept of "drift," which occurs when young people, finding themselves in situations with loosened social structures, justify their unlawful behaviours, release themselves from moral constraints and engage in delinquency. Focusing on the content of interaction between young people and social structures, namely attachment, commitment, involvement and belief, Hirschi (1969) theorized that individuals who are tightly bonded to social groups such as their families and peers are less likely to commit unlawful acts than those who are loosely bonded.

Labeling Perspective

With a basic belief that behaviours are not intrinsically criminal, a number of theorists have put forward the labeling perspective to examine the effects of labeling or societal reactions on the self-image and behaviour of individuals. Tannenbaum (1938) coined the term, "dramatization of evil," to describe the making of a criminal as "a process of tagging, defining, identifying, segregating, describing, emphasizing, making conscious and self-conscious," which then becomes "a way of stimulating, suggesting, emphasizing and evoking the very traits that are complained of" (pp. 19-20). Building upon Tannenbaum's thesis, Lemert (1951, 1967) classified nonconforming behaviours into primary deviance and secondary deviance, with the first being associated with isolated, relatively insignificant rule breaking, such as petty theft and classroom misbehaviour, and the latter referring to the construction of a deviant identity as a result of social reaction to the initial act. Lemert conceptualized the labeling process as a series of successive, increasingly punitive responses to an initial simple nonconforming act, which eventually lead to the individual's acceptance of a deviant status. In Lemert's view, social control is not simply a response to deviant behaviour, but plays an active and propelling role in the development of deviance. Taking the analysis of the relationship of societal reactions to social production of deviance a step further, Becker (1963) suggested that not only do societal reactions to nonconforming acts encourage further deviance, but that socially dominant groups create deviance by making rules that equate infraction with deviance and then applying those rules to particular groups of people and labeling them as outsiders.

Conflict Perspective

All the sociological perspectives presented thus far have assumed a consensual approach to crime; that is that members of society equally value the legitimacy of governing institutions, laws and social definitions. The critical/conflict perspective, on the other hand, maintains that society is more adequately explained as rife with tensions and contradictions and the study of crime, therefore, ought to examine structural inequality and structural conflict.

Influenced by classical Marxism, Bonger (1936) proposed a theory of economic causation of crime, suggesting a causal link between crime and economic and social conditions. According to Bonger, crimes are concentrated in the lower classes because the capitalist class structure provides the bourgeoisie with the economic power and political force, which allow them to control and impose punishment on the working class, and equate the definition of crime with harm or threat of harm to their property and business interests. Bonger saw the reorganization of the means of production and the development of a classless society as the only way to solve the crime problem. Quinney (1970, 1974), in his theory of the social reality of crime, contended that structures of power, authority and interest make up a society's context for defining crime. He elaborated on the social construction of crime: (1) the official definition of crime is created by the dominant class; (2) the formulation of criminal definitions describes behaviours that conflict with the interests of the dominant class; (3) criminal definitions are applied by the class that has the power to shape the enforcement and administration of criminal law; (4) the less powerful

segments of society, which are not represented when the definitions of crime are created, are more likely to develop behaviour patterns identified in criminal definitions; (5) those in power construct and disseminate public conceptions of crime; and (6) the social reality of crime is therefore constructed by the formulation and application of definitions of crime, the development of behaviour patterns related to criminal definition, and the construction of criminal conceptions.

Moving away from class concepts, Vold (1958) presented a group conflict theory based on conflict of interest. According to Vold, society consists of a congeries of groups held together in a shifting but dynamic equilibrium of opposing interests and purposes. A great deal of criminal behaviour, therefore, results from the conflict among groups struggling over control of power in the political organization of the state. Laws are passed in response to the struggles of groups with competing interests. Some criminal behaviours are committed in accordance with norms that were previously acceptable, but that have become illegal because of successful efforts of competing interest groups.

In summary, the review of the criminological literature has revealed minimal theoretical efforts to examine connections between crime and immigration. Immigrant and racialized experiences involve complex intertwining between individual adaptation and social interaction. Prominent criminological theories, which tend to emphasize one or another central contributing factor, fail to provide a comprehensive explanation of criminal involvement of immigrants in general, and youth from immigrant families in particular. The psychological theories generally offer no insight about behavioural manifestations relating to acculturative challenges and the development of cultural identity that are common among youth from immigrant families. A number of sociological theories from the ecological, strain, subcultural, social control, labeling and conflict perspectives variably promise to account for certain aspects of the acculturation process, particularly with respect to socioeconomic dynamics and intergroup relations. Nevertheless, as Mears (Mears, 2001) pointed out, these theories have not been systematically applied or assessed in relation to immigration-related crime and the little research that exists either does not consistently support these theories or suggests a much more complicated picture than each theory alone can provide or can accommodate.

SUMMARY

Youth from immigrant families have established a strong presence in Canadian society. In fact, one in five young Canadians under the age of 18 is either a first generation immigrant youth or second generation Canadian youth born into an immigrant family (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006). The emerging body of knowledge in Canada offers glimpses into the socioeconomic and cultural realities facing youth from immigrant families. First generation immigrant youth often experience linguistic, acculturative, educational, psychological and socioeconomic challenges (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Beiser, 1999; Berry, 2006; Hamilton, 2005; Hernandez, 1999; Kunz & Hanvey, 2000; Pumariega, 2005; Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003). Many also encounter a wide range of barriers and challenges in their interactions with various Canadian institutions in the areas of social services, education, health, and justice (Cooper, 2006; Ngo & Schliefer, 2005). Although second generation Canadian-born youth, as a group, tend to fare well economically, those who are visible minorities have experienced significant inequities with respect to educational attainment and participation in the labour market (Aydemir, et al., 2009; Corak, 2008; Palameta, 2007; Picot, 2008). Second generation youth from immigrant families have also experienced tremendous sociocultural challenges with respect to competing cultural expectations, cultural identity and intercultural interactions (Mokbel, 2005; Sundar, 2008a). Regardless of their generational status, visible minority youth have been subjected to discrimination and racialization, and have struggled to achieve a strong sense of Canadian identity (Desai & Subramanian, 2003; Khanlou, et al., 2008; Rajiva, 2005; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2003; Thomas, 2005).

In examining criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families, it is important to consider the broad context of youth crime in Canada. Overall, youth crime rates in Canada have steadily declined in recent years (Wallace, 2009). Contrary to the increased media coverage of gang violence, the social phenomenon of youth gangs in Canada is not an epidemic (Chettleburgh, 2007). Most young Canadians are law-abiding citizens. A small number of Canadian studies have suggested that youth with persistent family and school problems become involved in gangs for a variety of reasons, including protection and safety, power and control, respect, thrills, psychological rewards and money (Gordon, 1994; Mathews, 1993; Wortley & Tanner, 2008).

Currently, there is a lack of statistical information on crime with reference to immigrant status, race and ethnicity. Consequently, it is not possible to establish the prevalence and patterns of or changes in criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. There is a growing public perception that more youth from immigrant families are involved in criminal gang activities (Rassel, 2006a). A few studies, however, have shown that foreign-born youth are less likely than Canadian-born youth to report criminal gang involvement (Wortley & Tanner, 2006). These studies have also warned that the likelihood of foreign-born youth to report criminal gang involvement increases with their length of time in Canada, and that criminal gang memberships are disproportionate among certain racial minority youth. Most studies reject the notion that serious crime among youth from immigrant families was imported to Canada from other crime-prone nations. Rather, their evidence suggests that the issue of youth gangs is a domestic phenomenon with roots in the Canadian experience. A few studies have cursorily identified the risk factors related to family functioning, peer relations, school challenges, community life, experience of racial injustice, and socioeconomic status (Gordon, 2000; Kwok, 2008; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Wortley & Tanner, 2008).

The Canadian theoretical perspectives on criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families are of limited value. The four prominent models, namely the importation model, the cultural conflict model, the strain model and the bias model, have examined the underlying assumptions about immigration, and in varying degrees accounted for the intergroup dynamics in contemporary Canadian society (Wortley, 2004). With an explicit focus on the relationship between immigration and crime, the importation model contends that those youth who come from crime-prone nations are likely to commit crimes in Canada. The strain model, on the other hand, attributes criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families to tensions in their relationships with Canadian society at large that result in frustration with their marginalized status. The cultural conflict model focuses on the intersection of immigration and culture. Proponents of this theoretical standpoint would argue that some youth come from cultures that condone certain practices such as violence, prostitution, and the use or sale of drugs that are not legally accepted in Canada. Finally, the bias model suggests that over-representation of certain ethnoracial groups in crime statistics is due to systemic discrimination and bias in the criminal justice system. These models speak to different aspects of the experience of youth from immigrant families in their interactions with Canadian society. More research is needed to further elaborate on and confirm these models.

In contrast to the emerging body of knowledge on crime in Canada, the established field of criminology in the United States offers notably different explanations of the causes of youth crime. For example, learning-behavioural theorists would focus on the process of acquiring criminal attitudes and techniques through the youths' interactions with negative influences in their immediate family and social networks (Aker, 1973; Bandura & Walter, 1963; Centerwall, 1989; Sutherland, 1939). Those who promote the social control perspective would attribute youth crime to weakening social bonds between these young people and their social networks of families, friends and teachers, as well as to deteriorating personal control on the part of some young people (Hirschi, 1969; Reckless, 1961; Reiss, 1951; Sykes & Matza, 1957). The ecological school of thought, on the other hand, would draw attention to the physical status, socioeconomic conditions and the sociodemography of a neighbourhood that together have

contribute to social disequilibrium (Burgess, 1925; Curry & Decker, 2003; Park, 1925; Shaw & McKay, 1942; Spergel, 1995; Thrasher, 1927). Proponents of the strain perspective attribute youth crime to tensions and discrepancies within social structures characterized by a lack of legitimate opportunities for young people (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Cohen, 1955; Merton, 1957; Walter, 1958). Focusing on societal responses which affect the self-image and behaviour of individuals, theorist adopting a labeling perspective would argue that negative public attitudes towards and biased treatment of young people, immigrants and individuals of certain ethnoracial backgrounds in the criminal justice system, have led some young individuals to internalize negative self-identities and to act according to self-fulfilling prophecies (Becker, 1963; Chan & Mirchandani, 2002; Jedwab, 2006; Lemert, 1951; Tannenbaum, 1938). Finally, the critical and conflict perspective would focus squarely on social, economic and political structures that construct the social reality of crime through unfair differential treatment of disadvantaged populations (Bonger, 1936; Hawkins, 1995; Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 2000; Quinney, 1974).

Some critical observations emerge from the comprehensive review of the literature related to youth from immigrant families, trends in youth crime, criminal involvement of youth from immigrant families, diverse criminological perspectives and acculturation theories. There is limited research exploring the relationship between the sociocultural realities facing youth from immigrant families and their criminal gang involvement. Only a few studies have used self-reported surveys, indirect accounts or interviews with immigrant and racial minorities to begin elaborating on the extent and nature of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. Further, the existing criminological theories and research have neither been attentive to nor adequately explained the social phenomenon of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families, particularly from the Canadian perspective. The limited research in this area is characterized by the absence of coherent explanations of motivation and pathways or processes of gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. At this critical juncture in research and theoretical development, thus, there is a unique opportunity to draw upon the lived experience of youth from immigrant families to describe and explain their criminal gang involvement in the context of contemporary, multicultural Canadian society.

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3 | METHODOLOGY

This study was intended to facilitate an in-depth understanding of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families in the Canadian context, and to promote collaborative action among community members, service providers and decision makers in diverse sectors to support high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families in Calgary. These theoretical and practical objectives demanded an innovative approach to research that would ensure both academic rigour and practical relevance. This chapter accounts for the research design and procedures of the study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research involved the interplay of two processes: the participatory group process of the collaborative inquiry network made up of representatives from the community, social service, education, government, justice, health and media sectors; and the inquiry into the lived experience of gang involved youth and former gang members from immigrant families. The participatory group process of the collaborative inquiry network involved recurring cycles of action and reflection. The stakeholders of the diverse sectors provided strategic advices for the inquiry into the lived experience of gang involved youth and former gang members, critically reflected on what they learned from the findings of the interviews with gang involved participants, and collaboratively developed and implemented strategies to deal with the issues they identified.

The second process of the research involved the inquiry into the lived experience of 30 gang involved youth and former gang members from immigrant families. It involved joint data collection and analyses of the interviews with the gang involved research participants. The emerging findings and theoretical insights from the interviews were regularly presented to the members of the collaborative inquiry network and informed the critical dialogues, planning and action.

This research used two research methodologies, namely participatory action research (PAR) and grounded theory, to inform the two integrated research processes. It used PAR to guide the overarching participatory group process of multi-sectoral stakeholders. As a research methodology, PAR is concerned with practical knowing, and seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). PAR, thus, focuses on process, participation of diverse stakeholders, integration of reflective inquiry and action, and empowerment of stakeholders. The collaborative research process involves the recurring cycles of reflection-action-reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Smith, 1997). The study used PAR to facilitate group process, critical dialogues and collaborative action among multi-sectoral partners.

The research further used grounded theory to guide the inquiry into the lived experience of gang involved youth and former gang members from immigrant families. Grounded theory is an inductive research methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The goal of grounded theory is to generate theoretical constructs that explain the action in the social context under study (Stern, 1980). Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The study used the grounded theory methodology to guide the cyclical process of data collection through one on one interviews with the gang involved participants and ongoing analysis of the transcripts of the interviews.

Supported by a team of advisors, which included the representatives of the sponsoring organization (Centre for Newcomers), the selective service partners and the dissertation committees, Mr. Hieu Van Ngo, a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Social Work, at the University of Calgary, facilitated the participatory group process of the collaborative inquiry network and led the inquiry process into the lived experiences of gang involved youth and former gang members from immigrant families. The researcher served as a link between the members of the collaborative inquiry network and the gang involved participants. He provided the members of the collaborative inquiry network with regular, detailed updates on the emerging learning from the interviews with gang involved participants. He also timely incorporated strategic research advices and questions from the members of the collaborative inquiry network into the subsequent interviews with the gang involved participants.

PARTICIPATORY GROUP PROCESS OF THE COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY NETWORK

Recruitment and Membership

The collaboration among stakeholders started with a small group of community and service partners in August 2006. Motivated by their shared concerns about the increased level of gang violence, especially among some young people from immigrant families, the partners came together to consider ways to mobilize and work with community stakeholders from all sectors to deal with youth gang issues in Calgary.

Over the next two years, the stakeholders learned about effective practice in dealing with youth gang issues, consulted with and involved more community members in the working group, and conceptualized the *Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime* initiative (see Chapter One for the description of the initiative). The strategy for community engagement and mobilization which supported the work of the collaborative inquiry network was integral to this initiative. The stakeholders envisioned that the collaborative inquiry network made up of diverse stakeholders from all sectors would do foundational work to establish greater understanding about issues facing gang involved youth from immigrant families, and develop a preliminary practical framework for effective support of this youth population. They further envisioned that the groundwork done by the collaborative inquiry network would inform all other aspects of the *Effective Community Response to Immigrant Youth Gang Crime* initiative, and mobilize more community stakeholders from diverse sectors in the development and implementation of a city wide action plan to support gang involved and high risk youth from immigrant families in the Fall of 2010.

The founding members of the collaborative group established the two basic criteria for the selection of the prospective members of the collaborative inquiry network: that they should (1) be a member of an ethnocultural or geographic community, a social service provider, a researcher, or a representative of an institution (justice, education, health, social services, etc), and (2) be concerned about issues related to gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. They used three key strategies to reach the potential members of the collaborative inquiry network. First, they circulated the recruitment notice online in various professional and social networks. Second, they printed and circulated the recruitment notice to various professional and community groups. Third, they identified and arranged meetings with, or sent individualized invitations to selected stakeholders in the health, justice, education, social services and community sectors to invite their participation in the collaborative inquiry network.

A total of 32 representatives of 21 organizations and 6 ethnocultural communities participated in the collaborative inquiry network (see Table 3.1 for the list of organizations and communities represented). The members came from the justice, health, social services, education, government, media and community domains. They brought to the process their

diverse expertise and experience as front line staff, program coordinators, policy analysts, policy makers, funders, senior managers, reporters, researchers, and ethnocultural members and leaders. They were also diverse with respect to age, gender, educational background and ethnicity.

Table 3.1

List of participating organizations and communities

Names of Organizations/Communities
Alberta Health Services (Youth Addiction Services, Healthy Diverse Populations, Population and Public Health)
Alberta Human Rights Citizenship Multiculturalism Education Fund
Big Brothers and Sisters of Calgary
Boys and Girls Club of Calgary
Calgary Board of Education
Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth
Calgary Immigrant Services
Calgary John Howard Society
Calgary Police Service
Calgary Young Offenders' Centre
CBC Radio
Centre for Newcomers
Child and Family Services of Alberta
Child and Youth Friendly of Calgary
Citizenship Immigration Canada (Multiculturalism Program, Settlement Program)
City of Calgary (Community & Neighbourhood Services, Social Planning)
Elizabeth Fry Society
Global TV
MLA for Calgary-MacKay
Representatives of South Asian, Muslim, Southeast Asian, African, Caribbean, Hispanic communities
United Way of Calgary and Area
University of Calgary (Faculty of Social Work)

Group Process and Functions

Beginning in January 2009, the members of the collaborative inquiry network formally participated in a cyclical process of action and reflection. In the initial reflection phase, the partners broadly assessed their substantive understanding of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families, how they had developed their knowledge about this social phenomenon, and the implications of their knowledge and ways of knowing about the issues. Among the guiding questions for critical reflection were:

- (1) How have youth gangs evolved over time in Calgary?
- (2) What do we know about gang issues involving youth from immigrant families?
- (3) How have we developed our understanding about youth gangs?
- (4) What aspects of our understanding of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families would we like to clarify with gang involved youth and former gang members?
- (5) what else do we need to learn about criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families?
- (6) how have our current understanding and ways of knowing about gang issues affected practice and support for gang involved and high risk youth from immigrant families?
- (7) how can we effectively engage with and learn from the lived experiences of gang involved youth and former gang members?

The initial critical questions jumpstarted the first action phase: to address the substantive, methodological and practical aspects of the collaborative inquiry into the lived experiences of gang involved participants. Through dialogue, the members contributed to developing a guide for interviewing gang involved youth and former gang members, and strategies for outreach and recruitment of this hard to reach population. Several community and service partners stepped forward to help with the outreach and recruitment of gang involved youth and former gang members for personal interviews. Some of the members formed a sub-committee to help coordinate the existing efforts in the city to support gang involved youths. Several members also volunteered to connect with the gang focused initiatives in other cities, and brought back to the group their learning about effective practices for multi-sectoral collaboration in dealing with gang issues.

In the subsequent reflection phases, the members continued to assess the relevant trends and developments in the community. Upon reviewing regular updates on the progress of the inquiry into the lived experience of gang involved youth and former gang members, the members engaged in critical dialogue on the emerging findings. Among the guiding questions for critical reflection were:

- (1) How have the emerging findings validated or challenged our understanding of issues related to criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families?
- (2) What do these findings mean to us and our work?
- (3) What strategies would be effective in dealing with the issues identified in the findings?
- (4) What are the potential roles for stakeholders to play in addressing the identified issues?
- (5) What else do we need to learn from the gang involved youth and former gang members from immigrant families?
- (6) what considerations should we pay attention to with respect to our group process and the next interviews with gang involved youth and former gang members?

Through their dialogues on those questions, stakeholders had the opportunity to examine and deal with their assumptions about gang involved youth and effective solutions for youth gangs. They evaluated, refined and illustrated theoretical concepts. They also suggested concrete strategies for working with others to address issues facing gang involved youth from

immigrant families. In addition, the partners further provided strategic input into the recruitment of and interviews with gang involved youth and former gang members.

Informed by the critical insights arising from group reflections, the members of the collaborative inquiry network engaged in successive actions in response to their emerging learning. The focus group meetings turned progressively into working seminars where the partners developed strategies to address issues facing gang involved and high-risk youth from immigrant families, and identified opportunities for community mobilization and coordination of comprehensive, responsive services. Drawing upon recommendations from the interviews with gang involved youth and former gang members, and their creative synergy, the multi-sectoral partners developed a practical framework to prevent and address criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families (see Chapter Five).

Outside the focus group meetings, the members took individual and collaborative action to influence change in our organizations and in the community. Individually, they shared their learning with others in our their organizations and communities, and incorporated practical insights gained from the collaborative inquiry into their work. Several project coordinators used their new knowledge to substantially refine their existing programs for immigrant youth. Some service partners incorporated the identified effective practices in the development of new programs. Encouragingly, some service providers who traditionally did not have specific programs to serve immigrant communities, allocated targeted resources to provide outreach and support for youth from immigrant families. The funding partners used the knowledge gained from the collaborative process to connect groups with similar project ideas, to provide strategic advice to their partner groups, and to inform their funding priorities and decisions. Several policy makers used the findings to promote cultural competence and targeted services for youth from immigrant families in both municipal and provincial governments. The correctional services partner collaborated with a local theatre company to provide youth from diverse cultural backgrounds with the opportunity to communicate their struggles through interactive theatre.

Collectively, the members coordinated services for high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. Many members allocated significant amounts of time to develop strategy and prepare for and attend a meeting with the senior leadership of the Calgary Police Service (CPS). They briefed the CPS leadership on the collaborative effort, and sought to establish a formal communication channel with the CPS leadership to inform them about their progress. The work of the collaborative inquiry network came to the attention of the organizers of the provincial gang strategy for Alberta Justice. Several members were invited to participate in both the preparatory consultation with stakeholders on May 7, 2009, and the Alberta Gang Crime Summit on June 25 and 26, 2009. They were able to bring attention to the need to address criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. The knowledge gained in the collaborative inquiry informed their critical review of the strategies proposed by Alberta Justice in the areas of awareness, prevention, intervention and enforcement. They also provided recommendations for the development of the provincial strategies and courses of action to address gang issues in Alberta.

Currently, the members are working together to strategize and plan for a multi-sectoral, collaborative symposium on criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families in Calgary on October 29, 2010. They will present the findings and share with other stakeholders their proposal for a practical framework to support gang involved and high-risk youth. They will invite stakeholders to develop a city wide action plan to support high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families, and to establish a structure to coordinate and support the implementation of the action plan in the years ahead.

Appendix A further elaborates on the impacts of the collaborative inquiry on the gang involved participants, the members of the collaborative inquiry network and the community.

Management of Information

With unanimous permission of all members, the focus group meetings were audiotaped. Selected sections of the audiotaped sessions relating to critical dialogues and action planning were transcribed. Throughout the collaborative inquiry process, the network also kept detailed minutes of all meetings. At the end of the inquiry process, the members provided written submissions detailing their experience of being part of the collaborative inquiry process. With the assistance of atlas.ti, an analytic software program, the transcripts, minutes and written submissions of our members were coded to identify the key themes of dialogues, learning and recommended strategies.

Ethical Considerations

The work of the collaborative inquiry network adhered to the research protocols approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board. Prior to their involvement in the formal process of collaborative inquiry, the eligible individuals received verbal orientations to the research and written materials that explicitly explained the rationale for the study, its goals and objectives, research activities, possible risks and benefits, voluntary participation, requested commitment to the inquiry process, and storage and management of information. They had the opportunity to review and clarify their questions and concerns before signing their informed consent forms. The members of the collaborative inquiry network were asked to indicate whether they would like to be publicly recognized for their contributions to the dissertation study. They also signed a confidentiality agreement to protect the identifying information of those who were involved in the dissertation study, and to share the research information only with those persons or institutions approved by all members of the collaborative inquiry network. Throughout the collaborative inquiry process, consensus among all members was sought to approve the use of audiotape in the focus group meetings. The members received detailed minutes of the meetings, and were invited to correct or provide additional input into the records of the group process.

INQUIRY INTO THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GANG INVOLVED YOUTH AND FORMER GANG MEMBERS FROM IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

The collaborative inquiry into the lived experience of gang involved youth and former gang members from immigrant families involved joint data collection and analysis of interviews with 30 gang involved participants. The process involved strategic input from the members of the collaborative inquiry network with respect to outreach and recruitment of gang involved participants, development of an evolving interviewing guide, and theoretical analysis. It also invited gang involved youth and former gang members to validate and refine the understanding and interpretation of their lived experience by the members of the collaborative inquiry network, and to provide their suggestions of effective practice for the development of the practical framework to prevent youth gang involvement.

Data Collection

The goal of data collection is to produce as rich a description as possible of the phenomena being studied. In grounded theory, the researcher uses the strategy of theoretical sampling to jointly collect, code and analyze the data, and then decide what data to collect next and where to find them in order to develop the theory as it emerges (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The process of data collection is therefore continually guided by the emerging theory. The process of data collection in the collaborative inquiry involved the selection of research participants, development of research questions and use of in-depth interviews as a means of gathering data.

Selection of Participants

In order to participate in the study, prospective research participants ought to meet several criteria of inclusion. First, they must be at least 12 year of age. Second, they must be either first generation immigrants (born outside of Canada) or Canadian-born children of immigrants (at least one of the parents born outside of Canada). Third, they must have involved in criminal gang activity during their teenage years (between the ages of 12 and 17 inclusive). Fourth, they were able to converse in English or Vietnamese. Fifth, they must have parental consent (or legal guardian's consent) to participate in the study if under 18 years of age.

Recruitment of Research Participants

One of the most challenging aspects of this dissertation study was the recruitment of gang involved youth and former gang members. The intensive coverage of gang violence in the media, the publicized crackdowns on criminal gangs and the increasing level of gang rivalry had heightened fear and paranoia about interactions between gang members and outsiders. Strict ethical protocols and safety considerations had also narrowed the available options for the recruitment of potential research participants. The members of the collaborative inquiry network and community and service partners helped devise and implement a comprehensive plan to recruit prospective participants for the inquiry. First, the research team relied on various professional and social networks to identify and distribute copies of the overview of the study, the recruitment notice and invitation letter to prospective research participants. Those professionals who volunteered to help with the recruitment received guidance on how to deal with prospective research participants.

Second, 5 research assistants of diverse cultural backgrounds with previous experience in working with gang involved youth were hired to provide outreach to gang involved participants. The research assistants were able to tap into their ethnocultural and religious communities, and use their knowledge about gang cultures to provide outreach to gang involved youth and former gang members. The research assistants received an individual orientation to the study, with emphases on the goals and objectives of the study, the inquiry process, ethical standards, and guidelines for recruitment. They spent a significant amount of time on outreach activities in the community. In fact, the research assistants, on average, would talk with at least ten prospective research participants in the community in order to find one participant who consented to be interviewed.

Third, the research team collaborated with the Calgary Young Offenders Centre and the Calgary Community Corrections offices (with the approval of the Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security), to promote the research among the prospective participants in their systems. The research team met with the Young Offender and Corrections officers to provide an orientation to the research study, and to the ethical guidelines used in dealing with prospective participants, with emphases on voluntary participation and informed consent.

Finally, the research team used the snowball sampling strategy, and asked gang involved youth and former gang members who participated in the interviews to encourage their peers to contact the research team. We also offered an honorarium of \$50 to qualified research participants. Those who did not wish to receive or were not allowed to receive an honorarium (in the case of the youth in the detention centre) could request that the money be donated to a charitable organization of their choice.

Profiles of Research Participants

Upon the completion of theoretical sampling, a total of 30 qualified gang involved youth and former gang members from immigrant families voluntarily participated in the inquiry. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the profiles of the participants. The participants were all males with the exception of one female former gang member who identified herself as a lesbian. With respect to the place of birth, 19 participants were born outside of Canada and 11 were born in

Canada. The participants represented diverse ethnic backgrounds: 5 Southeast Asians, 8 South Asians, 3 Middle Easterners, 9 Africans, 1 European, 1 Latino and 3 with mixed ethnicities. The participants ranged between 14 and 38 years of age, with an average age of 23 years. Among those who were born outside of Canada, the average age was 23 years and the average length of time in Canada was 15 years.

The participants represented a wide range of educational backgrounds. Eight participants reported university or college education. Another 6 participants had completed their high school education. A significant number of participants had either dropped out of high school (9 participants) or had experienced disruptions in their education (7 participants). In terms of employment status, 14 participants were working at the time of their interviews. Two participants were looking for work. One participant was attending university full time. Twelve participants were in the youth detention centre at the time of their interviews. One participant was on social assistance for a long-term disability.

Table 3.2
Profiles of the Research Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Country of Birth	Years in Canada	Highest Education	Employment Status
Vinh	38	M	Vietnamese	Vietnam	25	College	Employed
Amir	25	M	Pakistani	Canada	25	Some college	Employed
Carlos	27	M	Salvadoran	El Salvador	17	Some college	Not working
Kamir	28	M	Palestinian	Canada	28	University	Employed
Sarosh	25	M	Pakistani	Canada	25	University	Not working
Huy	37	M	Vietnamese	Vietnam	25	Grade 11	Employed
Afework	23	F	Ethiopian	Italy	20	Grade 11	Employed
Rajab	28	M	Kuwaiti	Kuwait	20	College	Employed
Bekele	27	M	Ethiopian	Ethiopia	20	Grade 11	Employed
Thanh	36	M	Vietnamese	Vietnam	24	Grade 8	Employed
Mamdouh	19	M	Mixed (Lebanese Canadian)	Canada	19	Grade 12	In youth detention centre
Nasir	25	M	Pakistani	Canada	25	Some college	Employed
Vijay	23	M	Indo-Fijian	Fiji	22	High school	Self-employed
Epeli	24	M	Indo-Fijian	Canada	24	College	Employed
Osakwe	17	M	Congolese	Congo	9	Grade 11	In youth detention centre
Bashir	17	M	Mixed (Lebanese Canadian)	Canada	17	Grade 10	In youth detention centre
Amin	18	M	Afghan	Afghanistan	9	Grade 11	In youth detention centre

Table continues

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Country of Birth	Years in Canada	Highest Education	Employment Status
Ting	19	M	Chinese	Canada	19	University	Student
Rashid	19	M	Pakistani	Pakistan	15	Grade 12	Employed
Salim	32	M	Lebanese	Lebanon	26	Grade 12	Employed
Zuberi	14	M	Burundian	Burundi	4	Grade 8	In youth detention centre
Hisoka	18	M	Japanese	Canada	18	Grade 10	In youth detention centre
Nijam	15	M	Sudanese	Sudan	8	Grade 9	In youth detention centre
Pierre	18	M	French	Canada	11	Grade 12	On social assistance
Rafiki	18	M	Mixed (Somali Canadian)	Canada	18	Grade 10	In youth detention centre
Tahir	18	M	Sudanese	Sudan	9	Grade 10	In youth detention centre
Gyan	17	M	Sudanese	Sudan	7	Grade 8	In youth detention centre
Matak	16	M	Sudanese	Sudan	5	Grade 10	In youth detention centre
Awok	16	M	Sudanese	Sudan	7	Grade 11	In youth detention centre
Jagjeet	19	M	East Indian	India	10	Grade 12	Employed

Interviewing Process

Between February 2009 and January 2010, the research team interviewed 30 gang involved youth and former gang members. Eighteen interviews took place in the community at locations where the participants felt most safe and comfortable. Those settings included the university campus, a service agency, a school office, and probation offices. Twelve interviews took place in the local youth detention centre. With the exception of one telephone interview, all the interviews were conducted face to face. Each interview lasted about 2 hours. Even though all participants agreed to be contacted for a second interview if needed, only 2 participants required a second interview. These subsequent interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour. With the exception of one interview conducted in Vietnamese, all the interviews were in English. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the trained research assistants.

Guided by the principles of constant comparison and ongoing formulation and verification of hypotheses about relationships among categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998), the interviewing process involved cyclical, reflexive inquiry. It started with a tentative, exploratory semi-structured interview with one participant. The initial interviewing schedule was developed in consultation with the members of the collaborative inquiry network. The identification of the emerging theoretical concepts and tentative hypotheses about relationships, in conjunction with the critical dialogue among the members of the collaborative inquiry network in response to these findings, informed the next interview. The cyclical process of interviewing, theoretical analysis, critical dialogue among the members of the collaborative inquiry network on the emerging theoretical insights, and formulation of further research questions, thus progressively advanced the development and refinement of theory and continued until the inquiry had achieved theoretical saturation for all categories.

Data Analysis

Guided by the grounded theory methodology, the data analysis began as soon as the first interview was completed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). The process involved the making of comparisons and the asking of questions in order to conceptualize, categorize and establish relationships among theoretical concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). With the help of the software program ATLAS/ti, the researcher engaged in the three phases of data analysis, namely open coding, axial coding and selective coding. In open coding, the researcher identified concepts, properties and dimensions in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This process involved breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). In axial coding, the researcher discovered relationships among the sub-categories and categories, tested the hypotheses against the data, and further developed the various categories. During selective coding, the researcher engaged in the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in the categories that needed further refinement and development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998).

Ethical Considerations

The inquiry into the lived experience of gang involved youth and former gang members was guided by the rigorous protocols approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board and the Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security Department. The research team appreciated the sensitive nature of the focus of the inquiry, and exercised due diligence in dealing with the various ethical issues, including voluntary participation, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, arrangements for service referral, and safety. The involvement of all research participants in the dissertation research was entirely voluntary. The research team recognized the vulnerability of youth in the justice system, and worked with the professionals in the system to ensure that the young people in the system were not and did not feel coerced to participate in the study. In addition, the research team informed the research

participants of their right to refuse to answer questions during their interviews, and to withdraw their participation altogether at any time. The participants were reassured that their participation in or withdrawal of involvement from the study would not affect their current or future access to any service.

Prior to the interviews, the research team went over the process of informed consent. The interviewers explained to the participants, both verbally and by reading the consent forms, the purposes of the study, research procedures, methodology, possible risks and benefits, the duration of the study, and their right to informed consent and confidentiality. They invited the participants to ask for clarification and to express their ethical concerns. The research team made clear to the participants that they could refuse to participate or withdraw their involvement in the study at any time, not just when signing the written informed consent form or providing their verbal informed consent. For those who were under the age of 18 at the time of the interviews, the research team also sought informed consent from their parent(s) or court appointed guardian.

With respect to privacy and confidentiality, only the research assistants, the researcher and his dissertation supervisor were authorized to have access to the confidential data. The research assistants signed a confidentiality agreement prior to commencing their work. The research team informed the participants of the limitations to their right to privacy: for example, by law, the researcher must report a participant to the appropriate local authority any disclosure related to child abuse, an intent to harm oneself and others, an unreported crime, or any plan for illegal activities in the future.

In managing the information, all collected information were stored in a locked cabinet. For the purposes of word processing and data analysis, the research team saved the audio files and transcripts on their hard drives, which required personal passwords for access. Additionally, all the research assistants who had access to the audio files and helped transcribe them signed a confidentiality agreement. They were required to delete the audio files and transcripts after they had sent the transcripts to the researcher. In presenting the emerging findings to the members of the collaborative inquiry network and the public, the removed all information which could identify the gang involved research participants.

Recognizing that the inquiry focused on the sensitive issue of youth gang and gang violence, the research team took measures to ensure the wellbeing and maximize the safety of those involved in the study. The interviews took place in safe locations with security measures in place. The research team consulted with both the participants and their colleagues about safety issues. The interviewers also had in place information about resources and a referral plan to connect the participants to relevant services should they need follow up support.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has some limitations. The participatory group process of the collaborative inquiry network required sustainable participation of stakeholders over an extended period of time. Several members had to withdraw their participation due to their changes in employment or reassigned roles within their organizations. Fortunately, the participating organizations were able to have the new replacements. The participatory action research approach to the study also demanded a great deal of time and energy from the members who had already juggled with their competing commitments and work assignments. Their levels of participation were greatly dependent upon their workloads, deadlines and other day to day functions in their organizations.

With respect to the inquiry into the lived experiences of gang involved youth and former gang members, the study encountered some methodological challenges. Due to the increased media attention, the publicized crackdowns on criminal gangs and the increasing levels of gang rivalry, gang members were reluctant to come forward. The study, thus, relied solely on the method of convenient and snow ball sampling. In addition, the people who occupied in the

high hierarchy of their gangs were reluctant to take part in this study. Those who agreed to be interviewed had remained guarded and censored their thoughts. With respect to gender representation, the sample consisted almost all males. This study experienced great difficulties in its outreach to gang involved female youth. The experience of the lone female participant in this study did not allow meaningful discussion of gender differential in criminal gang involvement.

SUMMARY

This chapter has described in detail the integrated inquiry, which involved the interplay of two processes. The first process involved the participatory group process of the collaborative inquiry network, which was made up of 39 diverse representatives from over 21 organizations and 6 ethnocultural communities. Our participatory group process involved the recurring cycles of action and reflection, by means of which the members developed strategy for the collaborative inquiry into the lived experience of gang involved youth and former gang members, reflected on the learning from the interviews with gang involved participants, and worked together to develop and implement strategies to deal with the identified issues. The research accounted for the group process, including: recruitment and membership, group process and functions, management of group information, and ethical considerations. The second process involved the inquiry into the lived experience of gang involved youth and former gang members from immigrant families, which offered theoretical and practical insights that informed the action of the collaborative inquiry network. This process involved joint data collection and analyses of the interviews with the gang involved research participants. The research addressed strategies for selection and recruitment of gang involved participants, data collection, and analysis. Throughout the inquiry process, the research were attentive to the ethical considerations relevant to their work with gang involved youth and former gang members. The study also had some limitations with respect to the level of participation of the members of the collaborative inquiry network, and the representation of diverse gang involved participants in the sample.

The next three chapters will showcase the outcomes of the integrated inquiry. Chapter Four will describe and explain criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. Chapter Five will present a practical framework to support high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. Chapter Six will celebrate the positive impacts of the collaborative inquiry on the gang involved participants, the members of the collaborative inquiry network and the community.

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4 | CRIMINAL GANG INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH FROM IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

The focus of this research is an in-depth understanding of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families, and an exploration of effective strategies to address youth gangs in Calgary. The study involved an integrated inquiry based on an overarching participatory action research (PAR), which guided the direction of strategic research toward learning about criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families and the development of collaborative strategies to address the identified issues. It also embedded within the PAR process a grounded theory undertaking to inquire into the lived experience of gang involved youth and former gang members from immigrant families. In total, 30 gang involved participants of diverse ethnic backgrounds were interviewed.

Drawing upon a theoretical analysis of the lived experience of gang involved youth and former gang members, this chapter sets to answer the following two questions:

- (1) How do youth from immigrant families become involved in criminal gangs? And
- (2) How do they exit gangs and become reintegrated into their families and communities in post-gang life?

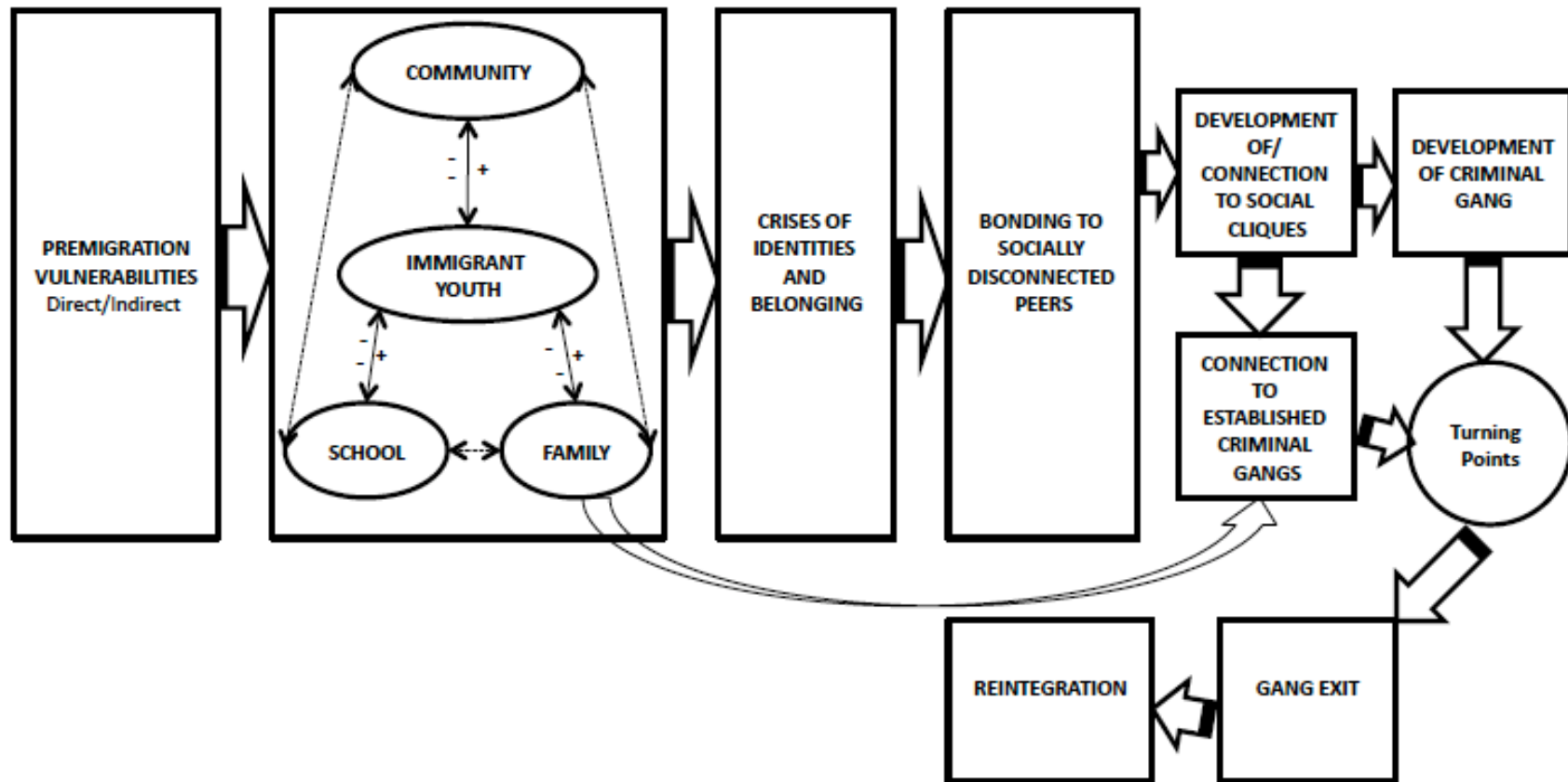
This chapter starts with an overview of the pathways towards disintegration of interactions with family, school and community, substituted integration into gang culture and reintegration into family and community of youth from immigrant families. It proceeds to discuss the pre-migration vulnerabilities that directly or indirectly impact both foreign- and Canadian-born youth from immigrant families. It elaborates on the specific issues and dynamics involved in the disintegration of relationships between vulnerable youth and their families, schools and communities, which result in crises of identity and belonging. It examines the integration of youth from immigrant families into social cliques and criminal gangs. It then identifies the turning points for gang exit, and describes the reintegration of former gang members into their families and communities.

OVERVIEW OF PATHWAYS TOWARD DISINTEGRATION, SUBSTITUTED INTEGRATION AND REINTEGRATION

The analysis of the lived experiences of the gang involved youth and former gang members from immigrant families unearthed complex pathways towards criminal gang involvement and out of gang life (see Figure 4.1). The gang involved participants either directly experienced pre-migration vulnerabilities or were indirectly impacted by their parents' pre-migration histories. Their life experience in Canada involved gradual disintegration of their interactions with their families, schools and communities. Subsequently, the participants experienced crises of identity and belonging, which propelled them towards forming friendships with other socially disconnected peers. They became involved in social cliques, and progressed towards membership in criminal gangs. Confronted with various turning points, some participants eventually chose to leave their gangs. They worked towards exit from the gang and reintegration into their families and communities.

Figure 4.1

Pathways toward disintegration, substituted integration and reintegration



PRE-MIGRATION VULNERABILITIES

The lived experience of the gang involved participants revealed two key pre-migration factors that hindered their positive integration into Canadian society, and increased their vulnerability to criminal gang involvement: early exposure to violence and brutality, and unfavourable family socioeconomic conditions. While the foreign-born participants experienced those factors at first hand, their Canadian-born counterparts had been indirectly impacted by the pre-migration histories of their parents.

Early Exposure to Violence and Brutality

A number of participants experienced or witnessed extreme violence and brutality in their homeland or in the refugee camps in the transitional countries. Eleven individuals among the 30 research participants survived the civil wars in Afghanistan, Burundi, Congo, El Salvador, Sudan and Vietnam. They ranged between 3 and 10 years of age at the time. Their recounting of the civil war experience spoke to the chaos, severe brutality, and the long lasting impact of these events upon their lives:

At night, bombs would come and BOOM and blow stuff up, and yeah, bombs and soldiers, and we would have to huddle up. 'Cause at night, it would be like, helicopters would come at night throwing bombs, and you felt it. So our family would go to the most nearest safe spot, which was like the bathroom, because that's where my dad thought it was safest with concrete walls. So we would just stay there until it was over, and we would go back to sleep. (Carlos)

I've seen lots of people dead in front of me. Too much to count, because we're pretty much all running [from] the same bunch of stuff - family and everybody are all together...Pretty much, everybody, almost thousands of people, running from the Rainbows shooting. Everybody is running in the same direction, and the Rainbows are following our direction, so they shoot us in the back... I've seen people run behind me, beside me, and get shot. Once, my sister was close to being shot, but the lady beside her got shot. It wasn't a good thing to see, because the lady was also carrying a baby on her back. The bullet went through the baby and out of the woman's chest. I'm still happy it didn't hit my sister, but I feel sorry for the lady too. I've seen lots of people die...After the war, hundred of soldiers, hundreds of mothers, hundreds of kids just lying around dead. And it would take about four to five days to clean it. So every time I would go to school, I'd be seeing pictures of ladies on the run, I would be seeing how about if that was my mom, my dad, or sister laying on the ground like that. Basically, those memories would piss me off. (Zuberi)

For those who were very young during the civil wars, their early experiences seeped into their consciousness some years later. In their process of cognitive development, they came to understand what had happened in the past, and subsequently grappled to deal with the post-traumatic stress.

When I was little, I went to a forest or jungle there, and I saw a bunch of bodies stacked on each other- at least 20 of them. I thought they were just sleeping, but they were all dead. I was little, and I didn't know nothing. But now, I know that they were dead. They were all piled up on each other, and I realized that they were dead. I didn't know what to do. Like, 2008, I realized that. Yeah, the memory of it. When you're little, you don't know too much. You just think that it's not real, and that they're sleeping. As soon as I grew up, I realized what was going on in Africa. We had a history thing that we had to do [for school], and we did that in 2008. And after that, I realized that those people were dead. I was just shocked because I realized that it was dangerous. I didn't know what to do. I realized that people died a lot. In Africa, there's too many people dying... Even if somebody calls me the 'N' word, I would get affected from that- for no reason. Probably

the reason was that people kept dying, and all the racial stuff and more people died. So if somebody swore at me, I would just fight them. (Tahir)

The urgent, violent situations often led to the sudden departure of some participants from their home countries. For those who were able to migrate to Canada directly with their families, their sudden uprooting did not allow them to prepare for their new lives in Canada.

I remember the last day he just took me, we just left that night, we didn't call anybody that we were really leaving, because we did not want anyone to know. So we just left in the middle of the night.. It was hard, it was hard because you leave all of your friends and everything that you know, you going somewhere where you don't even know what it looks like or what you are going to expect...I was just doing whatever my parents said was better for us. (Carlos)

For many other participants, their families had to stay in the refugee camps or transitional countries in Asia or Africa for several years. A few arrived in refugee camps without accompaniment of adults. There some participants once again experienced or witnessed extreme violence and brutality.

You don't get into trouble. If you get into trouble, they [Thai authorities] handcuff you by the finger, and you fainted or something. Yeah, say you fighting or you go stealing or something, they just handcuff you by the finger, and they hang you up. Just one finger. Yeah, the wire or ceiling or whatever. Until you faint and they let you go, and they just throw you on the ground. And then, your family come, pick you up. Or you get well by yourself, and walk back by yourself. (Huy)

For a few participants, their traumatic experiences were compounded by distress related to domestic violence and childhood bullying. They were subjected to beatings by their parents and peers, and witnessed brutal acts against other members of their families.

First time I've seen my dad be abusive, was towards my mom. I've seen him hit my mom, very badly actually. My older sister which is my half sister told my mom about my dad's plans that he wanted to remarry to another lady, or get married to another lady and have 2 wives. So my mom confronted my dad about it. That night, in this room right here is where we all slept. My mom and dad had their own room. My older sister slept there (pointing to one corner of the room), and then there was me and my brother shared a bed, and my other 2 sisters slept in that bed (pointing to another corner of the room), and my youngest sister she was only 1 years old was in the room with my mom and dad. Anyway, so my dad came out and electrocuted my sister. He plugged in a plug like that. And he ripped it open and he electrocuted her right in the eye, I remember that. We were all very very terrified. I was only 5 at the time, but I still remember it like it was yesterday. And then he beat up my mom very badly, he broke her nose and cheek bone and stuff like that. That was the first time I had seen such a brutal thing in my life. That was probably the first major hit in my life. From what I've seen and experienced, it probably escalated to when I got older a little bit. I didn't like my dad at all. As I got older and I realised how cowardly acts that was too, and he started hitting her even more. So that's why I think I rebelled a lot about it...I remember after that happened, the next day I remember I had killed a cat, it was a kitten actually. Out of anger I picked up a big rock and started smashing it. That was like a big thing in my life from when I did that, to what happened a couple of years down the line. 'Cause that was the first time that I had shown that I had it in me, to be like that. I don't know if it is hereditary, or it was from what I've seen, and I was lashing out as a kid. But that was definitely the starting point I think for what happened after that in my life. Because I didn't talk about it forever. It just sat with me for a while. (Bekele)

A few participants were also bullied by their peers. They were subjected to frequent beatings and harassment.

I was bullied when I was young...The friends I was around with, I was being beat up and whipped you know with a belt and all that stuff...It happened like every week. Because when I was younger I didn't listen to them, and they just whipped me. But the fact that they whipped me... I have anger in me you know, like release it out some other time I can't just let it bubble in my stomach you know cause that not good. (Awok)

Violence and brutality had left long lasting impacts upon the participants. As articulated in the testimonies above, those traumatic experiences filled the victims with what one participant described as "the reservoir of anger," and begot their own violence against others. A number of individuals expressed their loss of trust in others. For some, the image of war had served as a lens through which they viewed the world. The following analysis of war from a fourteen year old youth illuminated not only his worldview, but also his exceptional analytical ability and wisdom:

I just started talking like this because of the experiences I've seen. Sometimes when the police come to me and tell me to change, and the world is a better place and stuff, and I say "Yeah?" Sometimes the cops get confused when I talk to them, because they say that this is a free country, and ask me if I want to go back to the war...I say that this is not a big war, but it's still a war though. There's young people fighting each other, and then there's cops, and then there are bad guys who fight each other. That's a different way of saying war. Even good kids whose parents think that they are good, at school when they are having problems with each other, they still fight after school. That's another war going on. There's pretty much a war for everything...People don't see it the way I do, but still, that's another war going on. So, I just see things differently than others, I guess. (Zuberi)

Through difficult life circumstances, the participants had developed early cognitive maturity, which resulted in intra-generational gaps in their interactions with the young people in their age groups in Canada. For example, Amin, as an 8 year old boy, found himself to be "too mature for elementary school." He had experienced first hand the civil war in Afghanistan. At the age of 2, he lost his father, an Afghan soldier, to the war. By age 5, he walked with his mother every day the distance of about 10 km to the mosque to protect her from being raped at night. At age 6, he went on a difficult journey to Pakistan, where he stayed with his uncle without his mother for a few years. Amin's life experience was simply too unfamiliar and complex for most children of his age in Canada. He felt at a loss in connecting to other peers in his school.

Family Socioeconomic Experience

Ten foreign-born participants had experienced extreme poverty in their home countries or in the refugee camps. They had struggled to meet their basic needs, such as food and shelter. It was not common for them to live without food for days.

My family- we had big family. I come from eight kids. But no food, nothing to eat. It was empty...The house was so empty. Too much people living in the same place... there's not enough food. (Osakwe)

Young, harsh life. So, do whatever to survive. Like, grow your own garden or have to go get to survive like, whatever. So, yeah (groans), stay there [refugee camp] for a very long time. (Huy)

They also did not have access to what in the West would be considered the basic necessities of life.

We played soccer that's made out of plastic bags. Here, people are always wearing shoes. There, to wear shoes you would have to be a king or something. People would look up to you and stuff. It's mostly sandals, and those are expensive too. (Zuberi)

Due to the persistent sociopolitical turmoil in their home countries, most of the participants had had sporadic education. In addition, 5 participants came from lone parent families, where their parents spent long hours working outside the home, and provided them with little guidance. As a result, they spent time with other young people and engaged in delinquent activities.

I was considered a tough kid [in Kenya], like I used to fight a lot over there, and you know, you wanted something done, like you would go up to the kid, fight them and whoever won, that's theirs, you know? You get respect, but you know, I gained the anger problem with that, and just everything I used to resolve with fighting. (Matak)

For some participants, the socioeconomic disadvantages in the home country and/or refugee camp had negatively affected their ability to adapt in Canada. The early deprivation of the necessities of life heightened their sense of desire for material things, such as video games, cell phones, cars, and jewelry. A few experienced difficulties in adjusting to the behavioral expectations of Canadian schools. Further, limited education in their home country, compounded by the language barrier and inadequate educational support, contributed to the extreme difficulty some participants experienced in coping with schoolwork in Canada (see School Interactions for a more in-depth discussion).

In contrast to the harsh life conditions facing some foreign-born participants, 6 participants were born into wealthy families in their home countries. Their lives were privileged in terms of material goods, and the families employed servants.

My parents owned a business. We had nanny, and also maids, taking care of the place. I had like a driver that would take me to school and take me back. I was one of those lucky, you know lucky people, because I had a few cousin that escaped from Vietnam, some landed in Canada some landed in Australia, some landed in West Germany at the time. So you know they sent toys, and all the sort of Westerner clothing and toys of back home. (Vinh)

Their privileged histories did not prepare them to cope with the downward socioeconomic mobility of their families in Canada. A few expressed resentment of their parents for their decision to emigrate to Canada.

The first few years I was here, I was fairly bitter. I had a perfectly fine lifestyle, and all of sudden that changed. I do believe that those are one of the factors for myself to misbehave. (Thanh)

Indirect Exposure to Pre-migration Vulnerabilities

Even though some participants were born in another transitional, safe country or in Canada, they had experienced the impact of civil wars through their parents' post-traumatic behaviour. Quite often, their parents expressed their anger through domestic violence against their spouse and/or children.

My father, they got him involved in the military [in Ethiopia]. He was very young, maybe 14 years old. I mean, they put tattoos all over him and stuff like that...It definitely affected the family, because I think it affected him in a way that it affected my mother and the family, with his anger issues, and the abuse and problems...Sometimes he would get really angry and he would take it out on us. (Afevok)

Some parents internalized their traumatic experiences, and accepted violence as part of their culture. They, in turn, relied heavily on beatings to discipline their children, and imbued their sons with a culture of violence.

My father came from Lebanon. He escaped the war over there. He was violent. He said, it was part of the culture. It was in you, you get immune to it, you get used to it. That's part of our culture. This is our culture. (Salim)

A number of Canadian-born participants from a Muslim background reported that their parents grew up in their countries of origin in strict home environments with strong religious values.

Influenced by their strict upbringing, these parents were protective of their children and expected their children to follow those strict rules in Canada.

My parents have very strong religious values and religion means a lot to them, and they tried to instill this in me and my younger siblings from a young age...As far as following his rules, there was no 'ifs' or 'buts' about it. Growing up with him as my father, it was, you know, you have to obey all the rules, especially when it came to socializing. I couldn't just go to him and say "I want to go out with my friends just because". That never existed. Pretty much you go to school, you come home and that's it. You stay home. (Vijay)

DISINTEGRATION OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN YOUTH AND FAMILY, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

Family Relationships

In their interactions with their parents and other family members, the participants were overwhelmingly challenged by ineffective parenting, differing expectations and treatment, the negative influence of siblings, and negative parental influences. They grew up primarily in working class and low-income families which faced a tremendous struggle for basic needs.

Ineffective Parenting

The majority of the participants were raised in families that primarily used one or a combination of the following parenting styles: absent parenting or parental neglect, permissive parenting, and strict parenting. Eighteen participants experienced absent parenting or parental neglect for an extended period of time during their childhood and teenage years. Many struggled to recall any quality time they had spent with their parents. The most commonly reported factor contributing to absent parenting was the parents' overwork. Many immigrant parents had more than one job, ran a demanding small business, or studied and worked at the same time.

For the first four years, both of my parents worked two jobs. They both worked as dishwashers during the day and as cleaners at night. They spent pretty much, like you know, morning to 10 at night working. I didn't see them much then. Not all all, maybe on the weekend. There's no interaction, cause the parents not home! (Vinh)

A number of participants reported that their parents, usually their fathers, could not find work in their professional fields in the local community, and had to go elsewhere for work. Some parents stayed in different cities, or travelled frequently to other countries for work over an extended period of time. Also, some fathers became absent parents after divorce, and in two cases, the fathers were deported back to their home countries due to criminal charges. The absence of a father figure was devastating for some male participants.

My dad went to the US, China, Malaysia, Pakistan for work...Cause he was a journalist in Pakistan, but when he came here, they didn't accept his degree. And he didn't have time to upgrade, because he has a family. So he started driving a taxi, and when that wasn't enough, he went to the US and made money there and came back...First time he left, I was 5. The second time he left, I was 7. The third time he left, I was 8. And then he left a couple more times, but not for a year, just for a couple of months. Every time I needed someone, he wasn't there...I started slipping away and started going downhill, because I didn't have the guidance. A man needs his father in his life to show him how to become a man. (Jagjeet)

Eleven participants indicated that they came from large families with at least 4 children. Their parents did not have time for all of the children. In 6 cases, the participants came from single parent families. Quite often, their mothers, as the sole caregivers, had to work hard to take care

of the children.

We have lots of kids in my family. There's about 6 of us kids, and its just my mom right. So she was busy working, trying to pay the bills, and pay for everything for us kids. I think most of the time I didn't have much to do, so I got involved with my friends, always with my friends, some of my friends weren't into good stuff. So we started stealing bikes, stealing cars, and we got money from people from selling these cars and these bikes to people. And through there I got charged for assault, cause we fight people, just for no reason, cause we were drunk or high or whatever. (Afewok)

In addition, one participant, Huy, left Vietnam without his parents, and later joined his brother in Canada at the age of 12. He did not receive much attention from his guardian, and felt that "there's nobody guiding or standing beside" him. Two participants, Mamdouh and Bashir, had a long history of living in foster care and group homes due to parental neglect. Another participant, Pierre, was in temporary foster care for 6 months, when his mother had a nervous breakdown and sought treatment for her alcoholism.

As a result of absent parenting and/or parental neglect, these participants received very little adult supervision or discipline and had a great deal of freedom in their daily activities. They did not receive adequate parental validation and practical guidance to navigate through their developmental, social and cultural challenges. Many did not feel an emotional connection to their parents. A few felt boredom at home, and relied heavily on television, video or computer games for company.

If nobody is there, nobody can really watch you. What do you do? You sit home alone or your friends come over or something like that, or you go out. Nobody could tell you not stay or not to go right? (Carlos)

Another frequently reported style of parenting was permissive parenting. Fifteen participants indicated that their parents, in most cases their mothers, adopted a "laissez faire" approach to child rearing. According to the participants, their parents were overly nurturing and accepting, and rarely set boundaries or standards of acceptable behaviour. When the participants engaged in undesirable behaviour, their parents did not take action to discipline them, or to support them to face the consequences of their behaviour. In some cases, their parents continued to "spoil" them. Some went as far as buying cigarettes for their teenage boys.

I skipped school and a lot of time, slept in, and then, it would be too late to go to school. Then I would just hang out with friends. My mom, she let me sleep in. She knew it, but she was very easy on me...she just let me be...My mom gave me everything. She did not discipline me. She gave me lots of money. So when I went to school, I could afford buying a lot of food for lunch. I bought so much food for lunch that my principal called me in, because he thought I did some illegal stuff. (Amin)

For those participants who came from families with strict fathers, their mothers often compensated for the other spouse's rigid rules and expectations with leniency and unconditional acceptance of their child's behaviour.

Everybody had a reason to take advantage of my mom. She wasn't strong enough to put her foot down, she didn't know how...When my dad was gone, it was easier for me to do all these things, because my mom was very passive. Because she felt bad for us. She's seen what life we had, and she wanted it to be a little more easy going on us...And my mom let us go, she didn't stop us from going out and stuff. It escalated, it was from smoking weed and not coming back home. And it just escalated, everybody just took advantage of my mom, and we were just very rebellious...And when he [dad] was around, my mom would lie for us. Because she didn't want us to get hit. (Bekele)

Some parents' permissive approach to child rearing encouraged participants to continue with their undesirable behaviour. Some felt protected and immune from consequences in their families. Over time, they lost respect for their parents' authority and became dismissive of their concerns. The parents also developed a sense of helplessness in dealing with their children's

delinquent behaviour.

I told her about criminal activities and what I do when I'm not even home. She's still sad about it, but she told me, "OK, whatever. Do whatever you do, but don't bring the police to my house"...We fight a lot, but it's not like we're mad at each other and we fight. When my friends come over to my house, she let's them in, but when they leave, they sometimes want me to go with them somewhere, and that's when my mom starts yelling, or start pulling me back at my shirt, and says that she was going to scream until people start looking and stuff. She's OK. I understand that she wants to look out for me, but I still hang out with my friends. (Zuberi)

Further, 11 participants reported that their parents, mostly paternal figures, used a strict approach to parenting. Their parents imposed rigid rules, social boundaries, and expected of perfection. They did not show affection, but rather demanded respect and obedience. Quite often, the fathers of these participants subjected them to physical punishment for breaking strict rules or misbehaving. Notably, the majority of participants from a Muslim background indicated that even though their parents had the best of intentions, wanting to help them develop strong religious values and a good work ethic, their approach was forceful and did not allow any personal freedom.

Did I feel the pressure of living up to his [father's] expectations? A lot, a lot. Lots, lots, lots. Not just to the macho thing, but just living up to every expectation of you. Lots of pressure on me. That's why I was always scared if every time I didn't do good in that game [sports], he'd give me a little shot, or slapping me and saying, "I know you could do better than that." (Salim)

The participants attributed their parents' strict approach to child rearing to their own traditional upbringing. They also felt that their parents experienced cultural shock, and were concerned that young people have too much freedom in Canada.

I think that when he came here, he always felt the need to keep us away. Keep me away...I guess maybe when he came here it was a shock for him more or less, because he came here he saw how it was, he saw the life of bachelors, and just how people can be. (Eveli)

Over time, the participants became envious of the greater personal freedom enjoyed by their peers. They felt resentful of their parents. A number of participants reported strained relationships with their fathers. Some eventually rebelled against their parents, and behaved in ways that would hurt their parents most, such as a Muslim person consuming alcohol. Those participants who were subjected to severe corporal punishment felt a sense of relief when their parents finally filed for divorce.

Overall, the participants overwhelmingly reported absent parenting, permissive parenting and strict parenting as the prominent approaches to child rearing in their families. Consequently, many were denied opportunities for close parent-child bonding, and did not receive adequate, effective support from their parents to deal with their developmental and sociocultural challenges. Vijay offered the following metaphor to illustrate the various parenting styles and their effectiveness:

It's like you pick up sand in your hand. Now, you could have one person just holding the sand in his open hand...wind will blow and it will fly away. Another person will squeeze really hard and what will happen? It's going to leak out of your hands: its sand. And you could have another who just closes their fist on it gently. Who's going to have more sand left in their hand? (Vijay)

Intergenerational/Acculturative Gaps

In immigrant families, parents rely on their cultural values in setting parental expectations and in guiding their interactions with their children. At times their cultural values are in conflict with those that their children have absorbed from the community at large. These conflicting

values result in acculturative strains in the parent-child relationship. All 30 participants reported that they had experienced acculturative gaps in their interaction with their parents. The average age on arrival of the participants who were born outside of Canada was 10 years of age. These children generally did not have an opportunity to develop a strong attachment to their home countries and cultures. Once they were in Canada, they acculturated faster than their parents. The Canadian-born participants, on the other hand, learned about their heritage cultures only through their parents and from involvement in their respective ethnic communities. Like their foreign-born counterparts, they admitted that they lacked an emotional connection to their parents' home countries and cultures. Those who were exposed to racism and negative public discourse about their countries of origin were reluctant to embrace and learn about their home cultures.

They [parents] talk much about it [Congo], but sometimes I don't care. Just forget about it...It's a different place, and we should talk about new things, not talk about old things. That was a long time ago. That's why I kind of was like, not listening to life over there. But I hear it's a bad place. (Osakwe)

The participants identified the acculturative gaps in their families with respect to the roles expected of parents and children, dating, cultural celebrations, and life priorities. Many participants were socialized to respect their parents as ultimate authority figures, and to be obedient as children.

It's basically like honour too. Don't disrespect the family or expect to be disrespected. Everything has to be done to the "t", done according to what the father says or what the mother says and you're supposed to go along with it. (Mamdouh)

Some yearned for a "friendship" connection with their parents, only to be disappointed by their parents' authoritative, distant approach to parenting.

When we were growing up, parent and children, we weren't friends. Like obviously parents need to be parents, but at the same time they need to be your friend too. So, they need to find a way to sit and talk to you, and they need to try and be your friend, and try to get in to your head, and try and figure out what you're thinking, and how you feel about this and how you feel about that and what your goals...But our culture gap, cause they grew up there and I grew up here, I think the culture gap is what stopped it. So I kind of shut them out and didn't let them. I didn't let them come close enough to be my friend. You know, I love my parents to death and they love me, but I don't know, if we were ever friends. (Amir)

Several participants from a Muslim background clashed with their parents over dating. They were resentful that their parents imposed restrictions on a commonly accepted social practice enjoyed by their Canadian peers. More often, these participants secretly pursued romantic relationships with others without their parents' knowledge. The parents reacted harshly when they discovered their children were dating.

I can remember having my first girlfriend in grade 5. Mind you, in the Muslim culture, that is a bad thing, right. There was only lot of restrictions, that's all I saw. When I was a kid, for example, dating, it was, "No, don't call my house. I'll call you!" I remember, in one time, I was walking with my dad during the day. The girls across the street, they started waving and calling my name. I do remember just not responding and then my dad, "No, don't talk to people"...I know he wasn't so supportive of dating and all that. In fact, I remember the biggest beating I got was when I skipped school, and he caught me in a hot tub with two girls [at a friend's house]. I am not supposed to be with girl, I'm not supposed to be dating and stuff like that. So my dad was pissed. We went home but the beating, what a beating. (Kamir)

A few participants from an Asian background were frustrated that their parents expected them to focus solely on academic learning, and undermined their need to socialize with their peers.

Since I was a kid, my parents were always nagging me to do well in school. So at the time

I was a kid, I was really scared and thought that I had to do it, I had to do well in school, and everything to get into university. At the time I was a kid, I didn't think that university was possible because it was just so far ahead of me...My parents always complained about it all the time- I could have done a lot. Since I was hanging out with friends, I had to take out time from my academic studies to hang out with them, so my grades weren't the best that I could do, but I was doing fine. I was doing 75 and up. I was on honour roll. (Ting)

Growing up, many participants felt confused and frustrated by their parents' selective integration. Their parents only encouraged them to adopt certain cultural values in the community at large, and for the most part, reinforced their cultural traditions at home. Sarosh, a Canadian-born individual, reflected upon his interaction with his parents and his observation of his peers' families:

They [parents] come here and they come here because they want a better life for their kids, they want to [them to have an] education, and they are more than happy to send their kids out across the country, or wherever it is to gain that education. But they would say, go out there, get a job, get money, education, but when it comes to culture, don't worry about the Canadian culture, because we have our culture from back home. And what that does, confuses kids because they have to develop different personas, one at home, in the very cultural sense, and one Canadian identity, and there is very little in between that kind of mixes.

Indeed, 19 participants reported that they had developed dual cultural identities. At home, they attempted to meet their parents' expectations. In the community, they adopted social norms and practices that might be in conflict with their home cultures. For some participants, they could "switch on and off" their dual cultural identities. For others, they felt they were "pretending to be somebody else" in their interactions with their parents.

The acculturative gaps in parent-child interactions were often exacerbated by the parents' language barriers and limited cross-cultural experience. While the participants readily acquired English skills and new values through their interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds outside their home, their parents remained insular, holding on to and reinforcing the traditions of their home country.

They [parents] tried to raise us Muslim ways. A lot of immigrant families come here and expect kids to follow the culture. It might work to a certain age, but once they start getting involved in other groups and other ethnic minorities, and start learning about other religions and other way of doing things, they sort of go from the straight track and twist, and go somewhere else. "I don't have to do this, this isn't the way it is, I'm in Canada now. Why should I do what I do back home here? This is a free country!" They start getting all these ideas in their head and starting thinking that because it's Canada now, the land of the free, they can do what they want. (Salim)

As a result of the widening acculturative gaps, many participants experienced frustration and depression. They resented that their parents focused solely on maintaining traditional cultural values, and overlooked support for intercultural interaction. Twenty-four participants reported breakdowns in communication in their families and drifted away from their parents. Some turned rebellious, and found comfort in delinquent activities with peers experiencing similar struggles. As the participants got older, some also spent more time away from their families:

I never talked to my family about school. I would just go home, eat, and go to my room. Even other friends were like that with their family too. (Jagjeet)

About 16 [years old], I started to stay with your friends overnight...What they [parents] can do is find me, my friend's parents, right well, have you seen my son? And you know, your friends' parents would say, "Well, I haven't seen him. Have you seen my son?" And some odd days, I went back home to take a shower to get clothing and I went back

out again. I planned. I wanted to make sure that they not home...You know, I didn't want those awkward feelings and all that, right? I did anything possibly to avoid those feelings. (Vinh)

Differential Treatment

Many participants received differential treatment in their families on the basis of their gender, family position, mixed child status, and/or stepchild status. The male participants frequently reported that compared to their female siblings, they enjoyed relatively greater freedom. Sarosh offered his analysis of his South Asian community:

When you look at the Asian community, in the sense, girls and daughters are protected and sheltered. Compared to my sister, I probably had more freedom than my sisters. One of the reasons for that is because that daughter was raised and told, okay you're probably going to be like this and this. And the son was probably told the same things, but at the same time he was also given the freedom to do whatever he wants.

At the same time, many male participants were burdened with an expectation of hyper-masculinity. Their fathers instilled in them the ideal of being a "tough man" at a very young age.

I went into Kindergarten. My first day there man, my dad said, "Okay it's time for me to go." First day, there wasn't any friends, I went in there, and was like, "Holy shit," you know? And I saw my dad, he was about to leave. I was like, "Da Da!" I called my dad, and was like, "What are you doing?" He's like, "I'm going now, I'll pick you up after school", and then I started crying. I was like, "No, you can't leave me." He was like ditching me, you know? So my dad was like "Oh my God, you're embarrassing"...I think he always wanted me to get into fighting, like karate, not like street fighting. He always told me this one thing, and I remember it even now. He always said it, "If someone hits you once, you hit them three times." That was his philosophy. (Rashid)

Many participants internalized the expected "macho man" standard of behaviour. They found it difficult to express their vulnerability, and to seek family support to deal with their personal struggles.

You want to be the man, so you're always portraying yourself as a man, even though deep down, you're hurting inside and you need somebody to talk to...I don't know about your culture, but all these ethnic cultures, you can't just sit down and talk to your parents about that stuff. It's not something that you can do. "Oh wait, you're not a man now. You're losing your manhood, because you sit down with your parents and talk to them about your problems and how you're feeling." You can't express your feelings. It's hard to do that. (Salim)

In addition to their struggle to meet the ideal of hyper-masculinity, a number of participants experienced intense pressure as eldest sons in their families. Their parents expected them to excel academically, and to set a positive example for their siblings. Some participants, at an early age, were tasked with the responsibility of taking care of their home, and in some cases, taking on the role of care provider to other family members. Those who came from a Muslim tradition were expected to develop strong religious values. The participants frequently used such words as "pressure," and "too much" to describe their experiences as the eldest son.

It was rough [to be the oldest son] man, because I was supposed to take responsibility man. I got to clean the house like every day, take my brother to school, I got to translate for my mum. It was rough I don't get the time to like hang around friends, I have to like run away to go hang out with friends. (Nijam)

Whereas those who were the eldest sons felt that their behaviour was closely scrutinized, the participants from a middle family position were often frustrated by a lack of attention from their parents. Many felt insecure in their relationships with their parents. Some

had to “fight” with other siblings, and worked hard to showcase their talents to gain more family recognition. A few felt resentful at the lack of attention, but learned to be content as a middle child.

Well, it [my relationship with parents] wasn't very good. When I was growing up, I just felt almost like they forgot about me. There's three of us...But just sometimes I feel like I don't get enough attention, maybe because I'm the middle kid you always feel you don't. They were always busy with the younger guy and the older guy. So, they put more attention on those two and the middle kid kind of doesn't get to do what he wants, or alone. Like my brother would be having his soccer games, he could go do whatever. They never really cared about what I wanted to do, what sports I wanted to do, or things like that. And I always felt like, I am good at these things, like why they not supporting me...I thank for my parents for the things that they gave me, but sometimes, wish they just little be more, give me more support. It just seemed they never really cared too much about me. So, then you start building resentment. (Carlos)

A few participants from a non-traditional family structure, such as a cross-cultural marriage or blended family, faced some unique challenges. Two mixed-race participants were subjected to familial racism. They experienced verbal abuse, mistreatment, exclusion and rejection from other family members. As a result, they were denied the opportunity to learn their heritage language, and to develop their ethnic identity.

I was in a foster home for like a year or 2. And then my aunty decided to take us. It was me and my 3 brothers. She only took us in, because in the Muslim culture, she believed that by taking us in, she gets rewarded in heaven. Messed up how she thought but she took us in. She treated us like shit because my mom and her being all White and stuff. I wasn't allowed to go library or anything in the community. It was considered not right. We [our siblings] were just not allowed to do anything. That's the way my auntie operated and she stuck to it. Her kids were allowed to. So we basically grew up with her for 5 years. Did I feel I belonged? No. I was treated like an outcast. Because I was half White. It messed up man. They totally disrespect you. You try to fit in and they just keep putting you down. Even my cousins would be like “Hey White boy, do this. Hey White boy, do that.” Like, I didn't appreciate it. It's like some White people disrespecting Black people because they're Black. I felt really bad because I tried to get my family to like me, but they kept on disliking me, disowning me because of who I am. Just because of who my mom was too. I put myself down all the time. Maybe if you were full Lebanese then you wouldn't have this problem. (Mamdouh)

A few participants had turbulent relationships with their stepfathers. As young children, they felt that they had been made vulnerable by the choices that their mothers made in their relationships with men. Quite often, the partnerships were dysfunctional, resulting in domestic violence and break up. The participants reported mistreatment from their stepfathers, including physical and verbal abuse, neglect and social exclusion.

She [mom] met this guy [step dad] after she came to Canada. She had two kids with him, and turned out to be a really bad guy. He used to lock me in the basement and was a terrible guy. It was absolutely hell. I wasn't aloud to see my friends. I wasn't aloud to do anything. In my summers [in elementary], where you get the two months off, I spent my summers doing yard work, and I had to stay in the basement in my room with some books and some writings, paper, pens, and a bed. That's it. I wasn't allowed to have the lights on even. When it was dark, and if I had the lights on, and got busted, it was bad. He would push me around. He was yelling and screaming, and he took the food away. So it was hell for two years in his house. (Pierre)

Negative Sibling Influences

Thirteen participants were exposed to negative influences from siblings. Most of these individuals looked up to their older siblings, especially their brothers, as role models. As early as age 5, these individuals aspired to emulate their older siblings' lifestyles and behaviours.

My oldest brother, I love that guy. He's the kind of guy I look up to. He's my role model, you can say. So what happened with him, he started sneaking in girls home from the basement window. His room would be right there, and my other brother would be there, and I would sleep outside. Like in the living room, I'd sleep there. So this guy was bringing girls home, and next door they would be talking, like through the wall. And I've always wanted to be like my brother. And I saw him doing this, and then I started dressing up like him and everything, and I started going out, talking to girls. And your attitude changes when you change your outer picture. (Rashid)

Often the older siblings who engaged in delinquent behaviour introduced their younger siblings to fighting, alcohol, and drug use.

I think it all started when my [older] brother got me high for the first time smoking weed. 'Cause we were all sitting on the roof or whatever. I see my brother who was on mushrooms at the time, and was waiving his hands in the air. He thought he could command the wind or something...It was wicked. I got high. Ever since then, things have been going down hill...He also introduced me to oxycontin too. That's really addicting. My brother would spend a thousand bucks every few days on oxycontin. He was a hustler. (Hisoka)

In a few cases, the older siblings introduced the participants to criminal activity. Some of the siblings had lengthy criminal records (as many as 36 charges).

My brother was already doing a lot of coke. When I was 15 and he was 17. He was a big time drug dealer. He had stacks of hundreds. At age 17, he had over 30 g's. I always wanted to be like him, because he was my dad figure. My mom was always too poor to get anything for my Christmas, because she was smoking crack. My brother was getting a whole shit load of clothes, toys, and game systems. I started wanting to get involved in gangs. My brother was involved in a little gang called FOB, at the time it was little - there was no killings then. He was graduating school with them. By the time I got to grade 10, I went to a place called XXX. It was a big school, I think 1600 people. It was all rich kids, stoners. So my brother gave me a pound of weed and was like, "You're in high school now. You should start making money." And he was like, "You should start doing something with your life." I was like, "How do I start?" He sat down and talked to me and taught me how to sell. (Mamdouh)

The participants described the way their siblings influenced each other as a chain reaction. While the participants acquired their older siblings' negative behaviours, their young brothers and sisters also looked up to them and aspired to follow in their footsteps.

It escalated, it was from smoking weed and not coming back home. [We were] going out and partying all night long, and having sleep over and stuff. And everybody started growing individually, and we started copying each other. It was me and my brother. And then my sister one year younger than me, she tried to copy us. She tried, then it escalated from the sister younger than her. (Bekele)

Most of the time, the older siblings influenced their younger brothers or sisters. In two cases, however, the participants influenced their older brothers to engage in illegal activities.

Negative Parental Influences

Many participants grew up in households in which parents struggled with mental health challenges. Nine individuals indicated that at least one of their parents suffered from depression. The primary reported causes of depression included cultural shock, post-migration

downward socioeconomic mobility, and marital conflict. In a few cases, the parents suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and stress-related mental breakdown. Two participants reported that their parents were hospitalized to receive treatment for their severe depression.

My mom felt very alone. She used to cry every day and night, thinking about her other sister in Pakistan. So she went through a bit of a rough time. (Amin)

After they [mother and stepfather] broke up, my mother was having a rough time with everything, and she kind of snapped. They stuck her in the hospital for a little while there. They gave my little sister, who was a baby at the time, to her father. After the 6 months, I ended up back with her. But I was in foster care for 6 months while she was in the hospital and getting care and everything. (Pierre)

The parents' poor mental health affected their care giving ability and parent-child relationships. The participants experienced their parents as being either distant or hostile towards them. Two participants had to live temporarily with other relatives or in foster care while their parents received treatment for depression.

A few participants witnessed their parents' drug use and heavy drinking at a very young age. Two participants, Mamdouh and Bashir, lived every day with the consequences of their parents' drug addiction. They were denied parental supervision, care and affection. Both moved through various foster care and group home arrangements over the years.

My dad and my mom always got high and stuff. They drank, they did ecstasy, they did weed, everything, crack, and sometimes they'd be in this room for like days, and they didn't care whether we went to school or not. They sit there and get high until they needed to get more money. They'd come out go to work, or they'd somehow sell something and get money, so they could go buy some more drugs. So drugs fucked up, excuse my language, messed up my whole family. (Mamdouh)

When I was 14, I started taking care of myself, because my mom was too busy smoking crack on the pipe...She was too messed up on crack. I see my mom, I would walk in the room and kiss my mom goodnight, and she would be sitting on the couch with her eyes rolled back, and I would just give her a hug and tell her good night...I try not to think about that [her drug use]. I tried to make it like I didn't notice that she smoked crack. Like she was still the same mom... My most painful memories were watching my mom smoke crack once, and get taken away from my mom [by social services]...Everyday, I would be like, "Yeah, I'm going home to my mom's house!" "Yeah! She's not on crack!" But she is. (Bashir)

Another two participants, Pierre and Rafiki, struggled with their mothers' alcoholism. Their mothers were single parents who relied heavily on alcohol to cope with their post-marital stress. They both reported drinking and drug use at an early age.

My mom had drinking problems. When she was drunk, she was full of anger and would yell at us from the top of her lung...She was happy until something snapped her, like accidentally burning her hand with her cigarettes. She would then be very angry, yelling and making a big mess. I was very angry at her, but I had to wait until she was somber before I could get mad at her. It was a vicious circle that we were in. She would treat us badly when she was drunk. Then when she was somber, she would realized that she was being bad, and felt badly about her being a bad mom. Then she would drink to deal with it. (Rafiki)

Thirteen participants grew up in families with serious marital troubles and domestic violence. They were caught in frequent verbal spats between their parents. In 9 cases, the participants witnessed their fathers' physical aggression against their mothers.

I remember coming home one day, and my mom was sitting outside, and it was freezing outside and she had her hand in her mouth. I asked her what she was doing and told her to go inside, and she takes her hand out of her mouth and her mouth was bleeding. I knew right away what had happened...So I was coming in the house, and my dad was coming

down the stairs, and I just punched him square in the mouth, and I knocked him right down the stairs. I said, "If you ever hit my mom again, it would be the last time you ever, ever hit my mom again...My mom, when she doesn't do nothing because she's been here raising ten kids, what gives you the right to hit her?" (Salim)

The participants were also not immune to domestic violence. All of the 13 participants experienced physical beatings from their fathers. Three participants reported severe abuse.

When I was 2, my dad almost killed me. I was crawling across the floor and he kicked me, he kicked me in the ribs. He used to beat up my mom because he thought that she was cheating on him with somebody, that I wasn't his son. One day- my brother still has scar- when I was four, my dad was cleaning out his gun and he actually shot. This is what he said to my mom that he was cleaning out his gun, and he accidentally shot my brother. Ever since then, my brother wide eyed. Like, crazy. (Bashir)

The participants were also subjected to verbal abuse, such as threats and humiliation.

I sit at home studying, my mom say, "Ngu qua! [meaning "So stupid!" in Vietnamese]. Holy cow, you know...I gonna go out I am gonna hate, right? And then somebody yelling at me again, but just people on the outside. Of course I'm going to get mad and gonna do whatever- I don't care. Yeah, family influence, some family like that. (Huy)

I recall that sometime I hear from mom like she going to poison all of us. Just you know, making statement like you know, she not happy, or like when we misbehave. (Vinh)

As a result of family strife and violence, some participants experienced deep anxiety, anger and trauma. They expressed their anger outside the family, by means such as fighting with their peers. Rashid commented on his experience and those of his peers:

It's not how Muslims react, because in Islam tells you that you can't hit your son. When our parents beat us up, they slap you so much that your head would hurt so much, and you'd have a Black eye, they just abuse you...But these guys [fathers] didn't follow religion that much. It filled me with hate. Now that I think about it, I think that what they did was still wrong, and I think that they should have just talked it out with me. I think that I'm the kind of guy that no matter how much you hit me, it doesn't matter, and it just fills me with more hate. But if you talk to me, I feel regret. That's the thing about me. I even remember back then, when I got beat up, I would be so pissed and filled with rage. I would just go outside and chill with my friends and go fight with somebody because of that. I would take my anger outside, because of course I could not raise my hand to my dad. But I would go outside and raise my hand on somebody else, it wouldn't matter to me. (Rashid)

Persistent family violence led to parental divorce in 8 cases, which caused further disruptions in the young people's lives. A few participants were denied opportunities to have meaningful contacts with one of the parents, as well as with their extended families.

The participants' exposure to law breaking behaviours of their parents and extended family members was far less frequently reported. Two participants, Mamdouh and Bashir, indicated that their fathers were involved in drug and weapons trafficking. As a result, they aspired to be drug dealers at a very young age.

Since I was probably 10 years old, I always wanted to be a drug dealer. Because my dad was a drug dealer, so I was like if dads doing it then I want to do it too...He got caught with a kilo of crack and then he went to court and stuff. Had jail time...Well, he always went to jail. I just thought I'd be like my dad. (Mamdouh)

In both cases, their fathers were eventually deported back to Lebanon. Due to their mothers' drug addiction, Mamdouh was placed under the care of his uncle, and Bashir moved through several group homes. As for Mamdouh, his uncle was involved in drug trafficking and eventually introduced him to drug selling.

Disadvantaged Family Socioeconomic Conditions

The participants primarily came from working class or low-income families. As presented earlier (see parenting styles), many parents worked long hours, often with multiple low paid jobs, to make ends meet. As a result, they had little time to supervise and to spend quality time with their children. In addition, 10 participants indicated that they lived in poverty over an extended period in their childhood and/or adolescent years. Their families relied on subsidized housing and income support from the government. Yet many still struggled with basic needs.

We lived in Penbrook, where we literally had little silverware and no heating, and a toilet where I had to open up the cap just to flush it. Everything was pathetic. I open my door and there's the fridge right there on my side, no space at all. If I opened my door, I can't open the fridge. (Pierre)

For several participants, parental divorce did not only challenge them to cope with psychological and emotional upheaval, but also marked the beginning of a difficult life of poverty. Quite often, their mothers became the sole caregivers in their families.

It was kind of a shock. It was kind of, "We don't got no dad," you know? After that, it was kind of like, everything changed. My mom had other kids to take care of, and then we didn't have enough money. And that's when I was like, I didn't have enough clothes, my mom couldn't buy me enough clothes, we don't got enough money. The government gave us money, but we don't got enough money to feed the whole family, to buy clothes for kids. (Osakwe)

Many participants were expected to take on financial responsibilities in their teenage years. Some took on the role of a caregiver to their young siblings while their mothers worked outside the house. They had to juggle their schoolwork and family responsibilities. The participants felt intense pressure and frustration.

When I was in grade 11, my father had a stroke. It was a pretty massive stroke. It was a hemorrhagic stroke. So, he had to retire, he was disabled at that point. So, after that point too, after family situation, my father being the sole bread winner of the family, that was a really tough time. I was working like two jobs while going to high school, I remember, even up to 3 at one point...I kind of felt like, you know, this sucks, why do I have to work so much. (Sarosh)

For 17 participants, their childhood involved frequent relocation, often from one low-income neighbourhood to another. In addition to inter-country migration, several foreign-born participants indicated that their families had moved with their families between provinces, cities and neighbourhoods many times since their arrival in Canada. The participants explained that their parents or caregivers primarily moved to a neighborhood with affordable rent, and to be closer to their work or their ethnic community.

We were in Bowness. Then we lived on XXX by Franklin when I was in grade seven until I was in grade ten. Even past grade ten a bit, then we moved to Forest Lawn, like more in Forest Lawn. Then we moved to 26 Avenue, and we only stayed there for about nine months. Then we moved again to Falcon Ridge and we stayed there for three months, and then we moved to XXX Memorial [Southeast] for like another two months, and now we live here right around the corner [Bowness]. (Rafiki)

Those participants whose families relied on affordable housing simply relocated to wherever the housing authorities assigned them. In some cases, the parents decided to move to the different neighbourhood when they became concerned about their children's exposure to or involvement in delinquent activities. This strategy only worked temporarily. As Nijam put it, "new place, old me!" The families were also bound to move to yet another low-income neighbourhood but there they faced similar socioeconomic challenges.

The constant relocation was frustrating for a number of participants. It disrupted their

school life, since their move also involved a change of school. The participants lost social contact with their peers in their schools and neighbourhoods. In their new communities, they had to make new friends, and some were vulnerable to social exclusion and bullying.

The whole change again, again it was more change. I hated it. More change, lose more friends, and then start a whole new life, start new friends, and yeah basically everything new again...I was angry about just moving a lot you know. (Carlos)

Family Protective Factors

As demonstrated thus far, the participants generally experienced far more challenges than normal in their interactions with their parents and other family members. Nevertheless, a small minority of participants highlighted some protective factors within their families. Four participants talked highly of their parents' positive approaches to child rearing. Their parents ensured their basic needs, made efforts to spend time with them, and provided them with emotional support. They emphasized the importance of education and positive ethics, and encouraged the participants to complete their education. They also used reasoning to guide the participants, and to advise them about the consequences of negative behaviours, such as drug use and drinking.

A lot of people think that immigrant parents are all about using the back of their hand, or using a stick to beat their children, but my parents were actually not like that at all. They were more about reasoning because my dad is actually a very educated man, and he was a counselor... He used to counsel and help rehabilitate people, help them get jobs, so he's very good at reasoning. So he tried the same methods with me. I mean it was working at some point but I mean obviously as you grow older, like I said before at that particular age you're more fond of your peers than you are of your parents. (Nasir)

Several participants talked about the importance of showing ultimate respect to their parents and elders in their cultures. They feared "letting down" their parents and expressed their sense of "guilt" when they misbehaved. A few participants fondly remembered the warmth of their grandparents and older uncles or aunts and the wise guidance they offered.

And when my uncle came, that's when we got a lot better. He's the kind of guy that's all about family. He was like our father. He would always talk to us, and he would never hit us. We always respected him so much, and we would never do anything, because we thought that he would find out, and we couldn't look at him in the face. But then when he left, there was nobody like him. (Rashid)

Unfortunately, the participants reported that their strong urge to connect to their peers at the time had overshadowed their relationships with their own parents and other family members.

They [parents] knew that I was hanging out with the wrong crowd, and always gave me advice, but I'd never take it. I wish I did, but I guess you live and learn, and you make mistakes and correct them, eventually stop repeating them and learn from them. They say a wise person is a person that listens to his elders and takes in what they have to say, because they've been there, done that, experienced it, and tell you not to repeat it. (Rajab)

School Interactions

The educational paths of the gang involved youth and former gang members from immigrant families were uneven and challenging. Almost all of the participants struggled academically. They experienced a wide range of learning barriers, and had difficulties coping with the various school transitions. They were subjected to bullying and racism, and negative peer influences. Additionally, many participants had a history of behavioural problems, and showed a high level of school disengagement. In their schooling, the participants received limited support from their families, as well as inadequate, ineffective school support.

Learning Barriers

Twenty six participants experienced persistent academic struggles. Most started to show poor school performance late in their elementary or early junior high years. For them, going to school, as Huy described, was like “stepping up the stairs, from this level to another level” without knowing how to get there. Among the most frequently reported personal learning barriers that undermined their academic ability were a lack of English proficiency, sporadic education, learning disability and a lack of motivation to learn. As many as 17 of the participants had encountered language barriers in their learning. Most of these came from countries where English was not the mother tongue. A few Canadian-born participants were raised in households in which the home language was not English. For these participants, it took several years to learn the English language; many were still struggling with their English at the time of their interviews. In their school work, the participants were constantly struggling to “catch up” with their peers. Their limited language ability increased their vulnerability to peer derision and social exclusion.

I didn't even know English. I didn't even know how to say hi, bye anything. This one kid, just like, dissed me out. When I was in this one school right, and then this one kid that I knew...he's like sitting there he's like spell DVD for me, and I just spelled it like real weird. I was like A, D, C, I just said like random letters right, and he laughed at me and everyone else on the bus started laughing at me. So I was just pissed off you know and all that stuff. (Awok)

The participants recalled rampant social stigma attached to their lack of English language proficiency. Their peers often equated their limited English to a lack of intelligence. As a result, many participants were reluctant to express themselves, or to ask for English language support.

I didn't want to get help from people cause it made me feel dumb. You know, like I didn't want people to look at me like he's in ESL, like he must be really dumb you know. I didn't want that, I didn't want people to look at me the way they looked at kids who are not intelligent. I wanted to be intelligent, I wanted to be my own person right, so basically they tried to put me in a couple of ESL, but I was like, no I don't want to be in ESL right. (Matak)

In addition to the language barrier, many participants who came from war torn countries or refugee camps had had only sporadic education. In some cases, the young people arrived in Canada without any formal educational experience. These individuals lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills. They spent their days feeling lost in the classroom, and experienced extreme frustration in their learning.

Reading and writing, and math and English- it was all so hard for me. I couldn't attend no more. It was too hard for me. My brain was just going crazy. It was too much for me. I don't understand everything, why I'm in school. (Osakwe)

Three participants were also diagnosed with a learning disability. They described their difficulties in reading and writing, and considered themselves “slow learners.” These individuals were frequently ridiculed by their schoolmates. They struggled to develop

friendships with peers outside their special needs class.

I was in a LD class. It's called 'LD' for learning disability. I got made fun of because I wasn't part of the regular school population. I was labeled retarded. And so they put me into his class, and it was right across from where the normal kids went to class, and so we got made fun of all the time.

Many participants admitted they lacked the motivation to learn. They struggled with procrastination, lack of self-discipline and inability to focus. Quite often, their learning took a back seat to having fun with friends.

Waking up early, going to school, being there for hours doing anything but work, being extremely bored, and just the work they gave you. You know, like I don't want to do this, like you know its just too much work for me, like I don't feel comfortable with it. So just leaving it off, like I'll get back to it, I'll get back to it, and its due the next day, you try to struggle through it but you can't even...like I can't do this you know, I wasn't prepared for it, like screw it, forget about it, and I go to school the next day, and I don't have my work with me, so it just started getting like that, started getting lazy you know. Basically laziness was my problem for school. (Matak)

School Transitions

The participants were particularly vulnerable during the school transitions: from home country education to Canadian education, from one school division to the next school division, from one school to the next school, and from a faith based school to a public school. All of the foreign-born participants struggled to adapt to the new education system in Canada. In addition to the language barriers, and in some cases, a lack of any formal education in their home countries, many participants had to adjust to new cultural norms with respect to learning, teaching style, authority, student-school personnel relationships, and peer relationships. On the one hand, those who came from a strict education system grappled with their new found freedom in a Canadian school. Several indicated that they became "too happy" or "too hyper." They took their freedom for granted to the point that they did not show respect to their teachers, principals and peers. On the other hand, those who came from a chaotic home country environment also struggled to adapt to the new cultural expectations and practices, particularly in dealing with conflict.

Once I got here, the rules are different. You cannot fight, you cannot do any of that, any of the things that don't work in society you know. But I had a problem there, cause I was so used to fighting a lot and if I get mad or if somebody doesn't agree with me, I usually just end up punching them and start assaulting them, but that's not the way things run around here. (Nijam)

Being new to Canadian school, many participants were vulnerable to bullying and physical harassment. They had a strong desire "to fit in with other kids," which made them vulnerable to peer influence.

Oh I don't know I just wanted to be cool you know like I see these guys, I didn't actually know they smoked weed and all that. I see these guys they got new pants, new shirts, new hats, new shoes all the time and everything, you know and here I am like just wearing like suits from Africa you know, like clothes from Africa like stuff. (Awok)

Their lack of knowledge about Canadian education and school resources also prevented them from accessing support from school personnel.

The transition from one school division to the next school division posed tremendous challenges for 17 participants. As each school division transition marked a new developmental stage, the participants had to cope with increased peer pressure to be "cool" or "popular" in their schools. They were also faced with an emphasis on expensive, brand name fashion among their peers. Many participants found the transition from the elementary division to the junior

high division the most frustrating experience. They had yet to develop the skills to cope with the increased peer pressure.

In elementary, we were all equal, basically. We didn't really care who was cool, or whatever, we didn't give a fuck. But in junior high, that's when it came, you need to wear proper clothes- Diesel, you know brand name clothing. At the time, I got made fun of for wearing Exco right? Growing up in a community where there was no brand name clothing. We didn't care, it was just clothes. They came in, and influenced me and my friends to wear clothes to impress them, to impress society, right? So honestly, what really changed who I am and what I was back in the day when I was a child was because of those assholes. Those people who demanded people to be cool, those who demanded us to wear their clothes, the rich people. They were just really rich I guess, and had some money I guess, and called me a hobo or some shit because I didn't have the money. In grade 8, that's when I started buying more of those clothes. Honestly, if nothing like that happened, them making me feel like I had something to prove, or if they didn't make fun of me, or if I didn't get harassed, I wouldn't be the way I am. (Ting)

The participants also found themselves having more freedom to socialize with their peers after school, and a strong desire to explore new experiences. Some participants' history of personal struggles was not communicated to their new schools, consequently they did not receive adequate school support.

Seventeen participants also experienced transitional difficulties when they moved from one school to the next school within a school division. The individuals changed schools when their transient families moved into new neighbourhoods or when they were expelled from their current schools. In several cases, the participants regularly changed school, at times from month to month. When the participants moved to a new school, they had to adjust to the new school culture. They often experienced social exclusion and isolation, and were vulnerable to bullying. Some participants stated that as they got older, it was harder for them to connect to an already established, close-knit social network in their new schools. In all 17 cases, the participants reported that changing schools involved a lack of continuity in academic and social support.

The only difference was that when we went to this school, nobody knew we were immigrants no more. Like we were immigrants, but we still can speak the language much better. So, when you go to school they miss those things, so you don't get the attention anymore. That attention we had at that school, where they take you out, and still work with you knowing that you came to that school from another country, went to that school so they help you a lot more. Once you move around, those schools are not going to try to help you like the first school you got to that knows that you were an immigrant children that landed. So a lot of stuff gets missed. You go to high school, you still don't have the same basics, you still don't have a lot of the skills, like all my reading, writing, grammar stuff. I had to learn on my own that's why I went back to school because I wanted to, these are things that were missing and I didn't know that they were missing until I was back in school and I was like whoa, what is this? Like, I have to Google this seriously, I would be on Google most of the time, because I didn't know what something meant, and I should know this stuff, but it was just stuff that was totally missed. (Carlos)

Three participants from a Muslim background made a transition from a faith based private school to a public school in their high school years. According to these individuals, they had led a rather sheltered life in their faith based school, with a strict focus on religious values and conduct. When they joined the public schools, they experienced "a huge cultural shock," and felt overwhelmed by the "very loose" school environment. The participants also indicated that they were ill prepared to deal with the social complexities they encountered in public high school.

I wasn't a delinquent or anything. But I went to boarding school from ages from 11-15.

When I came back, and within the boarding school environment, you are really sheltered, and there is only so much, you are not exposed to certain realities of greater society. So when I left, I went to a regular high school. When I went back, all of a sudden, I was exposed to this whole new culture within high school, which is a mix of different people—who is the cool crowd, who is not the cool crowd, okay those guys are part of the chess club, they must be geeks, these guys out there in the smoke pit, they used to call it the smoke pit, having smokes outside, you know in the bushes right, that's the cool crowd. You have your jocks that play sports right...All of a sudden, I saw this other side, which is the, glamorized side...There's drugs and you know all that kind of stuff right, and that really appealed to me because I hadn't seen it before. I wanted to try everything and I also wanted to be cool right, so I made a few of the wrong friends and from there it was pretty much in and out of the wrong kind of crowds. (Sarosh)

Bullying and Racism

The school experience, for many participants, was marred by pervasive incidents of bullying and racism. The participants faced racial segregation and hostility as early as kindergarten. Twenty one participants were taunted with racial slurs on a regular basis. Those incidents happened in the school yard, in the hallway, and in some cases, in the classrooms in the presence of their teachers.

This guy would always call me terrorist. In the middle of class, he would be like, "Terrorist, terrorist, terrorist, terrorist". I would tell him to shut the fuck up. He would be like, "Why don't you do something about it?" And I would tell the teacher, and the teacher would just tell him to quit it. And he would just keep calling me, "terrorist, terrorist, terrorist" and I would just hate that...There's like a lot of people. They used to call me "Paki" and everything. That's why I started chilling with Black people, because they would never call me anything. (Bashir)

Yo man, they call you nigger and they make fun of you. Sometimes they make fun of Sudanese kids about the color of their skin. It's cruel, I don't want to talk about it...That's why Sudanese kids mostly beat up White kids because they called them N words, and sometimes the teachers can be like, yeah, you know what I'm saying. I don't want to go into any more detail because it's cruel. Because they treat you differently man...Like you know, how go to the changing room, they treat you differently. But being Black is different. But I don't know, It's not good to talk about it. (Nijam)

It was also a common occurrence for some participants to see racially charged graffiti on the walls in their schools. Those who were new to the country were ridiculed for their limited English, accents and cultural dress. A few individuals felt pressured to behave in a stereotypical way.

For some reason, they [Asian students] were the only people that were allowed to be smart. The Vietnamese and Chinese, if they're smart, it's OK. Nobody gave them a hard time. They wouldn't call them a geek and say they work hard in school. In fact, that was expected from them. But for us [Africans] to do well in school, you would be labeled as a nerd, a geek. "What are you doing? Who cares about school? Let's go do this." (Bekele)

In addition to racial slurs and taunting, 10 participants encountered racially motivated physical violence. Several participants were assaulted repeatedly over a long period of time. Those incidents involved beating, kicking, punching, spitting and verbal humiliation. The fear of retaliation prevented a few participants from sharing their suffering with family members and school personnel. As youngsters, these participants lived in fear every day, and felt desperate for protection.

I used to get called names all the time and pushed around and kicked and spit on and everything you can imagine in terms of bullying. So just getting called a Paki by itself made me upset, but it wasn't the main thing. That was part of it, but it would come hand

in hand with punching me or spiting on me or kicking me or something. Up until 10, I was bullied probably once a week. Most of the time it was always Whites, sometimes Natives, sometimes Blacks, but that was rare. But I'd say 95% of the time it was Canadian kids, but you know, I don't blame them, they didn't know any better, either their parents didn't teach them or something, that's just the way it is. Everyone is racist to some degree. (Amir)

In their early years, the participants tended to take time to explain things to their peers, or try to ignore racial taunting. Osakwe, for example, remembered the line he often used with his peers when they called him "Nigger": "What are you trying to say, we're the same person, that doesn't mean anything, we still got the same heart". A few participants struggled to make sense of the injustice. They felt resigned, and internalized an intense sense of hurt and anger.

I don't think it ever made sense. Yeah, it never made sense, I think all it did was turn into anger. That's my feeling on that. I mean anger in the sense that I'm getting beaten up for no reason. So of course, I'm gonna be angry, and you know, I wanted to take that out, but you know who am I gonna take that out on? You know what I mean? And then sometimes, I would snap at my family members, and they would be like "Well, what did we do?" And I would just storm off and go to my room and say "Leave me alone." I would just go hide in my room, you know. So anger from getting beaten up all the time, but how did I process that and how did I feel about it and what did I think? To be honest man, I don't know... I think all that came out of that is anger, that that, why are these kids treating me like this. (Amir)

Over time, however, 13 participants resorted to violence to deal with their brewing frustrations and anger. They reported that they turned into bullies themselves, often seeking revenge against those who had bullied them in the past. Several also noted that they started bullying others, once they had secured "protection" from other peers known for their roughness.

When I was little, I was getting called racist words. I was called "terrorist", "Paki." I wouldn't do nothing about it. I would try to talk to people about it and everything, telling them to stop, and what do they do instead? They keep on doing it. As I grew up, I felt like I could control that. I could control my own life, I could control people beating me up, I could control people calling me names. No one would call me names again if I could take a step forward and be the man basically. (Bashir)

Many participants also observed increased social segregation on the basis of race and ethnicity in their high school years. They felt pressured to socialize with their "own kind." It was a common phenomenon that "the Brown guys would always chill with the Brown guys, the White guys would always chill with the White guys, and the Asians with the Asians." Some participants simply accepted the "racist practice" as part of the high school culture. Several others attributed such social segregation to a growing awareness of the divergence in upbringing, life experience and cultural values among students of various ethnic backgrounds.

You want to be around people like yourself, right? Someone who knows about you. Like, my boys would have the same upbringing as me, versus Canadian guys didn't have the same upbringing. 'Cause our parents kicked our asses, and for the White guys, their parents would never hit them. And for some reason, Browns and Blacks would always get along. White guys are completely different. We felt like we saw a lot more of life than they did...Some of them would say completely pointless things about their family, and we have different values and everything. For us, family was above everything. Religion, family, and your brothers. For those guys, it would be girls and beer. That's the thing. You have a different set of values. (Rashid)

Still, for several participants, racial segregation occurred due to conscious social exclusion of certain racial minority groups. In some schools, as a few participants recalled, students from certain racial minorities were socially shunned and ghettoized in some "designated" areas of the buildings. These racial minority youth also expressed their frustrations in ways that

reinforced negative perceptions about them.

This school that I went to had this hallway called the "Leb hallway." It was just Lebanese people, and we were all feeding off of each other and just messing around with everything. We'd slam our locker doors shut just to piss off teachers that were next to us. We just fed off each other, and that's how we all got into trouble. We stick together, because that's all we had. We were not accepted. (Mamdouh)

Racial tensions were not confined only to interactions among the students. Eight participants perceived differential treatment on the basis of race and ethnicity from some school personnel. A few felt ignored or disliked by their teachers due to their religion or race.

One of my teachers in grade 9 never really paid attention to me, because I was the only Brown kid in the class. He was so racist that one of the white guys gave him the finger and said, "Fuck you, you racist!". I don't know how to explain it to you. He would throw the paper in my face. So I don't know how you call that. I heard from a couple of other kids too that he does the same thing to them. This teacher was a very racist one. Every time I would about to say something, he would say, "Back home, do you guys do this? Just because you guys talk like this back home." Back home, back home, back home- that's all he would say. (Jagjeet)

Some participants perceived that their teachers and principals had low expectations of their ability to succeed in school. When they got into trouble for fighting with other students, they felt that they were faced with more severe consequences.

If I do something and a White kid does something, they [teachers and principal] judge you differently. You know, like they give you different consequences. That's what I think, and it's true though. It's always the same...Some kid's thing goes missing and points finger at me...And what else, you Black, you're not really smart, like they think, oh because you Black, you didn't get enough school and you're dumb, and they start looking down on you, you know...Like sometimes it got me mad enough to care, and I usually ended up lashing out like violence. But most of the times, it was like whatever, I'm used to it you know, no big deal, you know. (Gyan)

In one instance, the participant (Bekele) had a fight with his teacher, who then spoke to him, using a racial slur. Out of anger, he grabbed the teacher and almost assaulted him. Bekele recalled feeling upset that the teacher did not face any disciplinary action.

Individual Behavioural Problems

A number of participants had a long standing history of individual behavioural problems in school. They reported minor mischief in elementary and early junior high school years, including: talking in class, not listening to the teacher, picking on their peers, petty theft and minor vandalism.

I was a bad boy. I was just like not dangerous, but I was naughty, bugged the people, bugged the teachers. Run around school, and basically just do that. I was just arguing with my principal, just to move me to a higher school. Because in my mind, I was too mature for elementary school. (Amin)

Several participants, however, noted that their behavioural problems escalated as they grew into their late junior and senior high school years. A few participants became increasingly aggressive, and used force to harass their peers.

I started getting into trouble in kindergarten. I used to beat up all the kids. That's just way I've been. I guess, it's because my dad used to beat me up, so I would fight back when somebody would start something...In high school, instead of punching the guy two times, I would start beating him until he couldn't walk, or break his legs or something like that. I know it sounds stupid and barbaric, but that's the way. (Rashid)

These individuals got suspended for turning their school into a hostile environment.

I got suspended for different things. I disrespect the teacher. I disrespect another kid, scare another kid, assault another kid, assault the property and basically roughhousing, and hit a kid, and basically it's just those kinds of things. And my school work just started getting lower, lower and lower. (Matak)

Some participants admitted to an ongoing habit of cheating in their school work. They used tactics of intimidation or bribery to force their classmates to do homework for them or help them with their tests. They also skipped classes on a regular basis. Furthermore, several individuals revealed their frequent use of drugs and alcohol both on the school premises and in the community. They started smoking cigarettes at an early age, and by high school had progressively become dependent on marijuana, magic mushrooms, and lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD or acid). In a few cases, the participants were addicted to cocaine. These individuals admitted that they committed petty theft or borrowed money from their friends to support their drug habits.

I started doing the weed first. A little bit of the acid and the mushrooms, and then from there, when I was in high school I started doing coke. Did a little bit of coke, not very much of it, just a little bit. Then after high school, I got into really bad. I was doing it everyday and spending all my money, stealing money from my family, borrowing money from friends, selling whatever I had just to get it. I did that for a period of six months. (Rajab)

Negative Peer Influence

The participants identified peer pressure as an integral, prominent reality in the school culture, especially at the junior and senior high school levels. Like their schoolmates, they felt the pressure to be “cool” and “popular.” However, what set their experience apart from that of other peers were their vulnerability to negative peer influence and the delinquent nature of the activities in which they felt pressured to take part. As elaborated earlier, the participants experienced a wide range of difficulties in their interactions with their family members. The school performance of most of the participants was poor, and they struggled to adjust socially and academically during the various school transitions. Notably, the majority of the participants had experienced social exclusion at an early age, and in many cases had been bullied for an extended period of time. Burdened with various vulnerabilities, the participants felt a heightened need “to fit in,” “to prove” themselves, and “to do things that no one else could do.” They were more susceptible to the influence of those peers with shared academic and social struggles. They were reluctant to assert themselves under negative peer pressure due to a fear of social exclusion.

I didn't want to be left out. I did not want to be the kids that were always left out. I wanted to be involved. I wanted to be in the inner crowd and I wanted to be someone that people liked to hang around with. People don't like hanging out with people who say no. If out of 5 people, 4 say yes and 1 says no. Guess what you'll be alone. And unfortunately that was the case that's how it goes. (Vijay)

Under negative peer influence, the participants became involved in a myriad of delinquent activities, including mischief, school truancy, drug use, consumption of alcohol and fighting (see Involvement in Social Cliques for an in-depth discussion of group activities).

Disengagement from School

Many participants found their school experience “boring,” challenging and restrictive. Their language barriers and constant struggle to “catch up” made learning hard work. Several reported that they often felt “reckless,” “edgy,” and generally unfocused in their classes, especially in the core subjects such as math, science and English. Some struggled with a tendency to procrastinate, and did not feel motivated to put an effort into their learning. In fact,

28 participants admitted to frequent truancy. Those who struggled with basic literacy and academic subjects skipped classes to avoid embarrassment.

It was a really tough time for me to adjust to classes there, and that actually drove me to skip out on a lot of classes, because I felt that you know what I'm just going to get embarrassed going to these classes. Especially when teachers call out you by name and you don't know what's going on. You're totally lost and I felt that there was no point to even go to class. (Mamdouh)

Some skipped school to spend time with their girlfriends. A few individuals who grew up in a strict home environment used their school time to seek fun outside the home.

So I skipped school and finding my own time to have fun, and unfortunately the only time I had to have fun was during school time. When I started doing that I wanted to have fun with people because obviously you don't want to be alone. And so you'd find friends that would want to do the same thing at that time and people that, generally speaking, were doing those things, not wanting to go to class, cutting class, were not always the best of the crowds. And that's where I fell in to a very different environment, coming from a very strict household. But then again I had to have fun and the people that I chose to be with were not always the best influence. (Vijay)

Indeed, when the participants skipped classes, they spent time socializing with other socially disconnected peers, and over time engaged in delinquent activities. Their school truancy resulted in a further decline in their school performance, and in many cases, expulsion from their schools. Eighteen participants either dropped out of school or failed to complete their high school on time.

Lack of Parental Involvement

In spite of their academic and social difficulties at school, most participants indicated a lack of parental involvement in their learning. Many parents neither spoke English well nor had a good understanding of the Canadian education system. Several participants reported that their parents, often mothers, did not have literacy skills either in English or in their heritage languages. These parents relied on the participants and their siblings for translation and interpretation in their communications with the school. Some participants intentionally misled their parents about their school performance and school behaviour.

They [school personnel] called my mom. But I always picked up the phone. My mom did not speak English, so I selectively translated things that would make me look good, and changed the answers for things that made me look bad. (Amin)

When I was in grade six, I slacked off. I was out of it. I isolated myself from everybody. I started doing bad in school. It got to the point, for my report cards, I would go to the computer store and cut little pieces of A,B,C,D's to put on my report card, photocopy it, and it would look like I got an A or B. I present that to my dad and he was happy. I just started getting sneaky. (Rashid)

The parents of many of the participants came from a culture where parents respect and trust the school system to raise their children. Therefore they assumed a non-interventionist role in their relationship with the school. A few participants, however, indicated that their parents simply did not care about their learning, and as a result, were inattentive at home to their learning needs and habits.

I couldn't read. And my family never really sat down with me and did homework with me. They didn't care what I did. (Mamdouh)

Inadequate and Ineffective School Support and Responses

Almost all participants (N = 28) elaborated on inadequate and ineffective school support and responses to various issues, including: English language instruction, teaching methods, support for troubled youth, dealing with cultural diversity and competence, and addressing school safety. Several participants with a mother tongue other than English reported a lack of English language instruction in their schools. They received minimal support, and had to rely on after school support. Some turned to their peers and television programs to learn English.

Whatever you need help, you can ask them after school or stay back after school. That's the service then - whatever you want to ask, they were busy during day, and they didn't have time until the end of the day... When we had a test in class and we had to hand it in right away. They knew about it [language barrier], but it seemed like nobody care. (Huy)

Those who did receive ESL support were frustrated by a lack of progressive programming.

Well, it was boring. Because they give you the same thing. Like you know, how when you come new to Canada, you don't know English. ESL, they give you like the same shit every year. You go, they give you the same thing, you go, and they give you the same thing. You tell them, but it's like they don't want you to get better. They keep giving you the same shit; you keep doing it over and over. (Gyan)

The practice of pull out, in which students were asked to leave their regular classes for a limited period of time to receive ad hoc English language instruction, made some participants feel stigmatized and alienated. Several participants also found that the traditional teaching methods made learning difficult. They found the information “went in one ear, and went out the other ear,” and grew restless and frustrated sitting at their tables.

Just sitting there for hours straight, just listening to them talk, writing notes that wasn't really paying attention to, just copied it from the board, reading and doing homework... Things with me, if I'm not interested in something I do not commit to it, I don't want to do it. Like if it's interesting to me, I will do it you know. But school became very less [interesting], like I didn't even want to be any part of it any more. (Matak)

Twenty three participants observed that their teachers lacked the skills and life experience to deal with students with behavioural problems. Rather than being confident and providing steadfast guidance, the teachers were intimidated by the students' behaviour. Subsequently, several participants took advantage of their teachers' fear and leniency. In a few cases, the teachers engaged in a shouting match with their students.

I remember being in grade 7, we pretty much told the teachers what we wanted to do. We didn't listen to the teachers... Some of the teachers there, I think, didn't know how to handle it. I think my social teacher, he was more of a lenient guy, so we took advantage of that. And we just did what we wanted to do. (Afewok)

To be honest, once we hit the later levels in junior high and high school, a lot of the teachers were intimidated... I saw the Lebanese kids have the teachers in line. Teachers would skip over us to yell at other kids, because they didn't want to yell at us. (Pierre)

Some participants looked back with sympathy for their teachers. Those teachers who asserted their authority were vulnerable to serious threats and retaliation from their students. The lack of relevant life experience made it difficult for some teachers to connect with the students with behavioural problems and complex personal and life challenges.

If I would have had somebody that had some experience in something bad or rough, and came to me and said, “Listen, I was involved in that, I can teach you this and this and this”, then I can say, “Yeah, OK. It's interesting to listen to.” But to have somebody with just a university education and speak bullshit to you, you hear that? How are you going to come and do this stuff when you don't even experience it? You don't know nothing about it. You just know it from reading. You don't know what the hell you're talking about. You haven't experienced it first hand. (Salim)

The lack of connection between several participants and their teachers meant that they had no positive, inspiring role models in their schools.

I didn't have a teacher to attach to, because like I said, the teachers were timid. They just thought that they had to get into this class, drive it into our heads, and get out. A lot of them, you can tell, that it's just their job, and they're not passionate. I didn't have a teacher. I didn't have a role model in that area. (Pierre)

Several participants said that their schools did not have a good support system for students with complex behavioural issues and life challenges. In many cases, the school personnel failed to recognize the personal challenges facing the students, or did not offer follow up support to students who needed help.

They [school] didn't have a good support system. I mean if you got in trouble, they knew that I had smoked weed and stuff like that, but I don't remember any teacher or anybody offer me counselling. They knew about it, but nobody said you should go and get counselling and stuff. (Bekele)

When I got into trouble with the police, everyone carries on with their own business, their own way of life. No one tried to help you then, or give you guidance. (Thanh)

In the experience of 18 participants, schools readily used suspension and expulsion to deal with behaviourally challenging students. Quite often, the participants did not receive any follow up support or guidance in the community. In most cases, the participants simply continued their behavioural patterns in their new schools. A few participants brought attention to the negative effect of the transferring of student records to a new school. In spite of their desire to make a fresh start, the participants felt profiled in their new schools, and out of frustration, acted out according to the labels assigned to them.

The teachers always looking at you like your a bad ass, like right away, right away...The school before there, they had made me like pretty marked, and so it follows you right through school. You go you do something bad in one school it's going to follow you. Your record gonna go from one school to the next school to the next school. So your reputation is really what it says in the book and they really say things like, oh he's a troubled youth, you are going to have a good time, good luck, good ridden. That's how I felt like at every school I went to, like good riddance, we don't even want him back. (Carlos)

Twenty one participants were critical of how their schools dealt with racial and cultural diversity. Many participants observed that racial segregation and exclusion became an accepted norm in their schools. Several perceived that their school principals or teachers ignored, or dealt unfairly with racial incidents.

Like when the kids called me the n word, I tell the principal, and the principal is like, "Oh, I'll talk to them" right? But then he never talked to them, so like I keep telling the principal, the principal doesn't want to do nothing about it. So I do something about it. Like I give them two choices, tell them first, if they don't do anything, I tell them again, and if he doesn't do anything the third time, I'll do it by myself. (Gyan)

Some participants did not see their culture reflected in school practices. They felt a sense of social distance and alienation in their schools. Many increasingly turned to their intra-ethnic peers for social interactions and peer support.

I didn't belong to the school, no...They would have sport, it's like a meeting where everyone in the school gets together, and they have the mascot dancing, just to show school spirit. So me and the guys would get forced to go there, and we would just sit there and look like donkeys on a fence. We wouldn't know what we were supposed to do, and we didn't care about it. And then you would see all the White guys on the rugby team all excited...I didn't see my culture in the school. Our friends were our culture in our school. When we are together, we talk to each other in our own language. We would know our tradition and talk to each other, and how to respect each other. (Rashid)

The participants also reported that there were very few role models from diverse backgrounds among the teaching staff. Several felt that their teachers were not competent in dealing with culturally diverse students, and that they were subjected to stereotyping and differential treatment from their teachers (see Bullying and Racism).

Some participants stated that their schools failed to provide a safe environment. They were exposed to fighting, drug use and drug selling in their early days in the schools, and eventually became involved in those delinquent behaviours. They felt their schools lacked expertise, resources and leadership to deal with the prevalent violence and drug activity. Several participants recalled detailed incidents involved stabbing, interracial group fights, selling of marijuana and hard drugs, and frequent use of drugs among the student population.

Finally, most of the participants did not have access to an anti-gang education program in their schools. A few of those who attended the anti-gang educational workshops were critical of both the content and delivery. They felt their schools lacked an understanding about gang issues within the local context, and did not provide adequate outreach and preventive education in their early elementary and junior high school years. They noted their schools took a protective, authoritative approach to anti-gang education. As a result, they felt their schools did not tell them all they needed to know about the realities facing gang involved youth. The participants felt resentful that instead of preparing them with problem solving skills, their schools focused on imposing rules to regulate students' behaviour.

They [school personnel] only knew a little bit about gangs, and they would just tell you not to wear bandanas in school, or couldn't have one glove on. Having one glove on would mean something. And we laughed about it. Like I said, Calgary groups don't have these labels or symbols. To wear one glove would just be a sense of style. They didn't have any involvement in anything. So we just laughed at the school system for making these rules, because it had nothing to do with Calgary group mentalities or crimes or gangs. It had nothing to do with these bandanas. And even with the little knowledge they did have, it was completely ignorant. They would see a video of an American Black gang, and they just applied it to our school. But that didn't work for us. It's different, we're in a different place, different city, with different ethnic groups. A lot of these kids speak different languages, and their parents don't even speak English. You're trying to compare them to America, where they've been there for centuries as slaves. They're broken down in bad societies and stuff. They're trying to take general media and places. There were no programs, no outreach, nothing. Nobody came to us and asked us about it. Nobody gave us awareness about it. Nobody went to us when we were little in school, which was more provocative, because you want to tell these little kids, and you want to get them scared. But we would think that don't tell us not to smoke in high school, because we're just going to laugh at you. We're going to leave your program and go outside and smoke. If you tell little kids, they're listening, even if they're bouncing off the walls. You can tell them that if you get shot, you're dead. And they might open their eyes and get nervous when they get asked to come on a drive by. They might think something different if they were told that when they were a little kid. Once they're hard headed, and they're teenagers, you're not going to get anything in there. Are you kidding me? You can't wait that long. So the outreach needs to begin with early junior high or elementary school. (Pierre)

School Protective Factors

Some participants were able to identify a few positive aspects of their school experience. Nine participants talked fondly about specific school personnel who were able to reach them and provide them with meaningful support. From the accounts of these participants, these school personnel showed confidence in how they handled the students' behavioural problems. They were able to assert their authority, and at the same time their guidance was patient and

thoughtful. They invested time and energy in listening to the underlying issues facing the participants, and followed up with practical support. In some cases, they gave the participants a chance to prove themselves.

She was the assistant principle, and she was very cocky. And I was very cocky too. We had something in common, but everybody else hated her guts...The first time we met, I went to the office and I called her a fucking bitch. She came to my face and asked me what I called her. I told her, and she told me to tell it to her face...I liked how she came up to my face, being a woman and everything, and came straight to my face, and we talked like that. And I started to build a little respect for her. You didn't expect her to do that. It didn't make sense in my head that she was able to do that. That was the first time that we had the one talk and had a connection...After that, every week she would call me to her office and we would talk for hours about whatever...I had enough trust in her now than I had trust in my mom. She would sit there and listen, instead of blaming me like how mothers do. I just had so much respect for her more and more each day. It went from week to week to day to day, we would sit down and talk. I would tell her everything. I would tell her that I'm on coke while sitting there talking to her. Instead of calling the police, she would tell me that this is wrong and this and that, but she understood why I did that. Slowly I started to think that it's stupid [to do coke]. There's so many things that she did for me that I can't even start to tell you. She did things even more than a mother. She could have lost her job for the things she did. But she told me that a kid like me can start an example for the whole school. (Jagjeet)

A few participants also recalled positive interactions with some visible minority teachers, especially those with relevant life experience. These teachers were able to provide culturally relevant advice, and served as role models to the students.

I had two Black teachers. They could teach me a lot about what's going on. I learn a lot from them, like their mistakes. Some people might not learn a lot from a normal adult, like a mom or dad, but some Black people sit down with you and ask me why I'm doing this and that, and think about what I'm doing. They gave a lot of good advice. I felt connected to them. (Zuberi)

Several participants identified their involvement in sports as an alternative to their thrill seeking, delinquent behaviour. They found physical activity to be their means of dealing with life stress. They also received social support from their sports teams.

Grade 7 we tried to do more sports...Sports was actually how I kind of released all my stress and because we were so good...I even remember telling this teacher, you know, you guys don't have a track and field team, like you guys have to have a track and field team, and they did. My brother became MVP (most valuable player) that year and I was MVP track field that year, so that was awesome. There were some good times in there, but yeah it's the negative stuff. (Carlos)

Unfortunately, for the majority of the gang involved youth and former gang members, the positive experiences were inconsistent, and generally overshadowed by their persistent struggles with learning and making positive connections with peers and school personnel.

Community Interactions

The participants had rather distant relationships or strained interactions with both the general community and their ethnic communities. They generally lived in impoverished neighbourhoods, and were exposed to various negative influences in the community. In daily community life, the participants were susceptible to negative peer influences and had limited positive interactions with adults. Many experienced racism and discrimination. They did not readily have access to adequate, comprehensive services. The participants also demonstrated a high level of disengagement from the community.

Impoverished Communities

The majority of the participants were raised in the northeast and southeast communities of Calgary, such as Forest Lawn, Dover, Marlborough, Penbrook, Albert Park/Radisson and Saddle Ridge. A few lived in Bowness, a community in northwest Calgary. The participants generally had a negative perception of their communities. Most grew up in low-income neighbourhoods with a disproportionate presence of immigrants, Aboriginal people, single parent families, and transient populations. Their families relied either on Calgary Housing or cheap apartment/home rental. Many reported an absence of strong social structures and cohesion in their neighbourhoods.

We used to live in the complex of Calgary Housing. Some of them [friends] had one parent or no parent; they lived with their brothers and sisters. Basically people that were poor, or didn't have that much money, or just didn't have any kind of support or guidance, or the resources. (Afewok)

I got stomped on by a group of 20 people in the middle of the road, and this guy stops his van and says, "Hey, can you move?" I'm laying on the ground trying to get up, and I'm all dizzy, and he's like, "Hurry up, can you get out of the lane?" He didn't ask me if I was ok, or if I wanted him to call the cops. This is the mentality here [in Forest Lawn]. Whereas you couldn't get away with it in other places. It did matter. People were more used to it, there were more drug addicts, and so it made the drug dealings easier, and the crimes easier. You could get away with stealing. There were more people to keep quiet. It was just easier. (Pierre)

Several participants used negative terms, such as "ghetto" and "crack head town" to describe their neighbourhoods. They were critical of the inequitable city development, and believed that the municipal government had marginalized their communities.

I don't like that whole area. People who are immigrants are sent to Dover or Forest Lawn. I can't stand that area of the city. I will never move back there. It's the northwest for me. That it's like the city just basically says, "Let Forest Lawn be Forest Lawn, let that area be the bad area of the city. Every city needs a bad area in it, let's just let it be there." You know what I mean? They come out to the media and say that they're trying to do this and that, but they're not trying to change anything. It's all the media thing. To me, that's how I see it. They're the forgotten ones. Not just Forest Lawn, but Ogden, Bowness - all of those areas in the city that are just forgotten. (Salim)

Negative Community Influences

Almost all of the participants had early, prolonged exposure to negative influences in their communities, including violence, drug use and drug dealing, and prostitution. The participants reported a high degree of violence in their neighbourhoods. Several participants witnessed incidents that involved their neighbours, and sometimes their own family members, using violence to resolve conflicts among neighbours. Some young people modeled this mode of conflict resolution in their interactions with their peers.

Everybody wanted to fight everybody. Little kids wanted to beat up the neighbour- "I'm tougher than you," or "My dad will beat up your dad". Just stupid, immature stuff. (Salim)

The rampant drug trafficking brought gang violence into their communities. At an early age, many participants were aware of gang warfare and gang related deaths in their neighbourhoods.

It was rough. It was a ghetto neighbourhood. Halloween days, there used to be like gunshots, cops everywhere. They used to sell drugs on the corners. I said, "WHAT? What the hell's going on, that's not supposed to be happening." When I lived in the northwest, like Dalhousie, nothing happened like that. It's like a different world man. (Nijam)

A few participants were victims of robbery and extortion perpetrated by their own neighbours. They felt vulnerable and were anxious to find ways to protect themselves.

People see me walking down the street, and they're like, "Hey, come here." I was a kid that time. I was like, "What?" They're like, "Take off your clothes, I have a knife". It was so bad! They're jacking me. They took my clothes, my hat, my cell phone, my iPod, everything like that! Sometimes they punch me out if I don't do it. I had no choice. What if they stabbed me?...I got used to it. The only way I can put it is, it kind of made me feel bad. That was kind of the reason why I want to help myself too. I don't want to get jacked everyday...I want to be a guy to defend myself. That's the only reason why I was like, "I got to do something about this. I got to find out how life is and how I can defend myself." That's when started going and doing bad stuff, because they show me how to do it. They jack my clothes, next time around, I jack their clothes. (Osakwe)

Persistent exposure of the participants to "rough" activities in their neighbourhood desensitized their fear of disorderly conduct and normalized the use of violence to resolve conflicts. It reinforced the need to develop "toughness" among the participants.

Furthermore, 28 participants witnessed rampant drug dealing in their neighbourhoods. At a young age, the participants were able to identify the drug dealers and their illegal activities. They saw people, including their friends' parents and their own family members and relatives, abusing drugs and alcohol on a regular basis. They also observed that their neighbours accepted such activities as the norm in their communities.

When I used to live there, it was like so bad and stuff, like drug addicts and stuff. To tell you the honest truth, I think my parents were like the only ones not involved. Everyone else was crack heads, drug addicts, or drug dealers, or stuff like that. (Awok)

I realized that drugs are actually everywhere. From my apartment, I saw some Black and White kids climbing up to the roof of a church and see their heads poking up and the smoking coming from where they are. We moved to a new place. There's a big field behind my house and my school. I was taking this big field home, and I saw a couple of police cars and a couple of White people who got caught with big stacks of drugs and everything. I think there's pretty much drugs everywhere. I've seen a couple people after school, be on the field smoking it or drinking. I've seen drugs everywhere. I've seen a guy using hard alcohol in the bus. He had those hard metal water bottles that you can't see inside, but I could smell and see the alcohol coming out of the water bottle, and his behaviour was raging - he was screaming and singing songs to himself and very loud. The bus driver didn't seem to do nothing, and the people around him just stared and did nothing. So, there's drugs everywhere. (Zuberi)

Several participants developed an awareness of nuances in drug dealing activities. For example, Rafiki observed, "many of the stores may do haircuts in the front, but they don't care if they cut hair; they would sell you any kind of drug." Some participants recalled their fear of the drug dealers and their criminal activities when they first moved into their new neighbourhoods. Over time, they were "getting used" to their behaviour; some even became friends with those

drug dealers.

Seven participants were aware of prostitution activities in their neighbourhoods at an early age. They were able to identify the areas with an established presence of sex workers. A few personally knew the “pimps,” and those young women who were involved in prostitution.

I knew this girl. Once I went to her house, I was in grade 6, I would see, they [women] are drinking beer, and yeah, they just get frisky, and I was like, “what the heck is going on?”...[At that age] you may not necessarily know what to name it, but you know, you know what it is. You know its prostitution right, what they are doing...I heard from some friends that she became a hooker. (Carlos)

Lack of Interactions with Positive Adults

From the accounts of many participants, there was a striking absence of interactions with positive adults in their neighbourhoods. Many participants answered “no” or “not really,” when they were asked if they had positive, inspiring adult figures in their lives.

Half of my neighbourhood that I was around, the people that I used to know, are doing 10 years in jail, 2 of them that I know are sex offenders. There’s no positive things for us back then. (Salim)

Instead, some of the participants looked up to the troubled adults who eventually involved them in criminal activity. Unfortunately, these adult individuals made themselves readily available to the young people.

I was chilling with these drug dealers, right? When I was chilling with these drug dealers, they were treating me right. I actually had friends. I actually had meaning around these guys. So I started chilling with them and everything. (Bashir)

Many participants also had difficulty broadening their interactions beyond their immediate families. They relied solely on their parents or relatives as their role models. Unfortunately, these figures had their own personal and interpersonal struggles, and some were far from being positive, inspiring role models. For example, Mamdouh identified his uncle as someone whom he respected when he was growing up. Yet his uncle was also the one who introduced him to drug dealing.

Negative Peer Influence and Behaviour

Many participants socialized with other young people in their neighborhood who also came from socioeconomically disadvantaged families or “broken homes.” Many of their peers had parents who were addicted to alcohol and/or drugs, or were involved in drug dealing. Some of their peers bullied them when they first moved into their neighbourhoods.

When I first moved into that neighbourhood, it’s an immigrant neighbourhood, there’s like bunch of kids and they already claiming a gang. I remember walking up, and it was just me and this other two Spanish guys. I heard one of the other kids saying to the Black kid, “Yo, if you can beat that guy up you are in our gang”. The guy came up to me, and he tried to fight me, so I just punched him out, and then he started crying. Then his friends were like, okay, because he just got beat up by this guy, so they like saying to me to be in their gang. I was like, I’m not going to be in no gang with a bunch of pussies you know. (Carlos)

As the participants developed bonds with their peers, they mutually influenced each other’s behaviour.

We moved into a co-op housing, I don’t know if you are familiar with that, it’s kind just lower income also. The kid who lived in our complex was one of my best friends. And he was into bad shit, and I started getting into bad shit with him too. And we were feeding off each other, I would do this, and he would want to copy and so on. (Bekele)

The participants recalled some minor delinquent activities that they took part in with their peers in their early years, such as egging cars, causing neighbourhood disturbance, or stealing food from neighbours. However, their mischievous behaviour gradually escalated and became more serious. Several participants reported that they committed petty theft, vandalism, fighting and break and enter by the later years of elementary school..

We started vandalizing things, and threw rocks at buses. We just broke into cars, and just things probably a lot of grade fivers and sixers did. As I went from grade 5 to 6 to 7 it got worse, stealing clothes and there on. And then fighting, lots of fighting and beating up people (Rashid).

Many participants experimented with cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana with their peers in their neighbourhood. In fact, on average, the participants started using drugs at the age of 13. The participants indicated that many of their peers had access to marijuana through their parents. They also committed theft and break and enter to buy illegal substances.

It started with cigarettes, when I was about 12. And somebody just told me, "Ok, here try this cigarettes." So I tried it, I don't know, just to be cool or something. Gradually when I was 13, 14, I started hanging out with the kids in the complex, up the hill from my house. We started smoking weed and joints and stuff like that all the time. (Afewok)

Racism and Discrimination

The participants grew up with a keen awareness of being different from the so-called mainstream society. They reported brewing racial tensions between White and non-White, as well as among ethnic minority groups. More than half of the participants could explicitly recount incidents that involved racial conflict. Many of the participants, particularly those from South Asian and African backgrounds, heard racial slurs on a regular basis. They were subjected to generalized and malicious stereotypes that, for example, viewed Muslims as violent terrorists. They also experienced racially motivated bullying in their neighborhoods, and in some cases, serious hate crimes. Zuberi, for instance, narrowly escaped a racially motivated attack shortly his arrival in Canada. As he recounted the incident, his voice and facial expression conveyed angst and disillusionment.

There's a group called Skinheads who are bald and have the Hitler signs. They often chased us. That was way back in my fourth or fifth month here, and I got chased by them. I was walking home around 7 going to 8, like right now when it gets dark early [winter]. I was walking in a back alley to get to my house, and he was in his car. I didn't see nobody, because he had tinted windows. I kept on walking and then I heard the door open. I turned around and he said, "Hey you, Nigger." He started running and chasing me. I saw that he had a knife in his hand, so I started running away. I didn't want to run in front of my house, because he would know where my house is. So I ran past my house. He was chasing me for 5 or 6 minutes until he gave up and went back. At that, everything was OK, so I started walking back, and that's when I saw his car coming straight still. And this time, it was not a knife, it was a baseball bat in his hand, and his window was down. About a year or two years after that, I met the guys that I hang out with now. They seem not to like White people. I told them the story that I got chased by a White man, that was when I didn't know what it was. They asked me if the guy was bald, if he had any tattoos around his neck, and I told them he was bald but didn't have any tattoos. They explained to me what a Nazi and everything is, because we don't know that stuff in Africa. So after that, the war back from Africa came. The way my friend said, it brings the evil in us out. (Zuberi)

This particularly incident triggered post-war trauma in Zuberi, and intensified his sense of alienation from the broad community. Other participants also reported anger and a sense of resignation in their relationships with the community as their common reaction to racial

incidents. Many young people relied heavily on their ethnic peers for social interaction and support. Some resorted to physical violence to express their anger.

Several participants reported differential treatment from the justice system. They perceived hostility and racial profiling in their interactions with the police in the community. When they got into conflict with the law, they felt that they did not receive fair outcomes because of their racial background. These individuals expressed their loss of faith in the justice system, and palpable discontent and anger toward the police.

Every time we walked in the street, cops just like harassed me for no reason, cause it's the way I dress, they think it's gang...They see us in group of 4 they think it's a gang. If you drive a nice car they pull you over, they think you're a drug dealer, stuff like that. Like a lot of people don't care about the law, cause the law just racist and shit. When they see Black people, they're like "Oh, they're criminals." So if they're going to say I'm a criminal I'll be one I'll be a criminal. Show them what criminal is. Fuck life. Life's gay, that's what I think. Especially if you're Black. Cops all got attention on Black kids and shit. (Gyan)

Lack of Access to Community Resources

The majority of the participants were either unaware of or did not readily access services in their communities. Many participants particularly lamented a lack of opportunities for them to participate in team sports. They attributed their limited involvement in recreational activities to prohibitively high costs. Some pointed out that their parents had not sufficiently become integrated into the community, and thus did not fully appreciate the importance of sports and recreation in their children's development and wellbeing.

I loved skating and I didn't even have money for a pair of skates. That was one of the thing that strikes me the most, like you know, like that's why I value my skates right now so bad. Because I remember I used to putting on the boots. Someone lend me a hockey skate so I can actually play on ice. That was probably the saddest thing, that I experience when I was young. (Vinh)

I would have loved it if my parents put me in sports and stuff like that. I wish I was put into hockey. Hockey is an expensive sport right, at that time and even now. If you look at first generation parents, they don't tend to do that. One of the reasons was the cost associated with that, and maybe just the general sense of them not feeling that they are fully part of that community. (Sarosh)

Several participants asserted that unlike youth in affluent communities, young people in the southeast and northeast neighbourhoods have not been offered adequate services.

You go to Tuscany, you go to Crowfoot, they got the clubs and different things for kids. You go down there [southeast], you have not much...Why not put the same things that they put in rich communities? Why only privileged communities? Some place where kids can go. (Salim)

They noted that youth from immigrant families do not have access to adequate services and resources either in the community at large or in their ethnic communities. In their view, service agencies in the broad community do not pay enough attention to immigrant and minority youth, especially those from low-income families. At the same time, their ethnic communities either do not have resources or can provide only piecemeal programs to support the young people.

A few participants accessed social services, often as a result of intervention from child protection services or as a consequence of court orders. They were frustrated by a lack of culturally competent services. They noted that even though some professional helpers had good intent, they were not equipped with the life experience, knowledge and skills to work in cross cultural situations.

I started seeing this counsellor, and she just kept talking about the same thing, so I didn't really want to see her, cause she asked me the same thing. Every week she came back, and "Oh, how you feeling?" And then she asks me the same questions like, "what were you doing in Africa?" I was just pissed off, and then I just told her that I don't want to see her anymore. But the thing is she was really trying to help me, but I just didn't know that you know. Like everything she asked me to do something I'd do it, but when she asked me those questions I just got mad and so I just left her. (Awok)

People, professional help, you know from upper blue collar sort of background, or come from a wealthy background, trained social worker who coming in, and try to do the work, and a lot of the time you feel like, you know, those people are feeling sorry for you but they don't really really understand the issue. So it's a different sort of a ball game. So even if those people trying to reach out to you, you didn't feel that they understood you. (Vinh)

They also noted that some professionals quickly asserted power over their families.

My dad tried to help me, he called in a social worker. But the social worker made the biggest mistake ever, he like what's it called? He came to my house one time, and like he told my parents they weren't taking good care of me. But then my dad was yelling at him, and he was threatening to take me away and everything. (Zuberi)

In addition, several participants criticized the lack of readiness and competence among service organizations to work with troubled youth. In their view, these organizations had a very limited understanding about issues facing youth with complex life experiences, and thus did not position their organizations to support youth with serious behavioural and psychosocial challenges. Rather than helping the young people, the organizations became fearful of them, or struggled to provide meaningful services. Some turned the young people away.

Half the time, a lot of the organizations, soon as they hear the word "gang," they're dealing with fear, you know. You have half the time, they shut the door just because they don't know how to deal with it. They literally go "My gosh!" (Vinh)

I wish they had a community group and help or whatever to help. Back then, there's nobody to help you. They're just, "Who cares, you go to jail, that's your choice." Yeah, I never had nobody come to me. Attend this class, or whatever, or that class, or attend a meeting, or whatever. There's nobody. (Huy)

Disengagement from Community

The participants did not have strong relationships with either the general community or their ethnic communities. Twenty eight participants struggled to connect with the general community. Several factors accounted for a lack of strong connection with the community at large. Those with limited English proficiency had only limited interaction with those outside their ethnic groups. They lacked an awareness of and were reluctant to participate in community activities. In addition, several participants indicated that their parents were experiencing their own acculturation, and did not fully understand, adapt to or embrace the cultural norms and practices in Canadian society. As a result, their parents had reservations about and were mistrustful of the so-called mainstream community, and discouraged cross-cultural interaction. Some families participated only in religious and other social activities in their own ethnic communities. In a few cases, the participants attended faith based boarding schools in which there was little interaction with other people outside their religion or school. Epeli, a second generation Canadian, recounted his upbringing:

Within the greater community, I was not involved, not with mainstream society so much. I mean being in that environment, I felt like I was only a part of the Muslim community within the greater community. At the time, I didn't feel like I was a member of society in general. I probably didn't know what this was. I guess sort of segregated or secluded

maybe. The outside world wasn't exposed to me, and wasn't of any concern to me then, nor were we given the opportunity I guess to be a part of it. Whether it was sports activities, or any activity in general. Most of what I did was to do with my community only. (Eveli)

Some participants grew disenchanted with the marginalized status of their communities. They compared the living standards and access to resources in their communities to those in the more affluent areas in the Northwest. These individuals looked for a way out, rather than rooting themselves in their communities. Several participants cited racism and discrimination as the reasons they felt disconnected from their communities. Their past experience with social exclusion and racially motivated attacks left them feeling resentful of White people, and wary about interacting with community members.

I have this sort of hate, but not for every White person. Just some of them, because some of them choose not to like Black people because of this and that. I have some White friends, who tell me that some of their parents don't like Black kids. Sometimes I ask them why, and they explain how they were growing up back in the days when we were pretty much slaves and everything, and they don't like seeing us around and having freedom and stuff. So that's how some of the Nazi stuff got informed, and we get chased. So some of my friends say we're tired of that, and so every time we see a White kid, we attack him. We're very good friends with Asians, but just the White people that we're tired of sometimes. (Zuberi)

I did my thing and I left their thing to themselves. Whatever benefited me, I would do, but I would never get involved with them. I would go with my [Pakistani] friends, and mainstream could do whatever they want. It's not a part of us. (Rashid)

The disengagement of the participants from the broad community did not always propel them toward having strong connections with their ethnic communities. Twenty three participants indicated that they did not have firm roots in or drifted away from their ethnic communities. Some Canadian born participants did not have an opportunity to develop their heritage languages. Those who arrived in Canada at an early age had not fully developed their first language, and lost their ability to speak and/or write their first languages over time. Subsequently, they did not have the cultural tools to communicate with other members in their ethnic communities.

I was going to Chinese school, but I dropped out in grade three, just because my dad didn't find how it would help me if I had trouble in English and Chinese. Why would I take both classes and confuse me even more right? So he told me to quit Chinese and focus on English. In the community, there were only a few Chinese people, not really that many. So, I wasn't very involved in the Chinese community. (Ting)

A few participants indicated that their parents were either too busy to be involved with or had consciously moved away from their ethnic communities, and did not actively transfer their cultural knowledge to their children. Those parents who made an effort to connect the participants to their cultural communities were discouraged by community politics and conflicts.

As a young kid, I attended events here and there. I remember going to different functions like the annual barbecues, or the different board meetings for election for the Pakistani societies right. And I remember being exposed to violence at those things. It was really interesting. We stopped going at a young age, because I distinctly remembered going to one event in particular, where there was an argument about who should be the leader or something like that, and it turned into a full on brawl between uncles, people that I respected. I was 7 or 8 years old, and I am looking like what's going on. And then it was called in a riot police. I remember this, it was funny. Looking back it's funny, but it's also really sad, but after that we didn't really attend those sort of functions I guess. (Sarosh)

Two participants of mixed race did not feel accepted by other members in the ethnic community. They were subjected to gossip and treated like outcasts.

I was an outcast. They didn't like me. Everyone in the community they talk. They'd be like, "Hey, do you know anything about Mamdouh?" and then people would say, "yeah, this and this...So and so did this". It's like kind of honor among Orientals and stuff. It's really important and the Muslim communities just talk and talk...a bunch of gossip. (Mamdouh)

Similarly, for a few participants, their community members did not attempt to understand their developmental and social challenges. Instead of receiving validating attention and support, they felt scorned and rejected.

I didn't consider them [people at my mosque] a support system but I considered them a burden. So we're part of a religious group, and we go the mosque every once in a while, and I never really liked those people there. I felt like an outcast when I went there. So, was it a support system? I mean, it could have been. Was it a support system to me? No, not at all. I felt it was a chore going there, and I felt like an outcast, and I felt that these guys didn't like me. (Amir)

The growing acculturative gaps among the various generations also prevented close connections between some participants and older people in their ethnic communities.

I am part of the Sudanese community, but I don't talk to them [Sudanese adults]. I deal with young kids, but I think what they say is bullshit, so I don't listen to them. They say the same things that my parents say. Like they talk but they don't know what's going on with us. (Gyan)

Protective Factors in the Community

A few participants were able to recount positive experiences they had had in their communities. One participant was enthusiastic about his involvement in team sports in the community. He received some social support from his teammates. Two participants found creative outlets for self-expression in the arts programs. Four participants credited their religious belief with providing spiritual support, even when, as Rashid put it, "you put it in the back of your head." Furthermore, one participant appreciated his friendship with a community police officer. He felt that the presence of the police officer at a locale known for criminal gang activity deterred groups from approaching him in his early years. Two participants also talked highly about the community youth workers who provided them with outreach support in their communities. Finally, two participants spoke highly of their respect for some elders in their lives. Even though they did not listen to them at the time, they later appreciated their wisdom and advice.

Overall, the participants struggled to connect to peers and people in the broad community and in their ethnic communities. Their negative experiences in the community outweighed their access to positive individuals and social support.

CRISIS OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING

As social beings, the young people relied on their social interactions with others to define their identities and build a sense of connection. The disintegration of interactions between the participants and their families, schools and communities resulted in crises of identity. The participants developed disempowering self concepts. They struggled to achieve a healthy Canadian identity, as well as an empowering ethnic identity. The disintegration of their connections to the different spheres of their lives gravely compromised their sense of belonging.

Disempowering Self Concept

In developing a sense of self, one learns to interpret and to perceive his or her existence through life experiences and interactions with others. The participants' accounts of their lived experiences spoke to the emergence and development of self identities within the paradigms of the victim/oppressed, the deprived/underprivileged, the unwanted, the incapable, the follower, the frustrated/ disillusioned, and the delinquent. A significant number of participants had internalized the identity of the victim/oppressed. These individuals experienced directly or indirectly (through their interactions with their parents, in the case of Canadian-born youth) the effects of civil wars and mass brutality in their countries of ancestry. They were subjected to domestic violence committed by other family members, and often raised in a strict, oppressive family environment. In their schools and communities, they suffered a great deal from their encounters with bullying and racially motivated hate incidents.

Many participants struggled with the identity of the deprived/underprivileged. Several foreign born participants were denied basic life necessities in refugee camps or war ravaged countries. In Canada, a significant of participants grew up in low-income families and in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods. They associated being "poor" or coming from a "ghettoized" neighbourhood as an integral part of their childhood. They experienced limited access to recreational, social, economic and educational opportunities.

A number of participants described themselves as the unwanted. They perceived themselves as "outcast" from their families, peers and other community members. Notably, the participants with mixed racial backgrounds often felt rejected by their traditional families. Those who grew up with absent or neglectful parents, or in foster care outside of their immediate families struggled with the abandoned child complex. Several participants experienced social exclusion by their peers and internalized social labels such as "geek," or "loner." Those who were subjected to racism and discrimination also felt unwelcomed and unwanted in their communities. In one severe case, the participant experienced such an overpowering sense of rejection, social exclusion, abandonment and betrayal that he felt like "nothing."

Persistent challenges in learning, compounded by a lack of adequate, effective support, led many participants to feel a sense of low self-efficacy. These individuals struggled to perform academically due to their lack of English language proficiency, their learning disabilities or limited literacy and numeracy skills. They used negative terms and phrases, such as "dumb," "retarded," "stupid," "waste of time," and "sucked at it" to describe how others saw their ability and how they assessed their own learning capacity. Over time, many individuals lost faith in their ability to succeed in life, especially through legitimate means such as education.

Furthermore, many participants were vulnerable to assuming the identity of a follower. Their past experience with social exclusion intensified their yearning for acceptance, "fitting in" or "blending in", and at the same time they felt insecure about their own ability to influence others. They were susceptible to peer influence, and inclined to follow their "sheep like tendencies." Even when the participants adopted "cool" behaviour, such as dressing in expensive clothes or acting tough, they felt vulnerable, and were in fact following the narrow definition of popularity set by their peers. For some participants, their identity as a follower was

also reinforced by their strict families, in which their parents expected them to be totally obedient. In the community at large, the participants felt the pressure to follow the norms and values of the dominant culture.

Negative experiences in life led the majority of the participants to see themselves as angry people. In fact, the emotional expression of anger was most frequently articulated among the participants. They mentioned the words “anger” or “angry” a total of 102 times. In addition, many used tough talk to express their frustration.

When I look in the mirror it's like fuck the world straight up. Fuck everybody. That's what I see. Fuck everybody, whoever say something about me. Like I don't give a fuck.
(Gyan)

Their identity as the frustrated/disillusioned had deep roots in their experiences with or perception of injustice throughout their lives. They were resentful of differential, unfair treatment due to their disadvantaged position in social hierarchies and power structures (i.e.: parent versus child; student versus teacher, police versus civilian, Black versus White, and so forth). The participants “took in,” “built up” or “filled” with anger. Their brewing resentment and deep frustration were sustained and intensified over time by perpetual, repeated and diverse forms of oppression, including domestic violence and abuse, bullying, differential treatment, and racially motivated hate incidents.

Finally, many participants internalized their identity as a delinquent. They had a history of “acting out,” “getting into trouble,” or taking part in socially discouraged behaviour such as drug use, stealing, and fighting. They relied on delinquent behaviour as a way to express their frustrations. Quite often, their peers asserted social pressure or encouraged them to engage in delinquent behaviour. Some also internalized the negative labels assigned by their parents, teachers, school counselors and other community members.

Underdeveloped Canadian Identity

Only two participants indicated that they did not struggle with their national identity as a Canadian. Most of the participants, however, experienced mal-development of their Canadian identity in their childhood and adolescent years. Interestingly, the participants, including those who were born in Canada, referred to themselves during the interviews primarily as immigrants or ethnic minorities (Vietnamese, Chinese, Muslim and so forth). Various individual, familial and intercultural dynamics were at play in the mal-development of Canadian identity among the participants. Many individuals personally experienced language barriers and a lack of understanding of Canadian norms and practices. Those who were born in other countries and new to Canada needed time to grow roots in their new homeland.

Several individuals grew up in households with a strong focus on ethnic identity. Their parents invested time and energy to instill in them strong religious and cultural values. Outside the home, their families relied disproportionately on intra-ethnic social support and interaction. In a few cases, the participants grew up in such cultural isolation that they had little interaction with people outside their religious community until they made a transition from faith-based to public education in their high school years. However, these participants' upbringing in cultural isolation was not always related to their parents' resistance to Canadian ways of life. Their parents were often struggling with their own acculturative barriers, including limited English proficiency and a lack of understanding of Canadian cultural norms and nuances, and thus did not see themselves as active, equal members of the community at large. Their parents' reluctance to interact with those outside their ethnic communities was a result of their past experiences with racial discrimination and social exclusion.

At school and in the community, hostile intergroup relations further compromised the participants' development of a healthy Canadian identity. Many participants were told to “go home,” or repeatedly subjected to degrading racial slurs. Some experienced racially motivated physical attacks. Even in a supposedly nurturing environment, such as the classroom or in

counseling services, several participants faced nuanced, subtle hostility and “othering” through social avoidance, innuendo (i.e. making a connection between Muslim religion and violence), out of context emphasis on ethnicity (i.e. a counselor repeatedly asking Awok what he was doing in Africa), or put downs (i.e. a teacher asking Jagjeet whether he behaved in such a way “back home”). The participants felt the social pressure to “stick with your own kind” during their late junior high and high school years. Subsequently, even though the participants shared the physical space with people from other cultural groups, some either functioned in their own cultural solitudes or exchanged hostility in their cross cultural interactions. These dynamics constantly reminded the participants that they were not welcome to be part of the mainstream culture or encouraged to adopt a Canadian identity.

Furthermore, many participants lived in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, where the reality of their lives in “ghettos” and ethnic enclaves reinforced a sense of their Canadian identity as being part of the underclass. Their limited interactions with positive adults and peers, along with a lack of access to resources and services, denied them support for positive socialization, including the development of a healthy Canadian identity. Exposure to negative influences, differential treatment and intergroup hostility presented a stark contradiction to the principles of equality, equity, fairness, respect and inclusion associated with Canadian multiculturalism, which has in turn played an important role in shaping the Canadian identity. Confronted with such incongruence, many participants grew disillusioned with their perceived status as second class citizens, and felt disconnected from the mainstream notions of national identity and pride.

Lack of an Empowering Ethnic Identity

Twenty-six participants demonstrated a lack of an empowering ethnic identity. Many participants did not have the opportunity to fully develop their ethnic identities. For those who were born outside of Canada, their average age upon arrival was 10 years old. Some had also lived in refugee camps or resided in transitional countries for several years. These participants, therefore, did not have time to grow ethnic roots, and subsequently felt a lack of connection and emotional attachment to their home cultures. In addition, many participants who were born in Canada felt disconnected from their ethnic identities. A few participants reported that their parents distanced their families from their ethnic communities and raised them mostly in the dominant culture.

To be honest, I never felt any belonging [being among South Asian people]. Maybe if I grew up, I never grew up in the Indian bollywood lifestyle right, which a lot of kids do. I've never watched a bollywood movie in my life. It's funny, to be honest I didn't really feel all that comfortable, you get used to it but, you know, it was weird to me at first, wow, there's a lot of Brown people here. (Sarosh)

Three participants of mixed racial backgrounds, all with absent non-White fathers, also grew up primarily in the environment of the dominant culture. They lamented their loss of an ethnic identity.

I have nothing to go back to. I don't know my background. I don't even know my own language. I never even seen my dad. (Mamdouh)

Several participants associated negative practices, such as strict parenting and child beating, with their cultures. These participants often experienced strained relationships with their parents due to acculturative gaps, and had limited connections with people of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds within their ethnic communities. They also lacked the opportunity to interact with positive role models from similar cultural backgrounds. These individuals tended to rely solely on their familial interactions and the experiences of those in their immediate circles (often from similar socioeconomic backgrounds) to generalize their cultural norms and practices.

Most Pakistan families are like this- they just beat you up. That's all they do. They beat

you up, and they don't see anything more, and a lot of tongue lashing. But the thing is, they can't try to talk you. That's the thing with our families, is that parents can't try to talk to their kids. They beat you up and that's it. They tell you you're an embarrassment, and then they leave you. That's how it is in our family. That's not right. (Rashid)

Some participants subscribed to contemporary subcultures within their own ethnic groups, with strong emphases on frustration with and negative responses to marginalization, glamourized violence, power, and provocative arts and fashions. They found these subcultures, such as the hip hop or rap subculture, spoke to their frustration, especially with respect to the unfair, differential treatment of racial minorities in the community. The participants, unfortunately, in adopting these subcultural lifestyles often interpreted the messages of violence and power quite literally.

When I see how like Tupac's life is like, what Tupac says about the young kids, Black kids, and we see the same shit is going on in this society. So I'm going to do what Tupac does. Fuck the cops. Straight up. (Gyan)

Many participants struggled to develop their cultural pride. They were vulnerable to negative public perceptions and criticisms of their cultural practices. In the post 9/11 era, several participants from a Muslim background faced increased public hostility. The participants reported pressure to tone down or abandon their cultural practices in order to "fit in" with their peers and in the community.

You see, an African guy dressing like he's straight from Africa, no one is gonna talk to him, you know. They're gonna think he's fresh off the boat. If you put him differently, like clothes and everything, girls are gonna want to talk to him, like new clothes, new shoes, new hat, everything. People will want to talk to him cause he's fresh you know. (Matak)

Several participants lived with the devastating effects of internalized racism. As a consequence of pervasive, persistent ridicule from and hostile treatment by others, the participants no longer embraced their ethnic identities. They disliked and distanced themselves from ethnic cultural practices. They avoided interpersonal relationships with people from their own cultural background, especially in romantic relationships. Worse, they hated themselves for their own ethnic identities.

I already have it planned out. I will have a half Japanese and half White kid... So, I'm going to have a good looking kid. I don't think Asian kids are good looking. Maybe when they're little kids or something, when they're cute running around. But then you get really old and gross. That's just the way I think. Like me, I'm pretty gross looking too. I don't think Asians are made to look good. (Hisoka)

I was just like looking at the mirror, like thinking...I just wanted to, feel like, spitting at myself, you know, spit on my skin or something. I just hated it, you know, disliked it...I just felt like, people look at me and call me the N word, you know. That's why I hated myself, even if I was a little bit lighter than this. You see, (gesturing vertical hierarchy) there's Black, and then there is light, and then there is a little bit Black, and then there is mulatto, and then all the way down here is where tar is, you know. And I'm like there (pointing to the bottom), that's what I feel like, you know. These kind of light skin guys, they get away with everything. Me, I'm Black. (Awok)

A few participants also internalized the association of being "bad" with being an ethnic minority. They often attached ethnic labels in their discussion of delinquent activities. For example, Jageet expressed his discomfort about associating with "Black or Asian" in high school, because he thought they "all fight and do everything like that."

Under-Developed Sense of Belonging

All of the participants expressed in diverse ways their intense need to belong to supportive social networks. As young people, they desired to connect to trusting people who would respect them and care about their existence, protect them, understand and validate their life experiences, play with them, show them ways of life, and accept and want them to be in their lives.

Oh man! And that [the need to belong] was like number one!!! (with emphasis and passion in his tone). That was the thing that would be picking at my brain sitting in class. That was what would be picking at me when I'm walking home from school. That was like sooo important. I mean now, I look back, I mean, even right now, I'm not going to lie, everybody feels like they need to belong right? But now I look back on it and the extent of how much I wanted it was pretty bad. It was right on top of the list man. (Amir)

Yet, as the result of the disintegration in their relationships with their families, schools and community members, the participants struggled to achieve a strong sense of belonging. At home, 20 participants did not experience strong connections with their parents and siblings due to acculturative gaps, strict or absent parenting, neglect or domestic violence.

When I got on the phone with my dad, he didn't even talk to me. He didn't say that he loves me. So I felt like I didn't belong, that I wasn't wanted around my family...Everybody treated me like I was an orphan...I was treated like I was forced to be there. Like I'm a nobody. (Bashir)

In school, 28 participants did not feel a sense of belonging over an extended period of time. Several factors contributed to their lack of social connection including acculturative barriers, social exclusion, bullying, racism, differential treatment by school personnel, and academic difficulties.

I saw myself as an outcast, like I wasn't wanted. Somebody that wasn't wanted, somebody that was bullied...I didn't feel belonging at home. I didn't belong in school either, because people called me names so I felt bad about myself. (Mamdouh)

Twenty-eight participants reported they did not feel a sense of belonging in the general community and/or their ethnic communities. They attributed their lack of belonging to the general community to acculturative barriers, bullying and racism, differential treatment, and limited access to recreational opportunities and culturally competent services. In their ethnic communities, many participants found it challenging to connect to other community members due to acculturative/ intergenerational gaps, social rejection, and internalized racism.

I don't feel at home here. There's no real home. What we're going through now, I don't think there's such thing as home. I don't know where I belong to tell you the truth - I still don't know. (Jagjeet)

In summary, the disintegration in the relationships between the participants and their families, schools and communities had shaped their negative self-concepts, under-developed sense of national identity and their lack of an empowering sense of ethnic identity, and had compromised their sense of social belonging within their social networks. Such disintegration created a void in social connections and support, which propelled the participants to seek or be open to membership in alternative social networks. The next section focuses on the substituted integration of the participants into alternative social cliques and criminal gangs.

SUBSTITUTED INTEGRATION INTO COUNTERCULTURAL GROUPS

In the absence of strong social networks and supports in the different aspects of their lives, the participants sought to connect with other similarly disconnected peers, as well as those who functioned outside the norms of social order. They became involved in social cliques, and progressed towards membership in criminal gangs.

Involvement in Social Cliques

Development of Social Cliques

Driven by their need for social belonging, the participants sought to connect with other young people. They developed friendships with those who shared their struggles at home, school and in the community, and formed social cliques as early as their junior high years. Some participants met their peers in school when they hung out with the “smoking crowd” or socialized with those who also skipped classes. Several others met their peers at various locations in the community, such as basketball courts, playgrounds or social gatherings.

Yah, basically if you struggle, and there is another kid that struggled, then let's meet up. We struggle together and learn more and get to know more kids that struggle with same problems with you. You feel connected to them, same problem as you...Some of them were from the same school; some of them were from the community like neighbors, you know. Some of them I met around parks, start talking, like you know, “You're pretty chilled, you're a cool dude, we should hang out sometimes.” They give me the number, and just go home, and couple of days later, I would call them up, or they call me. So I would go hang out with them you know, became friends. Start hanging out more and more, you should meet this guy, this guy is really cool you know. So I would go meet the new friends, you know, start interacting. It's all good, you know. Like some of them were bad, some were good, but most of them were bad though. So I became friends with bad people. (Matak)

More often, the participants formed social cliques with youth from similar racial or ethnic backgrounds, or those peers with an immigrant or visible minority status. They felt safe in the company of intra-ethnic or visible minority peers with whom they shared perceived commonalities. Several individuals found that their intra-ethnic peers were able to understand or relate to their familial challenges, such as dealing with strict parents.

It was just easier to deal with. Coming from a household with such strong culture values and strictness. So other friends who were not in that environment would not know. I think that the environment that I was in with my friends, they all had that at some level. Probably not the same level as I had but they understood it. If I tell him I couldn't come out, or do something [due to parents' control], they would understand. Whereas other that did not have to deal with that wouldn't understand. It wouldn't make sense to them. (Vijay)

For some participants who struggled with English proficiency, it was practical for them to hang out with those who spoke their language. Those who had experienced racial discrimination consciously sought to establish intra-ethnic, immigrant or minority social networks, and avoided friendly interactions with schoolmates from the dominant culture.

If you chill with a White person, they would start calling you nigger. It's better for Black to chill with Black, and White to chill with White. I don't want to be called that, because I would get into a fight. (Osakwe)

Some participants felt compelled to “stick” together with those in their ethnic group to show solidarity, and to reclaim their cultural pride.

I started to make friends of my own colour. All of the friends I had before were more

Brown or Black, because I wasn't happy with the colour White at all. They knew how to speak English and I didn't, and they treated me like a piece of shit. When I went there [new school], I said that I wasn't making friends with them no more. When I came here, the big thing was that because you're Brown, you're a terrorist. That's when 9/11 came around. That was a huge thing. (Jagjeet)

They were all Afghans. We stuck together. We shared this pride of being tough Afghans. We felt invisible. When we went to places, if people looked at us, we would harass them, "What are you looking at?" (Amin)

Connection to Established Social Cliques

A number of participants who experienced persistent bullying and social exclusion yearned for protection and friendship. These individuals were intentional in their efforts to research and make connections with the established social cliques. They modeled their behaviours and clothing styles after those who were seen as "popular" and "cool" people in their schools. They made themselves available at the locales, such as an illegal car racing area, where the members of a social clique socialized. Eventually, they formally approached members of the established, respected social clique and asked for help.

You don't have people directing you and helping you. There was no one really to mentor me and direct me (with emphasis). So in that sense, it was like, well, I'm getting called Paki, and I'm made fun of all the time, and I feel like shit, and I don't have any friends. Um, how do I fix this? And my only, the only option I saw at that time was, well, make friends with the people who no one wants to mess with. And that's basically how I got involved. That was my desires because I didn't want, I didn't want to feel like shit anymore. I didn't want to not have any friends. I wanted to have friends. I wanted to be cool, I wanted to go and have fun, and meet girls, and do this and do that. (Amir)

I was in elementary and people still made fun of me- how I spoke English, how I wasn't speaking properly and everything. So you know, at the time in elementary, I was fine. But when I hit junior high, I was picked on more often and I guess I felt like I had something to prove at the time. That's why I guess I tried to find friends that can help me. (Ting)

Group Structure

According to the participants, the structures of their social cliques were informal. Even though some individuals possessed strong leadership qualities, their groups did not have formal leaders. Rather, all of the members mutually influenced each other in terms of their group activities and behaviours. Their social cliques were primarily made up of peers in their age group (no adults). The majority of the interviewees belonged to an ethnically homogeneous group. A few identified their cliques as multicultural, or as groups comprising mostly visible minority individuals.

It's just a bunch of Black kids, but there's specific people, not random. There's around 50 or 45 of us, from 14 to 17. We just always like to hang out and stay together. It's not organized like a gang in the media. But it is a group of people together anyhow... We have this one creepy old abandoned house and go there and meet everybody and introduce new kids that we meet. There was no leader in the group. It's sort of like brainstorming stuff. People throw in ideas, and then somebody would come in the middle and say "you pick this, you pick that, and you pick this." We would decide and the guys keeps his eyes open, we close our eyes, and asks "Who wants to pick this?" and people would put up their hands, but we don't know which ones would put up their hands. Last time I judged and people put up their hand and some didn't. I realized that sometimes the judge lies based on what he wants to do. Still, we just pick that way most of the time. (Zuberi)

The participants indicated that they were free to leave their cliques at any time without any consequence. Most groups did not have formal names, and group members did not refer to themselves as a clique or gang. For them, they were simply a group of “buddies” “hanging out” together, “having fun” and doing “bad things.” Some participants explained that as their groups became known for their activities, the police classified them as “gangs,” and assigned names to their groups.

Benefits of Involvement in Social Cliques

Through their social cliques, the participants enjoyed a great deal of emotional and social support. They had people who shared, understood and validated their life struggles. Many participants referred to other clique members as their “family”.

In grade 11, I started to go outside a lot. I would come home late and lock my room, because I had 10-15 guys in my room sleeping together without mom and dad knowing that. In the morning my mom would wake me up, and we somehow sneak out and sneak in, and we kept doing that over and over. She thought that I was going to school, but I never went to school. (Jagjeet)

In fact, the bonding among the clique members was so strong that it undermined relationships with the members’ own parents and siblings. Many participants spent more time away from their families, or avoided their parents and siblings altogether. A few let go all of their family responsibilities, including taking care of their young siblings, to spend time with their friends.

She [mom] was like, “You got to come home. You got a curfew.” I was like, “No.” My mom was telling me, “Why you don’t listen to me?” I was like, “I think my friends are better than my family.” (Osakwe)

It didn’t bother me. I let a lot of people down. I let my mom down especially. My mom was so hurt, but at that time, I didn’t care. I wanted to be a part of the group. I didn’t care of what my mom thought or what my dad thought. (Salim)

The involvement in a social clique provided the participants with protection. In the face of racial hostility in some junior and senior high schools, many participants relied on the strength of by numbers to deal with ethnic conflicts. Those who had been bullied and socially excluded started to gain popularity and respect from their schoolmates. With the support of their group members, some participants took revenge on those who had mistreated them before. They also started to bully other people.

First, I wanted a name. I wanted people to stop bugging me. Second of all, I wanted the power that they had. Third of all, I wanted revenge...I got exactly what I wanted. That’s all I wanted at the time...All you wanted at the time was to feel tough, feel big, to have the attention, and to be untouchable where nobody can do anything to you...I was untouchable, and everybody knew that. And that made me become cocky. (Pierre)

As the members asserted aggressive behaviours in their interactions with those outside their social cliques, they cultivated fear among their schoolmates and enjoyed their group reputation. Most participants perceived a positive change in their social status. They, however, equated fear with respect.

We would never get beat up if we were in that group. We never got picked on. We were always on top and got what we wanted...It’s the best feeling in the world, and I don’t know how to explain it to you. There’s reputation, respect- so much respect. It’s actually not respect, but fear- everybody feared you so much. Now that I see it, nobody respected me, but they feared me. Only a few of them respect me. But every single one of them feared us. (Rashid)

The participants also relied on their cliques for social development. They mutually influenced one another’s attitudes and behaviours with respect to manhood, relationships with girls, and the perception of power and status. They supported each other in developing social

skills and confidence.

I was shy until I started hanging out with people that weren't shy. And I became mirror images of them. When you hang out with somebody for so long, or when you go to another country, and they speak another language, like Australian, you're going to pick up another accent. So you start picking up their traits. So when I started hanging out with these guys, I started becoming mirror images of them. They're making me open and very charismatic. And I wanted to be the centre of attention, so I was loud mouth in the room. (Salim)

Together, the members of the social cliques also fostered strong connections to their culture, and reclaimed their cultural pride.

Two or three of my friends were with me, or maybe even four or five of them converted into Muslims. I didn't know much about Islam, but I knew that these guys shared my culture, and we turned into Muslims, so that brought us even closer together. (Jagjeet)

Activities of Social Cliques

In the early days of their group development, many participants primarily engaged in group activities and thrill seeking behaviours that helped build group solidarity, and fulfilled their social needs. The members spent a great deal of time in "hanging out," or playing sports and other recreational activities together. They also took part in some antisocial group activities such as bullying their peers, committing vandalism and petty theft, and experimenting with drugs. As the members progressively asserted their influence and social pressure on each other, they quickly became more daring and ambitious in their group activities. All of the participants reported that in their late junior and high school years, they had on a regular basis used one or more of the following drugs: alcohol, marijuana, magic mushrooms, and LSD (acid).

Marijuana was almost like a sport for us, very easy and the new thing to do... I felt like if everyone else is doing it, and it's the thing to do, and you're constantly being told to try it, try it... so I went ahead and did it. (Eveli)

To have fun, that means to drink, and to smoke weed and to do stuff that they thought was cool like not go to school and what not. Eventually when I got to the age when I was not a teenager anymore, I pretty much didn't have a chance, because that's all I knew, to do these kind of things. To live negatively, but basically there was peer pressure the first time I took it I hit out of the joint, there was peer pressure, come try it, and I did it. And it escalated, but it basically from when I was young they showed me the ways of life in the fast lane. (Bekele)

For several participants, their drug use with peers offered temporary relief from the emotional pain and frustration arising from their difficult relationships with their family members.

When I feel depressed, I drink, and it makes the whole day good for me. When I get into an argument with my family, and they tell me to leave for a little bit, and come back in two days, I just run away and drink with friends. When I'm stressed out, I drink too. (Tahir)

Even other friends were like that with their family too. They had the same things [family conflicts] going on in their family like I did...we just laughed, and everyone was high sniffing and drinking. (Jagjeet)

Several participants reported that they committed serious offenses such as robbery while under the influence of illegal substances. Some were sent to youth detention for their crimes.

Like I was the nice guy you could meet. But when I'm like on marijuana, there's like a different story, there is like a different person in me you know. That [marijuana] just takes control of my body and tells me to do something that I don't really want to do. When I'm sober, like I wouldn't have thought of holding a gun. (Awok)

Many participants admitted that they became addicted to hard drugs and alcohol. In order to support their drug habits, these individuals stole money or valuables from their parents. They progressed to extorting their schoolmates, robbing other people and to committing crimes against property, such as breaking and entering, and stealing cars and electronic accessories.

We jacked a couple guys for weed or coke, pretending it was coke just to get money. Taking things, yeah. We would go around taking stereo systems from cars. We would be doing that at one, two, three in the morning. Getting the CD systems, or subs, or amps, or car stereos, or CDs from inside of cars. (Rajab)

Several participants indicated that their group members made connections with drug dealers, and started to sell drugs for them. They turned their schools into a business venue for selling marijuana, ecstasy, and in a few cases, cocaine.

I started dealing drugs in junior high...One of the guys I met, his older brother would, because he was dealing, front me whatever amount. So he would just give me some weed and say pay when you are finished selling it. So he would front me this one week and I would come back with the cash the next week...School was last on my priority list. But I only did that [attending school] because I sold most of my weed at school. (Amir)

In addition, the participants frequently took part in group fights in their schools and in the community. The clique members attempted to establish, maintain and expand their popularity and influence in their schools through the tactics of fear and intimidation.

The guys who were hitting everybody were the guys on the top. The guys with the most friends around, chicks around, clothes, chains, smoking, drugs- they were the popular ones. Then we started to like it and wanted to be like that too...There was this rule where if one of us runs, nobody else will run, and then we'll find out who hit us. So nobody really took off. So everybody knew that everyone would stand there and fight. (Jagjeet)

Several participants from the racially homogeneous groups indicated that they would engage in staged (arranged) fights with or physical attacks on other youth in their schools, or on random people from the dominant culture in the community. Their violent activities served to "get back" and/or to express their frustration at their personal experience of racial discrimination. A few participants stated that their groups also fought with other non-White ethnic groups to assert their influence and to gain notoriety in their schools or communities. The members of a clique "jumped" [attacked without notice] other people from a rival clique, or challenged each other to meet for group fights. Some clique members were serious in their intention to harm members of other groups.

People would have batons with them, swords with them, bear mace, and that's what you would fight the other guys with. So if people had swords with them, something was going to get cut off. If you get hit with a baton, something would get broken. If you get maced, then you would be puking up a lot. That's the kind of fighting we had. And then someone would come out with a gun and then everyone would peace it. (Rashid)

As the group members fought side by side against their rivals, they felt a strengthened sense of group solidarity and brotherhood.

We were all fighting together. If I got a big scratch here, he got a big one here. So, if I got a bruise here, he got a bruise there. So if we looked at each other, there was a connection there. I was not the only one getting beat up, he was in it too. After that, we were always together. (Jagjeet)

Involvement in Criminal Gangs

Development of Criminal Gangs

Reflecting upon their personal experience and observations of criminal gangs in Calgary over time, several participants contended that social cliques should not be undermined, although a number of social cliques had indeed evolved into criminal gangs. As some social cliques achieved an established, loyal membership, and a certain notoriety in the community, individuals with “brain power” assumed the leadership roles in their groups. They organized group activities, and asserted great influence over their group members to commit increasingly violent and criminal actions. They also expanded their membership to other people in the community, particularly those who shared a criminal intent.

Some participants indicated that they were charged for their criminal activity, and served their time in a correctional setting. They reported that they acquired knowledge and skills to organize criminal gangs from other inmates, and upon their return to the community, became more ambitious and savvy in their gang leadership. Their groups became formally connected to the “underground” worlds, and focused on criminal activity for financial gain, such as drug trafficking.

We started getting guns, shooting at people, robbing other gangs if we see them by themselves. We started doing really crazy, now that I look at it, stupid stuff. It got me into a lot of trouble and sent me to the XXX [correctional setting]. When I went to there, things got worse. They basically called those prisons, “University of Crime.” So I went and learned more stuff and recruited more people. So I got out, and our gang was even bigger and worse. So I got bigger guys that were more crazy. So when you have older guys around you, who were more crazy, even though you were the original guys of the gang, they start playing with your mind. So we started going more crazy stuff. (Salim)

Connection to Established Criminal Gangs

In addition to describing the progressively evolving development from a social clique into a criminal gang, the participants elaborated on the various ways that they became connected to established criminal gangs. Several participants intentionally sought membership in well-known gangs. These individuals felt threatened by severe, persistent intimidation and physical bullying in their schools or communities. Some participants progressed from recreational drug use to serious drug addiction. Through their connections with individual drug dealers, they became involved in the drug selling business to support their drug habits. These contacts eventually introduced them to an established gang. A few participants decided to move beyond “small time stuff” with “chump change” in their social cliques to pursue “big dreams.” These individuals sought to involve themselves in underground social networks to build their reputations, and to move toward membership in an established criminal gang.

I wanted to make an impression right away, so I hung out with these guys. We would go to parties, and somebody would disrespect one of my friends, and I would be right in there beating up the guy, so right away my name spread. They said watch out for this guy, he’s crazy, he’s a tough guy and stuff. They would refer me to people, they would say this guy is solid, he’s a good guy, he doesn’t rat, he fights, you can depend on him, so they referred me to people and so on. And eventually I started to hang out with gang members and what not. And got involved with these people. (Bekele)

A number of participants became involved in a criminal gang as a result of active recruitment by an established gang. These individuals were commonly in a vulnerable situation, such as having been kicked out of their family home and being suspended or expelled from school for their misbehaviour. They were approached by established gang members, who would then take care of their practical and social needs. Gradually, they were pressured to become involved in criminal gang activity.

Cause when you get kicked out of the house, you have no way to go...Then some [gang involved] friends, they just keep you hang out of the house, just stay in the house, right? And then eventually, like you, in your own conscience, you sit there, you eat with them, you live with them, you don't do nothing, of course, you're gonna get kicked, they don't like you, and they're gonna kick you out or whatever. So, yeah, so, you have to help out, or whatever. Just help out by picking up the phone, and just drive the delivery, or whatever. (Huy)

A few participants also indicated that their well-known delinquent behaviour in their communities attracted the attention of established gangs.

I got a lot of respect around people like around my neighborhood, 'cause they know me from like things that I did...People come from different places, then they come, and they want to know who's like running this neighborhood...Then they get with you and talk... They would be like people that I call them up, and they can get whatever they want from the guy. I get respect. You know, they'll give me like anything. (Gyan)

Finally, several participants were connected to a criminal gang via their family members. Their parents, brothers, uncles, or cousins were involved in criminal gang activity. At an early age, they witnessed drug use and business transactions involving drugs. Some were introduced to criminal gang activity in their early teens. They grew up in an insular environment, in which they looked up to their family members and aspired to follow their footsteps.

My uncle used to be a drug dealer, and so the whole family kind of became involved in the lifestyle. So it was expected of me to be involved to...Well, like when I was 12 years old, I stole money from my uncle. I got beat for it, because I stole a lot of money. At that time he told me what he did, how he got the money. And that's when I started working for him, chopping cocaine and wrapping it and distributing. I did little things for him, but now that I look at it, they were pretty big things, life threatening things...Because my uncle was the one paying for my food, my housing, and everything, I had to do what he told me to do. Unless I (pause), if I didn't, then I would have to live on the street...I slowly moved up in his ranks and made him proud... (Mamdouh)

Some participants had siblings who became involved in a criminal gang in their late teenage years. Their siblings encouraged the participants to work for them, and eventually introduced them to their gang leaders.

My brother was doing really good. So at that time, I moved in with my brother and chilling with friends that got me in trouble...I started dealing crack with him and everything, and meeting all his Asian friends. And they were talking to me and everything and started dealing crack for my brother and started working for one of his bosses- one of his higher ups. I started dealing crack, we called it "food"...I went for supper with one of my brother's bosses, and he was telling me about the gang and everything. This was when the shootings were going down. I think they were recruiting. He was telling me about the gang and what they do. At first, I was like, "No, I don't want to be down with that". Because I just wanted to be my own person, you know? At first it was like, no. So he was like, "OK, OK, OK". So we had supper and everything - nothing changed or anything, he was treating me like a little brother. So I think that's how gangs get you. They treat you like you've never been treated before. When I was growing up in a group home, I was never wanted, I had no friends, I was like a geek in school. I would always assault people and be brought here [correctional centre]...So after the supper, we were all good, like I said. (Bashir)

A few participants were not connected to an established gang through their immediate families. Rather, their close or best friends had gang involved family members. As they grew up, they developed close relationships with these gang involved adults, who then introduced them to their criminal gangs.

All my friends that I hung out with were Vietnamese. They had older brothers, they had dads, they had uncles. So they took advantage of what we were doing. Why not use these little kids? But we didn't know that. They were very sneaky behind the scenes. So we were like their puppets. And then we were like the puppeteers to other little puppets. So it just trickled down. Now that we think about it, obviously we were [being used]. But back then, we didn't know. The uncles were taking advantage of the children, the dads were taking advantage of the children, you know, what I mean? (Salim)

Gang Structures and Dynamics

The participants' accounts demonstrated both recurring themes and variations in the structures of the various criminal gangs. Commonly, the criminal gangs were organized with the explicit intent of committing criminal activity for the purpose of financial gain. The gangs were hierarchically structured with an established leadership and chain of command, and were selectively open to expanding their membership. Most of the criminal gangs that the participants belonged to had initiation rituals based on violence, and subjected new members to screening and personal testing to ensure their "solidness" and loyalty. Where the various criminal gangs diverged, however, was in their level of criminality, and their related capacity to organize group members and activities. The participants pointed out that "small time" criminal gangs, which focused solely on selling marijuana or stolen goods, tended not to be too well-organized. However, those criminal gangs focused on trafficking of hard drugs (i.e. cocaine) or weapons were definitely sophisticated in their ability to organize their members and business activities.

You know, it's like a big circle, and then so many different parts within this circle. Certain parts of the crew were stealing cars and chopping them down, and certain parts of the crew were selling crack. Certain parts of the crew were dealing with prostitution. Certain parts of the crew were selling and trafficking guns. Even transportation was a huge thing, bringing weed from BC, or coke from Montreal, Toronto, or BC. There were so many different things. I even sure murder, you know. There were lots of different things, you know. (Amir)

Most participants were involved in either an ethnically based gang, or in a multicultural gang. Those associated with the latter indicated that while their criminal gang was open to individuals of diverse ethnic backgrounds, only those from certain ethnic groups would be privileged with a leadership role.

I'm in the low rank. I'm not Viet [Vietnamese] or Chinese, so I can never be a really high rank. I can never be a boss who owns all of them. If you're a Viet or Chinese, you can be at a high, high, high rank that controls a whole shit load of people. If you Leb [Lebanese], you could be the middle. If you're White, you could be bottom. 'Cause it basically goes by races. I think it all started with racism, because they couldn't speak that good in high school. My boss told me that his big thing too was racism when he grew up. (Bashir)

With respect to group dynamics, the participants stressed the importance of group identity. As gang members, they were expected to help establish and elevate their group identity as being "tough," "crazy," or "ruthless." Ironically, many participants admitted that individually they felt insecure.

Yeah, just a group. There's like, you know, maybe I'm a chicken guy by myself, but as a group just do whatever. (Huy)

Every gang member, I'll tell you right now, they're pussies by themselves. I'll tell you that right now. I don't care who they are. You can put it in the paper that I said that. By themselves, they're pussies, because I've been in it myself. They're pussies. They're nobodies. They're insecure. They're not their own person, but when they're in a gang, and there's a group of them, all of sudden superman comes out of them. They're very macho and all of a sudden, they got all this confidence in the world. They can take out

this building with one punch, they can become superman. But when they're by themselves, that Clark Kent comes back in them, you know, with the glasses- they're just geeks. I'm just saying that from experience. (Salim)

Several participants indicated that they had rather insular interpersonal relationships with fellow gang members. They spent a great deal of time working and playing together. As a result, they enjoyed strong friendships and group cohesion.

Its great man, it's like a brother. They're there for you. They help you when you're done. They got your back, whatever you want they give it to you. I don't know, it's like family I could say. A part of another family helps each other with the bills and stuff...I don't know how to put more detail in it. They're like family, when you see them you hug them, you kiss them, say you miss them. They're always gonna be there for you. (Nijam)

Due to the nature of gang activity, some participants experienced the loss of their friends to gang violence. Their losses were often translated into an increased sense of group solidarity.

Most of the male participants focused solely on the "macho" gang culture. The lone female participant, however, offered her perspective on the role of females in a criminal gang.

There are females, don't get me wrong. But usually the females getting involved are either, one, the girlfriend of the person, or for two, they just hold the stuff, they hold it. Some people they are kind of like the in betweeners, the middlers. And then some of them work with, I never got involved in this part of the group, but there are drug dealers that have prostitutes, that have other girls who get these prostitutes, like I've met a few of them, the ones that get them. So, and they are hired by these guys, either they were a prostitute, or they have a lot of friends that are girls...For myself I never got involved in prostitution. I wasn't sleeping around. I didn't really use many drugs. I got along with a lot of people. When I did get into fights, I always won the fights, I guess, whether it was males or females to be honest. So, I don't know, I guess just by what I did, was where I was placed [in more male roles]. (Afewok)

Activities of Criminal Gangs

Most of the participants occupied the lower ranks in their gangs. They reported a diverse range of criminal gang activity. They were all involved in the drug trade. They had sold at least one of the following drugs: marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, magic mushrooms and LSD (acid). Many were tasked with selling marijuana at the beginning, and gradually trusted with dealing hard drugs. A number of participants were responsible for transporting and delivering drugs.

You know what a mule is? They give me the drugs and the money and a car, not a loan car, but their own vehicle. And I would drive their car to a person's house on the GPS, or I would ride my bike there, and I knock on the door and I give the people the drugs. They gave me an automatic and a bullet proof vest. (Zuberi)

The business dealing of drugs allowed easy access of participants to drugs for their own consumption. Many participants became heavily dependent on hard drugs, such as cocaine.

When I started selling, it was to me the best time of my life. Simply because I would always have the substance to use myself and have enough money to buy and sell without it breaking my bank account. (Vijay)

Several participants were responsible for collecting debts and extortion. They used intimidation and violence to collect debts from those who bought drugs from their gangs. They forced small businesses in the ethnic communities to pay them "protection payments." They would use threats or take action to vandalize, burglarize, rob or physically attack those who refused to pay. Furthermore, some participants worked with other gang members to support the operation of prostitution. Even though their gangs committed human trafficking for the purpose of prostitution, they were primarily involved in "pimping." A few participants indicated that played minor roles in illegal gambling houses.

They [gang leaders] used to run an illegal gambling house. So they had us to do all these little work, like look after the door, serving tea. If people winning money, make sure you take them home, and you get paid handsomely at the time. You know, like one night of work, you make about 500 to 600 dollars. (Vinh)

A number of participants were involved in property theft and robbery. They committed break and enter offences to steal jewelry, cash, electronic appliances, cars, and so forth. Some participants took part in the various missions to “raid” other gangs and their associates to steal their drugs and money.

We went and robbed people. And take all their coke, or crack, or weed, or money that they have. So they can't call the cops. We did a robbery for 2 kilos of coke, over 250 Gs [thousands]. We were big time. (Bashir)

A few participants were involved in selling guns. From their accounts, many young people had ready access to the underground gun market.

If I got it from this guy dirty for 70, I would sell it to this guy clean for 100. So from here, I bought it for \$500 and would sell it to some stupid kid for \$1500. Everybody had something going on too. Even the nerds had the brass knuckles. They would get it for five or ten bucks, and sell it to a grade nine for 60 bucks. Or they would steal it [money] from their mom and dad or something. (Jagjeet)

The participants pointed out that gang violence is an integral part of the gang culture. They recalled their involvement in various incidents of shooting, fighting with a weapon, and staged fights. Their members often fought with other gangs over business territories, girls, and to enhance the reputation of the gang. They were also caught in the cycle of gang retaliation. Many participants admitted to carrying weapons to fight with other gang members and for their own protection.

'Cause my boss was all stressed out by these shootings, like shooting him and everything. So I had to sleep with a Chinese 9. It didn't have a grip on the side. It was just a clip, with 4 casing wholes. The machetes, the guns. I think about them as power tools. Tools that you could have power with. (Bashir)

Several participants insisted that violence served as a means for their groups to assert their power and control. They noted an escalating trend in the use of violent tactics, in which many groups abandoned old school fist fighting, and became inclined to adopt shooting and execution to resolve gang conflicts. The increased ruthlessness and brutality, as one participant contended, did not mean that the gang members were completely devoid of humanity. Two participants philosophized that while gang members were “ice” towards violence, they reserved certain humanity in their existence, especially in their bonding and brotherhood with other gang members.

I don't know if it's truly an icing of the heart, or you just place certain parts of it with some steel, and you keep some places in your heart where you can feel something, because you don't want to be completely empty. Then, you're Hannibal Lecter, and you're not human. You want to keep your humanity, because that's what makes it worth doing. If I'm completely heartless, I can't go out and have fun. So then what's the point of making all this money if I can't have fun or have these friendships? So you do want to keep that part of you. If somebody goes away for ten years, that really hits you. (Pierre)

They contended that the vulnerability, and hence the humanity of gang members was revealed when other gang members were killed.

People are still vulnerable. That's part of the gang, because they know how to hit you. If I know that if I stomp on you, you're not going to run home and cry to your mom. But if someone stomps on your buddy, or if he goes away, you're going to have some complications there, and you're going to feel something. So that's why there's so much of this “kill or be killed” stuff that goes on. It's not just an honour thing. A lot of people think that “you killed my best friend,” so they go around with tears in their eyes, and

they go shoot the other person. If you see some of these guys at funerals, they're crying - they're not trying to be tough and not cry. They cry, and they bring flowers, because they are human. That's kind of the reality of it. There's still some room there for something for them. (Pierre)

Benefits of Criminal Gang Involvement

The participants enjoyed various benefits associated with their gang membership. Many individuals felt a deep sense of connection with other human beings in their gangs. They regarded the other gang members warmly as their "families," "home boys," or "brothers." They trusted in their loyalty and support. Some participants indicated that they relied on these "strong bonds" to help them deal with their "sadness," "tragedies," and "loss." Those who struggled to connect with their family members, peers or other people in their communities felt "wanted," "understood," "important," and "respected" in their gangs. In spite of the risks involved in gang membership, the participants reported that they felt protected.

At the time I felt belonged for sure. It's like going from one second being homeless to the next second being rich eating lobster. So yeah, I felt belonged for sure. (Amir)

They are my family. I get respect, I get a family that I never had...I don't know how to explain it. It's strong bonding. I think so because we sit there, I use my brother's ID to go to casinos and stuff, we sit there, we have fun. My boss lets me live at his house. We're all good. He looks at me like a brother, and I look at him like a brother. He used to tell me...forever all brothers. We're all brothers. He told me that when I get my tattoo, I shouldn't get it on my back because your brother got your back. So I don't get a tattoo on my back because my brothers always got my back. Like, fellow gang members. (Bashir)

Financially, most participants were satisfied with the monetary return for their criminal gang activity. They reported different levels of income ranging from \$150 per week to \$2,000 a night. Those who were involved in the trafficking and selling of hard drugs (i.e. cocaine) and weapons reported the highest levels of income. A few "foot soldiers" who had limited English and/or were in a vulnerable social situation, such as being homeless, felt undercompensated by the adults in their gangs. They, however, felt they made more money being part of a gang than trying to find work in the community.

I started dealing crack, we called it "food". Like, pushing 2 ounces every 12 hours. I was getting 1500 bucks every 12 hours...I bought an Audi A4. (Bekele)

They just give you like 150 bucks every pay for working or whatever. If you live for free, they give you 150 bucks for a week or something. A week, but that's if you make 1000 dollars a day, you know? You make a 1000 dollars a day, they give you 150 bucks, they give you living. You don't seem like liking that way either, but you got no choice, where else am I going to live? (Huy)

The participants used their money to party and to buy material things, such as cars and houses. Some helped their family members in Canada or in their home countries. Several participants also spent money on drugs and weapons.

In addition, the participants felt they had attained an elevated social status due to their affiliations with criminal gangs. They felt "powerful," "untouchable," and "superior" in their interactions with other people outside their gangs, especially when others responded to them with fear. Several participants revealed that they used intimidation to maintain their power over other people at school and in the community. Looking back, several former gang members acknowledged that they mistook fear for respect.

At the time, I felt like I was someone, that if I walked out on to the streets people would know who I was, and they'd be like, "He's part of this group. Don't mess with him. He's somebody!" (Eveli)

Gangs are strong because there's a lot of us, and there's power there, you know. We

want to have the power. We like having the power. We like being in control right? 'Cause we walk in a room, everybody knows you're in a gang right, nobody messes with you. Everybody does what you want; they respect you, we like how everybody looks at us. If you're powerful, people look at you like, "Yah, that guy is powerful", like we're not the same level as them. (Matak)

Life on the fast lane as a gang member offered the participants an abundance of thrills, excitement and fun. Many participants craved the "adrenaline rush" that accompanied committing criminal activity.

There's a thrill in knowing you got away with something right...Whatever I did was wrong, at that time, I was conscious of it, and I knew it was wrong, and there was no doubt in my mind that I'm breaking a law here, and I am also doing something that is against my religion, so that's double, you know, times two bad. So I was very conscious that I knew about it, but there was this thrill in a way. (Sarosh)

The participants enjoyed frequent house parties where drugs and alcohol were available, as well as opportunities for sex. Many maintained an active night life at the local disco, karaoke or billiard bars. Some also participated in gambling or prostitution.

Because if you had money, you'd have beer, you'd have drugs, and you'd have the girls. You'd have fun. And that's what was most important to me; to have fun. (Vijay)

At the end of the day, I was out there having fun with my best buddies and I didn't look at it as a criminal thing. I was pure fun, having a fun, crazy night and waking up the next morning talking about it, and then doing it again the following night. At no point did I really feel it was wrong for me to do so. I felt it was bad, but it was 'ok' bad. (Eveli)

In the absence of meaningful interaction with their families, schools and communities, the participants became integrated into the alternative social cliques and criminal gangs. Through their group interactions and activities, the participants enjoyed human bonding, group identity, protection, social status, thrills and financial rewards. The next section will examine the turning points that led some participants to leave their gang lifestyles and how these participants reintegrated into their families and communities.

GANG EXIT AND REINTEGRATION INTO COMMUNITY

The participants readily acknowledged the tremendous challenges involved in leaving their gangs. In addition to the lifestyles involving great excitement and material comfort to which they had become accustomed, they had established strong human connections with other gang members. The participants were insecure about their ability to connect to other people outside their gangs. Many were fearful of potential violent consequences of their decisions. However, some participants embraced their sense of belonging to a gang, and did not see the need to leave the gang.

The thing is, like, its not really negative. In other peoples' view, it might be negative, but in your view, you feel like it's positive, right for you, 'cause that's where you are, that's where you belong, right? So, you feel, like, it's positive, right for you, and people might see it as negative, but you don't really care. You're with the group that you want to be with, and you just feel positive about that, you know. So it's not really about negativity or positivity [for others], just what you feel is positive for you, now. Do you understand? So it was more like what made you feel belonged. And it could be the negative or negative force that made you feel belonged. (Matak)

Sixteen participants made a conscious choice to leave their gangs. They shared their insights about the turning points, as well as their strategies for gang exit and reintegration into their communities.

Turning Points

The turning points for the participants who chose to leave behind their gang involvement ranged from dramatic incidents of violence or betrayal to cognitive maturity and religious awakening. Two participants disengaged from their gangs after the deaths of innocent bystanders during gang confrontations in public. These deaths confronted them with the moral consequences of gang involvement, and made them examine the negative impact of their behaviour on other community members.

There was a shooting and an innocent bystander was killed. That was a turning point for my life...Four of us went for breakfast and didn't know that we were being ambushed by about 20 of them [rival gang members]. They had like machetes and you know, like steel bars, and such, and two of them carried knives, and bunch of them also had guns. I recall that the person who pulled the trigger at my friend...Somehow the bullet missed him and the bullet ended up killing an innocent bystander. (Vinh)

Four participants left their gangs after the deaths of friends. They experienced tremendous grief and began to question the meaning of life. In the harsh reality of escalating gang fights and retaliation, they were reminded of their own mortality.

A buddy of mine just died, he got shot up in his SUV, and I was like holy shit man, you know, I couldn't even believe it...That was like a slap in the face to me, like what are you doing here, why are you here? (Amir)

Some participants, however, pointed out that the death of friends did not always result in all members deciding to leave a gang. In many cases, gang members were further enraged by their personal losses, and became even more committed to gang membership. They aggressively retaliated to avenge the death of their friends. Many were caught in a vicious cycle of revenge and retaliation.

You got to remember that, the death of a close gang member can make the person even worse. It depends on the individual. It might make the person distance themselves from the gang, or it might make them worse if their close friend got killed and they might want retaliation. It can work both ways. If somebody dies, they can say that this life is not for them and they can leave, or I've seen a lot where it makes them even worse. "This guy killed my friend, now I'm going to come do twice as bad to him." (Nasir)

Three participants cited betrayal by peers as their primary reason to terminate their relationships with other gang members. The people whom they trusted "ratted them off" to the police or stole their drugs or money. Betrayals by their friends challenged these individuals' cherished belief that friends were their family. They became disillusioned by such untrustworthy relationships.

I thought we were family here. Everything was honoured- truth, respect, your word. That's what you lived by back then. Everything you had was your word...But then you start noticing little things. You get caught for a little crime, and they [police] put you in little rooms. You're supposed to be solid- these were your friends and you never turn on your friends. Then the cops say that your friend just told them this. You're like, "Ah, whatever. We know the game you're trying to play. You're just trying to turn us on each other. I ain't saying shit." So now you're the one sitting there thinking, you're cool and not saying nothing. Next thing, you go to court, and you see a video of your friend ratting you off! (Salim)

For 7 participants, their turning points did not necessarily involve some dramatic life event. Rather, they arrived at a decision to leave their gangs as a result of their increasing growth and maturity, particularly in their re-evaluation of their relationships with their families. When 3 participants spent time in jail for their crimes, their families provided them with tremendous social support. As a result, these individuals felt reconnected and grew closer to their loved ones.

Well my family man, they would come and visit me. They would send me letters. I would be able to call them all the time. I mean they spent a lot of money while I was in jail. I broke their hearts while I was in jail, and they spent a lot of money cause it's stupid, in jail you have to call collect. So every call can only last half an hour, and I was talking to them half an hour a day, and each call was 20 to 40 bucks. (Amir)

Their developmental maturity helped the participants to recognize and appreciate the sacrifice and unconditional love of their parents, especially that of their mothers. They felt ready to embrace a new life with their families.

My mom was crying, and I didn't really see her crying. But then I realized that those tears mean something, and that means the world to me. I don't know if that makes sense to you...I saw my mom getting picked on by my dad more and more. And then I saw my other brothers doing the exact same thing that my dad was doing. I'm thinking that she's a housewife, who doesn't work, who doesn't party with friends or anything because she's a married woman. On top of that, she's a cultural one too. She's just there for us. She cooks for us 24/7. Without any question, she would go make you food. After everything you've done, she just lets it go and goes on. I don't know who else does that. I don't know how she can let it go. There's still a little thing that you would hold. I've never seen it in anybody else. My mom is just so pure. She's a woman who prays all the time, and is always there for everybody. I myself don't think that I can be there for anybody. I can't even be there for myself. (Jagjeet)

Fatherhood encouraged 3 participants to contemplate a more peaceful life for their families. They want to live a long life with and to be good fathers to their children.

The birth of my daughter really changed my life too, because I want my daughter to have something I didn't have. And I wanna be there for her, like my dad wasn't there for me. So it's really important for me, from a young age. (Bekele)

Five participants were also worried that their young siblings started to follow in their footsteps. They felt a strong desire to set a positive example to their younger brothers and sisters.

It [my gang involvement] was starting to influence him as well. I could see change in him and that really scared me. The elder one started to follow in my footsteps. That's when I started to change. Whatever it took, I mean, I needed to be a good role model, I can't be what I was, I couldn't continue what I was doing. I didn't want them to go through the same process of learning the hard way that I did. So that also gave me a boost, to lead by example. (Eveli)

Ten participants from a Muslim background attributed their decision to abandon gang involvement to religious awakening. They felt a strong desire to connect to Islam, and to approach their lives with spirituality, peace and a sense of discipline.

I felt lost in life. There was something in my life that was just missing. I know everybody talks about it, but that's what happened to me too. There was something missing in your life, and you feel empty, and the reason why I got into fighting was trying to fill that stuff too. To become a man, I thought it would make me full, but it didn't. It just made me cocky, arrogant, and irrational. When I got into religion, I just needed something in my life to change me. I just started researching, because my mom talks about religion all the time, and why Islam was so beautiful, and I also thought about why people feel good when they go to the mosque. You research, and then you find out. I didn't know a lot of things about religion. Every time I hear stuff about religion, I feel like something comes up from my chest and expands me. It makes me feel better. It gives me something to do and to focus on. Something that I know is right to do. Something that makes life comfortable for everyone around me and myself. (Rashid)

Exit Strategies

Gang exit required the participants to consciously reframe their state of mind, and to take action to address practical challenges. Many participants showed personal courage in walking away from their gangs. They demonstrated an active thought process in reframing their understanding about power and respect, their priorities in life, and their relationships with their families and the community. In essence, they were fully committed to leaving their gang involvement.

I realized what gangs were about when I left it. I was on the outside now. When I looked in the inside, I thought, "What a bunch of losers." This is what we were? This is what we did? I wonder how people looked at us. They must think that we're losers, idiots, immature, and just punks...I never want anybody to look at me like that again. I want them to look at me with respect, as in I did something good. They respect me because I'm a good person, not because out of fear. That's basically how it started for me, how I started distancing myself. I started realizing things, doors started opening for me, and I started understanding things better. I understood life, and what life meant, and how precious life is, and how precious family is. Don't ever take for granted breaths that you take in life for your family. (Salim)

The participants used various strategies to leave their gang life behind. Many individuals used the strategy of gradual disassociation and avoidance to slowly distance themselves from other gang members. They started to maintain a low profile in their gang and curtailed involvement in their group activities. They returned phone calls to other gang members sporadically, and eventually stopped talking with them.

I haven't had connection with them for almost 2 and half years. I couldn't tell you what's going on with them. I had to completely cut ties with all of them. I knew this wasn't where I wanted to be and I needed to become something and the only way to do was to leave that circle. (Epli)

In spite of their fear of punishment and retaliation, most of those who chose to leave did not face any negative consequence.

No one was really holding a gun to my head, saying: "You know what, gang in, gang out. If you want to get out your going to be dead." It's nothing like that. I mean, yes they're gonna be mad at you, maybe try to fight you, or shoot you. But once you make that decision, these people will eventually will not come after anymore. Because the way of life for them, they have to keep on moving ahead doing what they are doing. Eventually they just turn their back on you, and that's the way you gotta do it too. You just gotta keep on moving forward. It wasn't easy like I said, but you make a decision, and you go with it. Luckily, like I said, I am very strong willed person, so once I make a decision, I stick with it. And that's final for me. (Bekele)

Several participants established more structured lifestyles in the community. They fully dedicated their time to school, to work, and to socializing with their families and people in their religious communities.

I just went to work, home, and school. So I didn't have time anymore. And I got rid of my phone. I had a lot of numbers and contacts in there. My friends had my cell and house number, but my cell and house number changed because there were too many people calling...I started working out at home and everything started to close. (Jagjeet)

A few participants sought professional assistance to develop life skills and to plan for their new future.

I got back in touch with the youth employment centre where they have counsellors and people, to help look for jobs, or a career, or go back to school, or get apprenticeships with any kind of trades. And they also have computers and stuff, for people to work on. So I got in touch with them. I spoke with the counsellor. They asked me where do you see yourself in 5 years. And try to set up goals and stuff like that. (Afewok)

In the cases of 5 participants, their parents took drastic action to force them to terminate their criminal gang involvement. These individuals were temporarily “shipped off” to their countries of ancestry. Two participants were also relocated to different cities to live with relatives. From the accounts of these participants, the temporary relocation strategy worked only when they received close supervision and had access to positive role models and mentorship. They had the opportunity to experience a healthy sense of connection with other people, to reflect on their lives, and to connect with and strengthen their ethnic identities.

When my dad found out about this [my gang involvement], he sent us back to Pakistan. When I went back to Pakistan, my cousins, who were the same age as me, were so happy I was there. There, we can't do cigarettes in front of anybody, like your cousins and stuff, because it was disrespectful. We had other kind of fun, like camping. What I always remember of Pakistan was in the morning- I never heard of it before - I heard the prayer in the morning. A little bit before sunrise, they make the call. As soon as I heard it, it was so beautiful, and I would wake up every morning just to listen to it. That's how beautiful it was- so peaceful and soothing. I didn't know the meanings of the words either, and I would always want to copy them and see what it meant. And my cousin suggested that we go to the mosque one day. We went to a congressional one on Friday, and started praying, and I liked it. I really liked it. (Rashid)

For 3 participants, the strategy of “shipping off” backfired as these individuals were exposed to even more gang violence in their home countries or in other cities.

My parents sent me to El Salvador to stay with my uncle. It was bad, what can I tell you, the social situation down there, it was horrible, and they were just getting over the war. So, the country was rebuilding, there's gangs everywhere, gangs in every block. It was like, if I thought I had it hard here, man I was not having fun down there. People carry guns down there. Wherever you go, drugs are more strong, anything you want, everything is so blunt, it's right in front of your face. (Carlos)

Re-integration Strategies

In their reintegration into their families and the community, the participants had to let go of their gang lifestyles, and to adopt different ways of living. They had to overcome adverse psychological, social and practical challenges. They had to unlearn their gang identity, and develop themselves as renewed people. Socially, the participants had to overcome their desire to reconnect and socialize with other gang members, and learn to develop new social work networks. They also had to be very self-disciplined in order to make an honest living and to avoid the tendency to look for easy, fast money solutions to their financial burdens.

The participants used various strategies to address their reintegration challenges. Within their families, they tapped into the support of their parents and other family members. Several participants moved back to live with their parents and siblings. They opened up and shared their struggles with their family members. They invested more time and energy to build healthy relationships with their loved ones. Some participants stepped up to set positive examples for their siblings. They embraced their new sense of responsibility.

I had no one to talk to when I was going this in high school and after, my college years, I was the eldest, so I had no one to look to. But with my cousins and siblings I feel like I have something to give them. I learned in a way that I could have lost my life or been in trouble with the law or who knows what. Now it's really leading by example. By being there for them if they need. I'll take them out, do things to keep them occupied. I feel that if you keep them occupied with outdoor activities, and they see that they are benefitting and having fun, then it makes them stronger to say that I don't need them and I don't need to be that guy that gets drunk and smokes, I'm having more fun rock climbing. (Rajab)

Several participants got married and had children. They credited their spouses and children with keeping them well grounded as family men.

I met my wife when I was 12 years old. So she knew what I was before. And then to see how I was afterwards, and to get in touch after 10 years, and see how was as a person, and how she looked up to me because of what I've done, and how I've changed my life, she just made me feel good- made me feel like a real man. If it wasn't for her, I don't know. She pushed me to do stuff. She pushed me to box, to open this and that. She's my rock, she's my life. And then to give me a son, that topped it right off. My son is my life. I would die without him. (Salim)

In the community, the participants accessed social support and services. A few participants sought to reconnect with their former teachers whom they respected as mentors. Some made use of youth employment and life skills services in their communities. Through those social service programs, they learned to set life priorities and develop practical plans to work towards their goals. A few participants returned to school to complete their high school education, and then continue with their post-secondary education.

Education was also a big factor for me. I knew of the option of going back to school, and I had already completed a bit of school. So that definitely did make a big difference in my life. I knew I wasn't just going to be stuck. A lot of times the reason, they [gang members] are not just walking out of this lifestyle is because they don't have that education or option. They are basically always stuck because they know if they leave they are going to be nowhere. They have little or no education. I think have education is a key to more opportunities out there, opening more doors for you. I think family support and a little bit of education could definitely draw you out and should you a brighter life. (Epeli)

Several participants were also committed to having legitimate employment. Even though they did not make as much money, and at times struggled financially, they took pride in their hard-earned income.

I made less money than I used to. But I don't even know where the money went before. Easy come, easy go. I make about \$1000 in two weeks. But the thing is, I'm putting it towards something very useful. I'm putting it towards a car. It's my car, not a jacked car. I have a license. It's not huge for you, but it's a huge accomplishment for me to get a license without cheating. That's one thing you have. If my family needs help, the only thing I can do for them to help is sell my car. I made a little but God is watching me, and I can sell the car to help my family. (Jagjeet)

Several participants gradually experienced success in their chosen careers. At the time of their interviews, 7 participants held professional and management positions. Socially, several participants had invested their time to develop new friendships and social networks. They were also actively involved in volunteering in the community to prevent criminal gang involvement of youth. In the process, they reclaimed their sense of citizenship as Canadians.

I started training kids [boxing] out of my house. All the neighbourhood kids loved coming to my house. I would turn my basement and my garage into a gym. So I started training them. The joy I seen in them, it brought me back to when I was young, and I wished that somebody would have done that for me when I was young, instead of letting me go into a different path and not care, and just think that I'll change one day. For me to see the joy in these kids eyes, and teach them discipline and respect their parents, and how important school was, and how important it was to be a leader, not a follower...If you teach them when they're young to be leaders, and to show respect and to have dignity, you get them young. That's what I wish somebody would have done for me...You fall in that hole, and it's hard to get out of that hole without a rope. I always wished that somebody would help me out and throw in that rope a little bit. Nobody did, and I managed to find my way out. But that's what I was trying to do with these young kids. Before they even find the hole and fall into it, I want to stop them and get to them before that. (Salim)

The participants also became actively involved in their ethnic communities. Notably, most of the participants from a Muslim background tapped into the tremendous social support and mentorship in their religious communities. They expressed their contentment in finding solace in their religion and respectful, supportive brotherhood in their spiritual communities.

With Islam, I have those mentors, I have those people to look up to. I have answers if I have a question in life. I can open a book and have almost everything that I'm looking for. The brotherhood there was different. There was no requirement on me, it was just spontaneous. They care about you. They do things for you and they would be there for you. Even if you were in a bad mood, they'd be there, and there would be no requirements. I was in a world where I was something without having to be something else. I can be somebody, I can feel something, and I can know what I want to do with my life and what's right, without having to hurt people or hurt myself, or make decisions that I didn't want to have to make. I could just be myself, and be sincere. That was the requirement actually- sincerity and belief. If you had faith and sincerity, that's all you needed to be a strong Muslim. Hopefully it keeps me for the rest of my life- very safe and very happy. And so far, it's the first time that I'm very happy and very safe. (Pierre)

SUMMARY

Drawing upon the theoretical analysis of 30 interviews with gang involved youth and former gang members, this chapter detailed the pathways towards criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families, as well as their exit from gang involvement and reintegration into their families and communities. The gang involved participants were exposed to pre-migration vulnerabilities. A significant number of foreign-born participants experienced at first hand extreme violence and brutality, as well as unfavorable family socioeconomic conditions. Many of the Canadian-born youth were subjected to the negative impact on parent-child relationship of their parents' pre-migration histories.

The experience of gang involved participants in Canada involved a gradual disintegration of their relationships with their families, schools and communities. At home, they struggled tremendously in their interactions with their parents and other family members. Due to their parents' absent/neglectful, permissive and/or strict approaches to child rearing, many participants neither achieved close bonding with their parents, nor received adequate, effective support to deal with their developmental and sociocultural challenges. Differentials in attachment to home country/heritage cultures and adoption of the dominant culture widened the distance between the participants and their parents. Depending on their gender, family position, mixed child status or stepchild status, the participants received differential treatments in their families, which often resulted in additional expectations and responsibilities, or an intense need for recognition by other family members. A large number of participants were subjected to negative influences from their older siblings, including fighting, drug use and drug trafficking. Some had parents with poor mental health, a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse, or criminal records. Many participants witnessed and experienced domestic violence in their families. Furthermore, the participants primarily came from working class or low-income families that struggled to make ends meet. Even though some participants were able to identify positive influences in their families, such as parental support and positive guidance from elders, most participants were overwhelmed by the challenges posed by the emotional, psychological, and socioeconomic conditions prevalent in the home, and by their strained interactions with parents and family members.

At school, the participants encountered tremendous challenges in their education and in social interactions. Many participants experienced personal learning barriers, including limited English proficiency, learning disabilities, disrupted educational experience, and a lack of motivation to learn. The participants struggled to adapt to Canadian school, as well as to the transitions from one school division to the next, from faith-based to public school, and from one

school to the next. In their relationships with their schoolmates, many participants were subjected to bullying in their elementary and junior high school years. They also experienced social exclusion and racially motivated physical violence. The participants were susceptible to negative peer influence, and participated in a wide range of delinquent behaviours, such as mischief, drug use, and fighting. Over time, they showed a high level of disengagement from school which was further exacerbated by a lack of parental involvement in their learning, and limited access to adequate, effective school services.

The participants had rather distant or strained relationships with both the general community and their ethnic communities. The majority of participants came from impoverished neighbourhoods with disproportionate numbers of low-income ethnic minorities, Aboriginal people, single parents and transient populations. At an early age, they were exposed to violence, drug use and drug dealing, and prostitution. They did not have ready access to positive adult role models. In their interactions with peers in their neighbourhoods, they mutually influenced and reinforced negative behaviours, which escalated from minor mischief into criminal offences. Furthermore, the participants were subjected to racial slurs and differential treatments in daily life, and several experienced at first hand racially motivated bullying and physical attacks. In spite of their complex life challenges, the participants generally did not have access to adequate, effective services and support. The small number of participants who utilized available services were frustrated by a lack of culturally competent support. They were also critical of the lack of responsive support designed specifically for youth with difficult, complex life experiences. Over time, the participants experienced a growing sense of disconnection from the general community as well as from their ethnic communities. As a result of the disintegration in their relationships with their families, schools and communities, the participants developed negative self-concepts, and failed to achieve either a sense of national identity as Canadians or an empowering ethnic identity. Their sense of belonging was in general gravely compromised.

The disintegration in the connections between the participants and their families, schools and communities created a social void, which propelled the participants toward memberships in alternative social networks, namely social cliques and criminal gangs. The young people became involved in various social cliques, made up mostly of similarly disconnected ethnic and visible minority youth from their schools or neighbourhoods. These social cliques were loosely organized and run by peers. Motivated by the shared need for social belonging, thrills, protection and peer popularity, the social cliques focused primarily on peer socialization (i.e. hanging out) and social delinquency (i.e. bullying, drug use, fighting). Over time, however, some group members became involved in illegal activities such as stealing and selling marijuana to support their drug use and social activities.

The participants progressed towards formal membership in criminal gangs. For some participants, their social cliques evolved into formal gangs over time. Others actively sought gang membership, especially when they perceived the need for personal protection or were addicted to drugs. The participants also became involved in criminal gangs as a result of active recruitment of vulnerable youth by established criminal gangs, or through connections with gang involved family members or peers. From the accounts of the participants, their criminal gangs were organized, albeit at varying levels of sophistication, with a structured leadership, and existed to commit illegal activity for the purpose of financial gain. However, through their group interactions and activities, the gang members also enjoyed human bonding, group identity, protection, social status, and thrills. The participants were involved in the drug trade, extortion and debt collecting, illegal gambling, prostitution, and robbery. They also became accustomed to gang violence, and life on the "fast lane." Their entrenchment in the insular gang life moved them further away from meaningful interactions and connections with their family members and other community members.

In spite of the appeal of gang life, 16 participants chose to leave their gangs and made efforts to reintegrate into their families and communities. Their decisions involved dramatic turning

points, such as the death of bystanders or close friends, and peer betrayal, as well as the tipping points of developing cognitive maturity and religious awakening. With self-determination and strong support from their family members, the participants gradually distanced and disconnected themselves from other gang members, and started a new life. In their efforts to reintegrate into their families and communities, the participants relied on family and social support. They put tremendous effort into continuing their education, and maintaining legitimate employment. They reconnected with the community through active participation in community activities and services. In their ethnic communities, many found spiritual grounding in religion and community mentorship.

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5 | A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUPPORTING HIGH RISK AND GANG INVOLVED YOUTH FROM IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

The participatory group process not only promoted critical reflection by the members of the collaborative inquiry network on the specific issues facing youth from immigrant families, but also required thoughtful, coordinated action to address the identified challenges. Drawing upon their learning about the lived experience of gang involved youth and their collective experience and expertise, this chapter offers a practical framework supporting high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. It begins with a brief overview of the practical framework, and presents its vision and guiding principles. The chapter then proceeds to discuss specific strategies related to the prevention of high risk youth from immigrant families from gang involvement. It also elaborates on recommended support for helping gang involved youth from immigrant families to exit gangs and to successfully reintegrate into the community.

OVERVIEW OF PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUPPORTING HIGH RISK AND GANG INVOLVED YOUTH FROM IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

The recommendations from the stakeholders involved in this study, namely the gang involved participants and the members of the collaborative inquiry network, served as a basis for the development of the practical framework for supporting high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. The practical framework was informed by the critical insights of the gang involved participants on what might have helped them and other youth to refrain from criminal gang involvement, and the kinds of support that would be useful to them for gang exit and reintegration into the community. It also drew upon the strategies developed by the members of the collaborative inquiry network following their critical reflection on possible solutions to the identified issues facing the gang involved youth participants.

The practical framework promotes a shared vision of collaboration among stakeholders of diverse sectors and communities to support youth from immigrant families who are at risk or have a history of criminal gang involvement to develop positive identities and to achieve a healthy sense of belonging at home, school and in the community. It is guided by a set of principles that focus on development of a positive sense of identity, equity, multi-sectoral involvement, coordination and collaboration, multiple approaches on the part of youth services, addressing multiple needs with multiple interventions, and timeliness and responsiveness. The practical framework addresses the issues facing youth from immigrant families in their pathways towards criminal gang involvement, gang exit and reintegration into their communities. It offers concrete strategies for home-based, school-based and community-based support for youth from immigrant families. Table 5.1 provides an overview of the practical framework.

Table 5.1: Overview of a practical framework for supporting high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families

Vision Stakeholders in diverse sectors and communities will work collaboratively to support youth from immigrant families who are at risk or have a history of criminal gang involvement to develop positive identities and achieve a healthy sense of belonging at home, school and in the community.		
Guiding Principles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Promote positive identity development in all services and programs ❖ Ensure equitable resource allocation, opportunities and outcomes ❖ Promote multi-sectoral involvement, coordination and collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Adopt multiple approaches on the part of youth services ❖ Address multiple needs with multiple interventions ❖ Ensure timeliness and responsiveness of services 		
	Prevention	Gang Exit and Reintegration
Family-based Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Resettlement support ❖ In-home tutor/family literacy ❖ Support for healthy family interaction ❖ Support for struggling parents and siblings ❖ Family outreach and mentorship ❖ Socioeconomic support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Family safety ❖ Involvement of family members ❖ Family strengthening support ❖ Other support identified in Prevention
School-based Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Academic and literacy support ❖ Positive social opportunities and programs ❖ Character building/identity support ❖ Mentorship/access to positive role models ❖ School transition support ❖ Outreach and psychosocial support to vulnerable youth ❖ Preventive education and support ❖ Effective school practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ School safety ❖ Psychosocial, academic and financial support ❖ Educational opportunities ❖ Other support identified in Prevention
Community-based Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Immigrant youth/culturally specific programming ❖ Support for youth to access general youth services ❖ Mentorship ❖ Community education and support ❖ Community/neighbourhood development ❖ Social action to address neighbourhood/community inequities ❖ Cultural competence among service organizations ❖ Organizational capacity to help psychosocially/behaviourally challenging youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Outreach support ❖ Gang dissociation support ❖ Post-gang psychosocial support ❖ Post-gang practical support ❖ Community connection and involvement ❖ Leadership opportunities ❖ Other support identified in Prevention

STATEMENT OF VISION

The development of the statement of vision addressed the shared understanding that the unraveling of identities and sense of belonging of youth from immigrant families, resulting from the disintegration in their relationships with family, school and community, would have detrimental effects on their wellbeing and behaviour. The members of the collaborative inquiry network experienced at first hand the power of collaboration, and thus called for multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral collaboration to support youth from immigrant families. The statement of vision for the practical framework is as follows:

Stakeholders in diverse sectors and communities will work collaboratively to support youth from immigrant families who are at risk or have a history of criminal gang involvement to develop positive identities and achieve a healthy sense of belonging at home, school and in the community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In order to achieve the stated vision, stakeholders recommended certain principles to guide the development of programs and services for high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. The key guiding principles include: integration of empowering identity development into all programs; promoting equity; multi-sectoral involvement, coordination and collaboration; multi-approaches to youth services; addressing multiple needs with multiple interventions; and timeliness and responsiveness.

Integration of Empowering Identity Development

The findings of this study highlighted the importance of healthy identity development in the overall wellbeing of youth from immigrant families. All programs and services for youth should articulate explicit strategies to promote a positive self concept, Canadian identity and ethnic identity among young people, and examine the intended and unintended consequences of such aspects of self-concept on the identity development of youth. While specific programs could focus on identity development of youth from immigrant families, intentional integration of healthy identity development in all programs and services would enhance program quality, accessibility, inclusion, cultural competence and positive outcomes for all youth.

Promoting Equity

The experiences of the gang involved participants in this study brought attention to the inequitable realities facing youth from immigrant families in the various aspects of their lives. Unless stakeholders explicitly deal with those inequities, programs and services for this youth population will remain ad-hoc and inadequate. Specifically, stakeholders ought to address equity in resource allocation and availability of services, support and opportunities that in turn ensure equitable outcomes of wellbeing and success of youth from immigrant families. Structurally, organizations ought to address equity by promoting diversity at all organizational levels, as well as incorporating the participation of diverse community members in decision making processes.

Multi-stakeholder Involvement, Coordination and Collaboration

As demonstrated in this study, the gang involved youth were challenged with myriad life challenges. The wisdom of “it takes a whole village to raise a child” rings true as a description of what would be required to support high risk and gang involved youth to become healthy citizens. Any one sector, one community, one organization, one program or one individual could not possibly meet the range and complexities of needs. Together, however, they could

increase resource and professional expertise, and ensure both specialized support for specific needs and development of the whole person. Stakeholders in the social services, community, justice, health, education, business, media and government sectors ought to embrace all youth as *our* youth, as well as own gang issues as *our* community issues. They ought to collaborate and coordinate resources, services and communication in order to achieve comprehensiveness and quality of services for all youth. Stakeholder involvement also ought to ensure active participation of youth, family members and community leaders of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds in decision making processes that have impact on the availability and quality of services for youth from immigrant families

Multiple Approaches to Youth Services

In response to the complex life experiences and needs of high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families, stakeholders ought to use multiple approaches to the development and provision of services. They could integrate the strengths of various cultural traditions and practices, disciplines (i.e. arts, education, psychology, kinesiology, and so forth), theoretical orientations, philosophies and effective practices to achieve innovation, comprehensiveness and depth in services.

Addressing Multiple Needs with Multiple Interventions

In order to achieve sustainable, equitable outcomes for high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families, stakeholders ought to be attentive to the multiple layers of needs and corresponding interventions required to address this complex issue. Strategies ought to mandate the scope of services for youth at home, school and in the community, as well as the comprehensiveness of strategies to deal with issues related to prevention, gang exit and reintegration. Stakeholders should provide direct services to youth and families to help them deal with specific issues, and at the same time identify and address underlying societal causes and relevant policy issues.

Timeliness and Responsiveness

High risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families often deal with competing social pressures, demands and influences. Their disconnection from family, school and community makes them highly vulnerable in dealing with uncertainties and stresses in their lives. Furthermore, their readiness to participate in risky individual and group activities could expose them to unpredictable events with potentially tragic outcomes. Interventions, therefore, ought to be swift and responsive to their needs.

PREVENTION

The gang involved participants in this study encountered a wide range of developmental, social, cultural and economic challenges in all facets of their lives. They experienced gradual disintegration in their relationships with family, school and community. Prevention of criminal gang involvement of high risk youth from immigrant families, thus, should focus on family-based support, school-based support and community-based support, and address the complexity of the needs experienced by these young people.

Family-based Support

The findings of this study showed that the gang involved youth from immigrant families primarily came from working class or low-income households that struggled to make ends meet, and experienced a gradual disintegration of their relationships with their parents and

other family members. As a result of the prevalent absent/neglectful, permissive and/or strict approaches to childrearing, many youth neither developed strong, healthy bonds with their parents, nor received adequate, effective support to overcome their developmental and sociocultural challenges. Their weak attachment to country of ancestry/heritage culture and their readiness to adopt Canadian cultural values and norms often came into conflict with their parents' efforts to maintain home cultural traditions and more selective adoption of Canadian ways of life. The participants received differential treatment in their families on the basis of gender, family position, and mixed child or stepchild status. Subsequently, some were burdened with additional expectations and responsibilities, or an intense need for recognition by other family members. In addition, some youth had parents with a history of poor mental health, drug and alcohol addiction, and criminal involvement. Many were influenced by their own siblings to participate in group fights, drug use and drug trafficking. A number of youths witnessed and experienced domestic violence. Their wellbeing was further compromised by the unresolved trauma related to either their direct pre-migration experience with extreme violence and brutality in civil wars, or the negative impact on the parent-child relationship of their parents' pre-migration histories.

Family-based preventive services, therefore, ought to be holistic and support high risk youth *and* all other family members. Stakeholders suggested a wide range of strategies to address resettlement and practical needs, and to promote the wellbeing of all family members and their healthy interaction. Service organizations could incorporate effective practices to provide youth and their family members with comprehensive resettlement support, including orientation to cultural, community and other resources, English language education, and employment training. They could provide or connect the youth and family members affected by past trauma to specialized counseling. Those young people with limited English proficiency, sporadic prior education, a history of academic struggles and parents without literacy skills and/or English proficiency would need frequent in-home or neighbourhood-based tutoring and family literacy support.

In addition, service providers could support high risk youth and family members to strengthen their family unit through active parental involvement and healthy family interaction. They could offer specialized education programs that help parents and caregivers to gain in-depth understanding of the complexities involved in the psychosocial development of adolescents, as well as the specific challenges facing high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. These specialized education programs should also prepare parents and caregivers with effective parenting skills and specific tools enabling them to recognize early signs of the psychosocial struggles of their children, to provide these high risk youth with responsive parental support, and to help them access appropriate resources in the community to deal with their challenges. Youth and all family members should also have ready access to educational workshops and family coaching to deal with parenting issues, intergenerational/acculturative gaps, sibling influence, and interpersonal conflicts.

Service providers should recognize the tremendous impact of personal and interpersonal struggles of parents and siblings on young people. Family members with known histories of poor mental health, addiction and behaviour problems would need specific professional services to deal with their personal challenges. Those parents who have experienced marital discord or committed domestic violence would require timely, sustainable intervention to resolve their conflicts and to manage their anger and behaviour. Youth and other affected family members would benefit from counseling and support to deal with the psychological aftermath of family traumas.

In providing family-based preventive services to high risk youth from immigrant families, service stakeholders should tap into social support from their immediate and extended family members, as well as from members of their ethnic communities. Those young people who come from socially isolated families and do not readily make use of community resources and services would require service providers to invest in intensive family outreach efforts. Their

families would benefit from positive ethnic-based and cross-cultural family mentorship through developing strong, meaningful connections with their ethnic communities and the general community, and through receiving help to navigate through their life challenges.

Effective preventive services ought to be attentive to the socioeconomic needs of high risk youth and their families, particularly with respect to their means and conditions of living. Service and community stakeholders could work with the municipal government to ensure access of disadvantaged youth and families to quality, affordable housing. They could support and advocate for periodic critical reviews of the existing public housing policies and practices, and promote innovative designs that extend public housing beyond a focus on basic shelter, and take into consideration quality of life and healthy social interactions in neighbourhoods. Public housing thus should play an important role in addressing socioeconomic inequities, and not create conditions for ghettoization. In addition, stakeholders could support socioeconomically disadvantaged youth and their families to attain a good standard of living through meaningful employment opportunities and public assistance programs. They could promote living wage and family focused policies that would make it easier for working parents to achieve a balance between work and home life, and thus afford more quality time for family interaction and supervision of young people. Those parents and youth with limited employment-related skills would also benefit from access to employment training and job placements.

School-based Support

This study demonstrated that many gang involved youth from immigrant families experienced multiple challenges in their education and in social interactions at school. These young people encountered personal learning barriers, such as limited English, learning disabilities, disrupted educational experience, and a lack of motivation to learn. They had difficulty in adapting to the various school transitions: from home country education to Canadian school, from one school division to the next, from faith-based to public school, and from one school to the next. In the personal and social context, the gang involved youth were vulnerable to bullying in their early years, and often experienced social exclusion and racially motivated physical violence. They were susceptible to negative peer influence, and participated in a wide range of delinquent behaviours, such as mischief, drug use, and fighting. By late junior high or high school years, the gang involved youth showed a high level of disengagement from school which was further exacerbated by a lack of parental involvement in their learning, and limited access to adequate, effective school services.

In the light of the complex educational and social challenges facing high risk youth from immigrant families, stakeholders recommended school-based strategies that focus on academic success, positive social support and opportunities, preventive education, and effective school practices. In order to ensure equitable academic success of high risk youth from immigrant families, educational stakeholders would need to develop and strengthen specialized programs to support students with limited English and literacy skills, learning disabilities, and sporadic prior education. These programs ought to be comprehensive, structured and pedagogically sound. Such programs should also receive adequate resources to ensure accurate assessment, program delivery by qualified staff, and evaluation. Schools could work with relevant service partners to provide frequent specialized literacy and homework support after school, especially in high needs neighbourhoods.

The educational experience of high risk youth from immigrant families should include ample opportunities for positive, empowering social interactions, and responsive social support. These young people would benefit from meaningful cross-cultural exchanges, validation through ethnic-based peer support, and active participation in multicultural sports and recreational activities. They should have ready access to school personnel and peers of diverse cultural backgrounds who can serve as positive role models and mentors. Schools

could involve students, school personnel and service partners of diverse backgrounds to develop social opportunities and programs that promote positive self-concept, Canadian identity and ethnic identities of students. All schools should have outreach strategies to identify and provide timely, relevant psychosocial support to youth who have a history of behavioural problems, or may be involved in negative social cliques and criminal gangs. They would also need to regularly review and take proactive measures to promote access of vulnerable and socially alienated youth to school-based social opportunities and programs. In recent years, a selected number of school-based initiatives, such as the Wellness Centre in Forest Lawn High School, have drawn upon the strengths and expertise of various service providers in diverse sectors (health, justice, social services, community and so forth) to offer coordinated, interdisciplinary support to students in high needs communities. Those collaborative programs should be expanded to schools in similar communities.

As demonstrated in this study, school transitions can cause a great deal of confusion, anxiety and social vulnerability among young people. Educational stakeholders should therefore provide mandatory school orientation for all students regardless of their time of arrival during the school year, and provide them with sustainable positive peer ambassadorship and mentorship. As the major local school boards have established central reception centres to welcome and assess foreign-born students, they could also ensure that all newcomer students have access to school-based settlement services, such as the Settlement Workers in School Program, to gain understanding about and adjust to Canadian education. Educational stakeholders should establish communication and collaboration among various schools and school divisions to help young people to move smoothly from one division to the next or one school to another. School records should document needs and recommended support to maintain continuity in the accurate assessment of students and provision of appropriate, responsive follow up support. Public schools could also work with faith-based charter schools and ethnic communities to prepare young people who make a transition from faith-based to public schools and help them adjust to new school structures, norms and practices. It is crucial that school orientation go hand in hand with ongoing mentorship and support to help students adapt well to their new schools, and to integrate into positive social networks.

Furthermore, school-based preventive services ought to include explicit, proactive educational strategies that meaningfully address contemporary social challenges, particularly criminal gang involvement, drug use and addiction, and bullying and racism. The experiences of the gang involved participants in this study made a case for preventive education to deal with the identified social issues to be available to all students as early as their late elementary school years. Schools should tap into the existing services and resources in the local police department, service organizations and ethnocultural communities to help young people gain a realistic understanding about gang life, drug use and addiction, and bullying and racism, and to prepare them with skills to deal with related social pressures and risk factors. They could invite inspiring people with relevant lived experience to share their insights into the issues, and to give practical advice to young people. To complement preventive education, schools and service partners need to have in place school-based services to support those who have experienced or been affected by issues related to criminal gangs, drug use and addiction, and bullying and racism. Schools could involve students, school personnel, families and service partners to strategize, create and promote a positive school environment for all students.

School-based preventive services should also support education stakeholders to develop competence in working with youth and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. In an age of increasing diversity in the community, the education system would benefit from an organizational assessment of policies and practices through the lens of diversity. Individual schools could work with culturally diverse communities and service organizations to develop and implement cultural competence plans that promote diversity and cultural competence in school culture, regulations, practices, communication, professional qualification and development, student services, support for families, and community/service collaboration.

Schools could work with culturally diverse communities to meaningfully involve immigrant parents in their children's learning and school activities, through volunteering or participating in school councils. School personnel, in particular, should have access to adequate professional training to support students of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. They could play an important role in encouraging and nurturing the development of positive self-concepts, Canadian identity and ethnic identity among culturally diverse students.

The experiences of the gang involved youth highlighted the need for schools to support their personnel to work with behaviourally challenging students. Schools should have intensive training and coaching services to enhance the practical knowledge and skills of staff, enabling them to interact effectively with high risk students, and to support them to deal with their underlying challenges. School personnel would also benefit from having access to those with lived experience who could shed light on their students' realities and support them to develop the empathy and expertise necessary in work with high risk youth. Furthermore, the practice of school suspension and expulsion ought to be reviewed in terms of effectiveness and appropriateness. When schools use these methods of discipline, they should have follow up support in place to ensure that students do not fall through the cracks in the community or in their new schools.

Community-based Support

The gang involved participants in this study had rather distant or strained relationships with both the general community and their ethnic communities. Most grew up in impoverished neighbourhoods where they were exposed to violence, drug use and drug dealing, and prostitution at an early age. They did not have ready access to positive adult role models, and peer interactions tended to reinforce negative behaviours. Many gang involved youth were resentful of the differential treatment they received in their daily life, and experienced at first hand racially motivated bullying and physical assaults. Although the young people experienced tremendous challenges in life, they did not always use the services that were available due to a lack of awareness about community resources or frustration with the lack of culturally responsive support. They experienced a sense of disconnection from the general community as well as from their ethnic communities.

In response to the dynamics involved in the relationships between the young people and their communities, stakeholders recommended several strategies to facilitate adequate, responsive community-based support for high risk youth from immigrant families. These strategies would focus on the availability of youth focused services, neighbourhood focused services, community education and organizational development. Service providers in the immigrant and youth serving sectors could coordinate their existing programs and develop new initiatives to ensure access of high risk youth to a wide range of general youth services and immigrant/culturally specific programs. High risk youth from immigrant families would benefit from specific programs that offer specialized support to address their immigrant/minority experience, particularly in the areas of identity development, trauma, resettlement, cross cultural exchange, and heritage language development. They should also be encouraged to use general youth services, such as team sports, recreational opportunities, arts programs, and youth leadership training. In addition, service providers could collaborate to offer cross-cultural and ethnic-based mentorship programs that connect high risk youth to positive role models from diverse cultural backgrounds. These mentorship programs would help high risk youth to overcome social isolation, to develop a positive identity, and to receive individualized guidance to deal with their personal challenges.

Effective community-based preventive services ought to pay due attention to the wellbeing of neighbourhoods where high risk youth and their families live. Community and service stakeholders could use the community development approach to reduce negative social influences and promote healthy community living. They could use public education as a tool to

inform and engage community members in dialogue on issues of shared concern, including criminal gang involvement of youth, drug use and addiction, and bullying and racism. There should be services and support in place for those who have experienced at first hand or been impacted by the identified social issues. Furthermore, service and community stakeholders could support community driven initiatives that arrive at solutions to the specific community issues, such as drug use, prostitution, gang violence, racism and community disengagement of youth. They could also encourage and support coordination and collaboration among community groups and initiatives to develop coherent, comprehensive community action plans to deal with such complex and interrelated issues. The existing socioeconomic inequities among neighborhoods would demand that community and service stakeholders support community action to promote investment and quality living in all communities. Service and community stakeholders could play an important role in organizing and facilitating public awareness, advocacy, policy forums and dialogues with policy and decision makers, community-based research and action, and proposals for community revitalization and development.

There should be orchestrated efforts among service agencies to promote cultural competence and organizational capacity to work with psychosocially/ behaviourally challenging youth in order to effectively support high risk youth from immigrant families. Service providers ought to critically examine their organizational structures and functions to ensure organizational adaptability and responsiveness to growing diversity in the community. They ought to ensure that their leadership and personnel at all levels reflect cultural diversity in the community and are competent in interacting with people of diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, many high risk youth came from challenging backgrounds, and may often exhibit difficult behaviours. Rather than feeling intimidated or turning these young people away, service providers should develop programs and services specifically for high risk youth, and provide training and coaching to staff to effectively deal with difficult behaviours and to support high risk youth from diverse backgrounds.

SUPPORT FOR GANG EXIT AND REINTEGRATION

A number of gang involved participants in this study managed to leave their gangs and to reintegrate into their families and communities. Their decisions often involved dramatic turning points, such as the death of bystanders or close friends, or peer betrayal, as well as the tipping points associated with developing cognitive maturity and religious awakening. In all cases, the young people ultimately had to decide for themselves to permanently leave gang life and commit to a new future. Their insights, however, confirmed that availability of responsive support at home, school and community would encourage gang involved youth to progress toward change, and help them adapt well to their families and communities in their post-gang life.

Family-based Support

In making the decision to leave their gangs, the gang involved participants were concerned about safety for their loved ones and themselves. They needed reassurance of family support and guidance, and desired to reconnect with their parents, siblings and other extended family members. Stakeholders, thus, recommended strategies that promote family safety, involvement of family members and respected community leaders, and support to strengthen family interaction. With respect to family safety, the police service and relevant justice partners (i.e. probation officers, correctional officers, youth justice committees, youth defense) could collaborate with social service providers and ethnic communities to devise and have in place protective measures for those youth who exit gangs, as well as their families. They would need to develop thoughtful, collaborative plans to reach out to and build trust with gang involved youth and their families, and make available to them information about concrete strategies for

gang exit and relevant community resources. Respected leaders in ethnic communities could play a key role in outreach efforts to gang involved youth, and serve as trusted links between the gang involved youth and service stakeholders.

The gang involved participants who were ready for gang exit often voiced the importance of reconciliation with their parents and siblings, and stressed the importance of family involvement in post gang life. Indeed, family members could be a great asset in providing youth with encouragement, guidance, a sense of security and practical support. Service and community stakeholders could therefore facilitate reconnection between youth and their families, and involve respected family members in working with gang involved youth to develop their plans for gang exit and a post gang future. They could support youth and family members to resolve difficult family issues and conflicts that in the past had caused the disintegration in their relationships. Service and community stakeholders could help strengthen family unit through culturally responsive counseling, family mentorship and coaching. They could also assist all family members to access services and resources in the community. Formerly gang involved youth and family members would further benefit from family-based preventive services and support discussed under Prevention.

School-based Support

Several formerly gang involved participants returned to school after leaving gangs. Some completed high school and pursued post-secondary education. Stakeholders built upon the critical insights of these individuals into their educational journeys, and recommended various school-based strategies to facilitate the educational success and career readiness of former gang members. These strategies focused on safety measures, support for transition to school life, and opportunities for educational advancement and training. Education stakeholders should consult and collaborate with the local police, public security services and youth to audit school safety, and to develop protocols and protective measures to ensure safety of formerly gang involved youth and all students and school personnel. Schools could encourage students with a previous history of gang involvement to tap into school safety resources by making the relevant information available to all students, and having respected school personnel be the point of contact for students. They could also strengthen communication with families, and inform them of resources available at school.

Formerly gang involved youth who return to school after a long period of absence would benefit from support for their transition. Education stakeholders could provide school reorientation to help returning youth to understand school curriculum, student services and resources, effective learning techniques, school expectations and codes of conduct, graduation requirements and effective learning skills. They could connect returning youth to positive, supportive peers, school personnel and volunteers to inspire and help them navigate through school life. Returning students should be able to readily access homework support and specialized services to address their learning challenges. There should be plenty of opportunities for them to participate in team sports and recreational activities, where they could develop a healthy sense of belonging and fulfill their need for acceptable fun and thrills to replace the excitement of gang life. Collaborative efforts between schools and service partners should ensure the availability of responsive personal counseling, life skills coaching and career planning.

Formerly gang involved individuals over the age of 18 who wish to return to school should have opportunities to continue and complete their secondary education in an adult high school or college that offers upgrading. Those who complete their high school education should receive support to attend post-secondary education or vocational training. Service providers and education institutions could offer those who consider returning to school readiness programs to help them plan and prepare for their school career. They could help these young adults to access financial assistance and scholarships to pay for their education and living

expenses. Educational institutions could work with government and business partners to invest in educational programs for young adults with complex life histories.

Effective support for youth in their post gang life should prevent recidivism. The school-based strategies identified in Prevention could be integrated into the overall support for returning youth.

Community-based Support

In their reintegration into the general community and their ethnic communities, the formerly gang involved participants made tremendous efforts to distance themselves from other gang members, to establish new social networks, to deal with personal and financial challenges, and to participate in community activities and services. Stakeholders recommended community-based strategies that focus on outreach, dissociation from gangs, psychosocial support, practical support, connections to communities, and opportunities to make a positive contribution to the community.

Community outreach support could start long before gang involved youth decided to leave their gangs. Many gang members at some point came into contact with the justice system. Correctional officers, probation officers, youth defense lawyers, legal aid personnel and counselors have direct contact with gang involved youth and their families. These professionals could be prepared with the knowledge and skills to encourage and work with gang involved youth to plan for gang exit and reintegration into the community. Correctional services could collaborate with respected community leaders from diverse ethnic communities, encouraging them to visit inmates regularly and provide them with support and guidance as they explore and prepare for a new future in the community. Relevant information about gang exit and resources for post gang life should be readily available to all inmates. Outside the correctional setting, professionals and respected leaders in ethnic communities could work with families to reach out to gang involved youth.

When gang involved youth decide to exit gangs, they would need immediate support to dissociate and distance themselves from other gang members. Community-based support for reintegration ought to involve youth, family members and relevant professionals to devise plans for safety. In situations of grave concern regarding violence and retaliation, the local police should be consulted and safety plans should include the option of relocation.

In post gang life, many youth would require intensive psychosocial and practical support. Service providers from the different disciplines can collaborate to offer multi-faceted programs that support former gang members during their transition into community life, offer sustained crisis intervention, and connect them to relevant community resources. They could provide professional counseling to help former gang members to reframe their gang identity, and instead develop healthy identities (i.e. self concepts, Canadian identity and ethnic identity). Treatment for drug addiction should be readily available to struggling youth. In addressing the practical needs of former gang members, service providers could offer life skills and employment readiness programs. These programs would assist youth to gain practical knowledge and skills with respect to goal setting, positive social skills, stress management, job search, resume writing, interview skills and so forth. These services could be connected to the federal and provincial human resource development programs to ensure adequate funding for programming as well as living allowances for participants. A number of existing life skills and employment readiness programs for youth, such as the Youth Possibilities and Youth 1.2.1 programs at the Centre for Newcomers, the Bridging Youth for Success program at the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, the Building Futures program at Aspen Family and Community Network Society, could be expanded or re-tailored to also support youth with a history of gang involvement. In addition, service providers could facilitate access of former gang members to legitimate employment. They could work with the private and public sectors to develop

specific employment opportunities for community members with history of prior gang involvement who desire to have a new start in life.

Reintegration of former gang members into the community would involve meaningful reconnection to their ethnic communities and the broader community. Service and community stakeholders could offer ethnic based and cross cultural mentorship programs that connect young people with positive, inspiring individuals of diverse backgrounds. These mentors could support former gang members to develop positive identities and to navigate through life challenges. Respected community leaders could reach out to the young people, facilitate their connection to positive social networks, and involve them in healthy social activities. Service and community stakeholders could invite formerly gang involved youth to participate in youth led or collaborative initiatives that address underlying community issues that had contributed to the disintegration of relationships between youth from immigrant families and their communities. They could involve former gang members in a speakers' bureau to educate the public about gang issues, and in outreach efforts to prevent involvement of at risk youth in negative social cliques and criminal gangs. These youth leadership and civic participation programs would enable former gang members to fully merge with and contribute to their ethnic communities and the broader Canadian society. Other community-based strategies outlined in Prevention should also be incorporated in the overall support for youth in their post gang life.

SUMMARY

This chapter has presented a practical framework for supporting high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. The framework integrated all recommendations from the gang involved participants and the members of the collaborative inquiry network, and was intended to serve as the groundwork and starting point from which diverse stakeholders in the different sectors could work together to develop and implement a city wide action plan to meaningfully address criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families.

The practical framework would promote the vision of collaboration among stakeholders of diverse sectors and communities to support youth from immigrant families who are at risk or have a history of criminal gang involvement to develop positive identities and to achieve a healthy sense of belonging at home, school, and in the community. It would be guided by a set of principles that focus on identity development, equity, multi-sectoral involvement, coordination and collaboration, multiple approaches to youth services, the need to address multiple needs with multiple interventions, and timeliness and responsiveness.

The practical framework would address the issues facing youth from immigrant families in their pathways towards criminal gang involvement, gang exit and reintegration into their communities. With respect to prevention, the framework offers a wide range of strategies for providing practical family-based, school-based and community based support to high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. Strategies for family-based support would address issues related to resettlement, academic and literacy capacity, family interaction, wellbeing and the influence of parents and siblings, family outreach and mentorship and socioeconomic support. School-based strategies would deal with academic programming, social opportunities and programs, character building and identity development, mentorship, school transitions, outreach to and psychosocial support for socially alienated students, preventive education and support, and effective school practices. In addition, community-based strategies would promote culturally specific programming for immigrant youth, access of youth from immigrant families to general youth services, mentorship, community education and support, community and neighbourhood development, social action to address neighbourhood inequities, cultural competence and organizational capacity to work with psychosocially/ behaviourally challenging youth among service organizations.

The framework also focuses on support for gang exit and reintegration of gang involved youth into the community. Again, the support would be available at home, at school and in the community to ensure the safety and wellbeing of formerly gang involved youth. The strategies for family-based support would ensure family safety, involvement of family members, and support to strengthen families. The school-based strategies would deal with school safety, psychosocial, academic and financial support, and educational opportunities for returning youth. The community-based strategies would focus on outreach, support with dissociation from gangs, availability of post-gang psychosocial and practical support, community connection and participation, and leadership opportunities for formerly gang involved youth to make positive contributions to the community. The framework stressed the importance of formerly gang involved youth from immigrant families also having access to other preventive programs and services available to the community at large.

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6 | IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

This chapter provides a summary of findings and recommended strategies for change. It also discusses the implications of the findings with respect to public discourse, effective practice and service development, and policy development. The chapter concludes with the recommended next steps and closing comments.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The inquiry into the lived experience of the gang involved participants illustrated the complex pathways towards criminal gang involvement and out of gang life followed by youth from immigrant families, and the detrimental effects of the unraveling of identities and sense of belonging on the wellbeing and behaviour of these young people. The gang involved participants either directly experienced pre-migration vulnerabilities or were indirectly impacted by their parents' pre-migration histories. Their life experience in Canada involved gradual disintegration of their interaction with their families, schools and communities. Subsequently, the participants experienced crises of identity and belonging, which propelled them towards forming friendships with other socially disconnected peers. They became involved in social cliques, and progressed towards membership in criminal gangs. Confronted with various turning points, some participants eventually chose to leave their gangs. They worked towards exit from the gang and reintegration into their families and communities.

Drawing upon their learning about the lived experiences of gang involved youth and former gang members, as well as their own professional experience and expertise, the members of the collaborative inquiry network proposed a practical framework for supporting high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. The practical framework promotes collaboration among stakeholders from diverse sectors and communities to support youth from immigrant families who are at risk or have a history of criminal gang involvement to develop positive identities and to achieve a healthy sense of belonging at home, school, and in the community. It would be guided by a set of principles that focus on identity development, equity, multi-sectoral involvement, coordination and collaboration, multiple approaches to youth services, the need to address multiple needs with multiple interventions, and timeliness and responsiveness. The practical framework would address the specific issues facing high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families prior to their involvement in social cliques and criminal gangs. It would also deal with the specific challenges pertaining to gang exit and reintegration of gang involved youth into their families and communities. This framework would promote coordination and comprehensiveness of home-based, school-based and community-based support for high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families.

IMPLICATIONS

The stakeholders' participation in the collaborative inquiry network has enhanced their understanding of the issues faced by youth from immigrant families and informed their work with these young people. Their learning and suggestions can also be used as catalysts for thoughtful public discourse, sound policy development and the development of responsive

services and effective practices to support high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families.

Public Discourse

There is a notable lack of vibrant, informed public dialogue on criminal gangs in general, and on criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families in particular. Public discourse has focused almost entirely on the reporting of criminal and violent incidents. The participatory approach to this study offers effective strategies that community members, media partners and leaders can incorporate in public debates on the social phenomenon of criminal gangs. Informed, effective public forums would contribute to both the process and content of public discussion. Such discussion should promote community ownership of the issues, sustainable dialogue, critical reflection grounded in the lived experience of those affected by the issues, diverse perspectives and voices, and an integration of analysis and the development of practical solutions. Public dialogue on criminal gangs should address both the underlying issues and innovative solutions. Discussion of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families should in addition address the multiple issues involved in the interactions of the youth and their families, schools and communities.

Effective Practice and Service Development

It is apparent from this study that youth from immigrant families encounter complex challenges in all spheres of their lives, and that their difficult realities have often been met with a lack of responsive support at home, school and in the community. Such discrepancies require institutions, service providers and community groups to undertake a critical review of existing services, particularly with respect to availability, access and responsiveness to the needs of youth from immigrant families. Such a review could address the following questions:

- (1) To what extent have the existing services in various sectors considered and addressed the needs of youth from immigrant families?
- (2) How effective are the existing services for youth and youth from immigrant families, particularly those with psychosocial and behavioural challenges? What ought we do to ensure effectiveness of the existing services and access of youth from immigrant families to those services?
- (3) How can service and community stakeholders better coordinate the existing services for youth from immigrant families? How can we reach those who need our services?
- (4) What are the gaps in the existing services? What other programs and services can we develop to address the needs of youth from immigrant families and promote their wellbeing?

The suggested practical framework could inform coordination and development of services for youth from immigrant families. Collaboratively, diverse stakeholders from the different sectors could use the practical framework to establish an inventory of the existing services pertaining to prevention of criminal gang involvement and support for gang exit and reintegration of gang involved youth into their communities. They could also use the practical framework as a starting point to develop a coherent, coordinated and city wide action plan to prevent and address criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families. Effective services ought to ensure family-based, school-based and community-based support. Services ought to be both comprehensive in scope and responsive to the specific needs of youth with psychosocial and behavioural challenges. In terms of priorities, from the recommendations of gang involved youth and former gang members, service providers should invest in positive identity building, ethnic-based and cross cultural mentorship, early prevention, and access to multi-layered support (i.e. recreation, cross-cultural exchanges, academic support, etc.).

Furthermore, efforts to promote effective practice and service for youth from immigrant families ought to take place in the context of organizational responsiveness to diversity and

multi-sectoral coordination and collaboration. As foreign-born youth and Canadian-born youth from immigrant families continue to establish a strong presence in Canadian society, it is prudent that public institutions, service organizations and community groups systematically assess their diversity readiness, and integrate diversity and cultural competence into all aspects of their organizational structures and functions. They can tap into the expertise and resources from various ethnic communities and diversity focused organizations for support. The wide range of needs of youth from immigrant families and their complexities demand that institutions and organizations in all sectors (health, justice, education, community, social services, government, ethnic communities, and so forth) coordinate and collaborate in order to meaningfully support and promote the wellbeing of these young people. Due attention to organizational change and multi-sectoral coordination and collaboration would help institutions and service organizations avoid ad-hoc, tokenistic services for youth from immigrant families, and instead promote wide acceptance of youth from diverse backgrounds, collective ownership of difficult social issues, and integration of services and support for youth.

Policy Development

The findings from this study assert the need for timely review and development of policies to support youth from immigrant families. Even though foreign-born youth and Canadian-born youth from immigrant families represent about 20% of all young Canadians under the age of 18, and the fact that this percentage is expected to reach 25% by 2016 (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2006b), there is a notable lack of coherent national, provincial and municipal policy that focuses specifically on the healthy development of youth from immigrant families. Government policies have often subsumed the needs of youth from immigrant families into overall support for all families and youth. As demonstrated in the findings, far too many youth from immigrant families have fallen through the cracks due to a lack of intentional, focused support.

Various governmental jurisdictions would benefit from undertaking a critical review of existing policies in all areas with respect to their intent and impact on youth from immigrant families. Such a review could address the following questions:

- (1) What is the level of congruence among Canadian policies responsible for the selection of immigrants and refugees and support for resettlement and integration?
- (2) How have various policies in health, education, justice and social services addressed diversity in general, and the needs of youth from immigrant families in particular?
- (3) What is the level of inter-governmental and inter-sectoral coordination in policy development in response to multiculturalism and support for youth from immigrant families?

Responsive policy development ought to ensure access of youth from immigrant families to comprehensive and high-quality support. Nationally, the federal government could champion a national strategy that focuses on the resettlement and integration of children of immigrant families. This strategy should involve all federal departments that are responsible for immigration, multiculturalism, health, justice, employment, skills development and so forth. It should ensure development and implementation of department-specific policy strategies and inter-departmental initiatives to support home-based, school-based and community-based services that address the needs of youth from immigrant families in the realms of justice, education, health and social services. A similar approach can also be used at the provincial level. The departments that are responsible for child and youth services, education, housing, immigration and employment, health, community development, infrastructure and public security could ensure both department-specific policy goals and outcomes, as well as inter-departmental collaboration to promote responsive, comprehensive policy to support youth from immigrant families at home, school and in the community. At the local level, the municipal government could champion policies that address inequities among communities and neighbourhoods; access of low income families to quality public housing in healthy, mixed

neighbourhoods; racism and discrimination; access of children of low income families to recreational programs and activities; youth focused facilities; and service priorities for vulnerable youth and families. The local school boards could strengthen educational policies that promote quality learning for students with ESL needs, learning disabilities and sporadic education; cultural diversity and competence; equitable resource allocation to schools; equitable outcomes among students; positive, inclusive school cultures; and educational upgrading. They should review the policies related to school suspension and expulsion to determine their effectiveness and to ensure concurrent and follow up support for students. In the community, institutions and service stakeholders could ensure organizational policies related to cultural diversity and competence, as well as responsiveness to youth with psychosocial and behavioural challenges. In all jurisdictions, institutions and organizations, policy development ought to go hand in hand with corresponding funding priorities, adequate resource allocation, and accountability and reporting measures.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Grounded in the lived experience of gang involved research participants, this study has offered an in-depth understanding about the pathways of gang involved youth from immigrant families towards criminal gang involvement and out of gang life. The practical framework for supporting high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families articulates a clear vision and guiding principles, as well as specific strategies for home-based, school-based and community-based support that address prevention, gang exit and reintegration of former gang members into their families and communities. Our groundwork has offered a solid start for sustainable and coordinated multi-sectoral collaboration to support youth from immigrant families in Calgary. As stakeholders move forward with the multi-sectoral symposium on criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families, and continue with the post-symposium collaboration to support these young people, we would recommend stakeholders to consider the following next steps:

1. Acquire and clarify shared understanding about issues facing youth from immigrant families.
2. Adopt the suggested framework as a starting point for collaborative planning, and develop a citywide action plan to support gang involved and high risk youth from immigrant families.
3. Establish a sound multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral infrastructure with a clear mandate and adequate resources to support the implementation of the action plan, and to ensure effective communication, coordination and collaboration among participating stakeholders.
4. Ensure big picture, balanced emphases on prevention and interventions; family-based, school-based and community-based support; and policy, practice and research.
5. Address specific programming for youth from immigrant families, as well as their access to general services and resources in the community.
6. Integrate an explicit focus on support for the development of positive self-concept, strong Canadian identity and empowering ethnic identity in all services for youth from immigrant families.
7. Support youth- and family-focused institutions and organizations in all sectors to review their existing policies and services to ensure an explicit focus on diversity, cultural competence and support for youth from immigrant families.
8. Involve youth from immigrant families and ethnic communities in all collaborative efforts.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This collaborative inquiry has been built on the premise that we, as community stakeholders, collectively own the social phenomenon of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families as *our* community issue. Over the course of 2 years, we have mobilized diverse partners from all sectors to enhance our understanding of the issues facing gang involved youth from immigrant families, and to explore creative, comprehensive solutions to support our youth. Our work has contributed to thoughtful dialogue in the community, informed our own programs and services, and paved a solid groundwork for upcoming collaborative efforts to support gang involved youth.

Looking ahead, hard work and investment will be required to underpin multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral collaboration to support high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families, particularly in developing shared ownership, coordination of comprehensive, thoughtful action, and sustainable leadership and collaboration. The success of this first step towards sustainable solutions to the community issue of criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families should serve to remind stakeholders of hope and the power of collaboration, and the hard work it takes to achieve our cherished Canadian ideal of an inclusive society to which all peoples belong.

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APPENDIX A:

IMPACTS OF THE STUDY

The integrated inquiry process facilitated growth among the members of the collaborative inquiry network, as well as the participating gang involved youth and former gang members. It contributed to positive progress in strengthening ongoing initiatives related to youth gang involvement, and the collaborative effort to mobilize diverse community stakeholders to develop and implement a city wide action plan to support high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families.

IMPACT ON THE MEMBERS OF THE COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY NETWORK

Through our continuing productive interaction, the members of the collaborative inquiry network developed positive relationships. We experienced a strong sense of connection, synergy, openness and trust, which served as a foundational basis for a positive collaborative group process. A member recounted her experience:

It was phenomenal to see so many professionals representing so many organizations coming to the table and bringing their own organization's experience, knowledge, and insight. This collaborative method helped to shape the core of the inquiry's research. When people from various agencies met in an open and inquisitive forum like this one, it lent itself to creating a natural flow, a positive space and energy for people to differ, debate, agree, disagree, create and learn.

In addition, our openness in sharing what had inspired us to step forward to join the collaborative inquiry network helped consolidate our common concerns about the wellbeing of our young people from immigrant families and the safety of our community, and our commitment to work toward a shared purpose. Our positive interaction offered support and resources, as well as opportunities for more collaboration. A member discussed the importance of these positive connections:

Being a part of this collaborative network has allowed me to build relationships and positive connections with other stakeholders and organizations that would not have otherwise occurred...These new connections have enhanced my level of comfort in accessing these service providers and their programs. I have gained awareness about the existing programs and services for immigrants in Calgary. We have explored new ideas to work together.

Our collaborative inquiry validated and enhanced our understanding of issues facing youth from immigrant families. It extended both our intellectual understanding and our emotional awareness of the challenges facing our young people. As a member succinctly put it,

It [the collaborative inquiry] has certainly highlighted the main concerns and deepened my understanding of pain and perspectives.

The process facilitated the emergence of new learning and deep critical reflection. As the research unfolded, we had the opportunity to learn from the lived experience of gang involved youth and former gang members, and to examine our own pre-conceptions. A member provided her testimony:

Before this inquiry, I thought I understood the issues that gang involved immigrant youth and families experience. I am a socially involved person and work in social services with youth. My natural tendency to believe that I knew some of the issues went south

very quickly. I would say that after this collaborative experience, I am now in a fairly good position to be able to discuss the issues with a certain degree of knowledge.

Our evolving journey also challenged us to have faith in the power of a collaborative process, and the lesson of perseverance:

The process started slow and I was at first afraid that nothing fruitful would come of it. Perseverance proved otherwise. Not only have we joined as a community of agencies to combat this issue; we also have real data to interpret. Having a real look into what the individuals feel and think will no doubt reveal a new insight into how we approach this problem.

Our understanding of complex acculturative challenges and their roles in shaping the social phenomenon of youth gangs acted as a catalyst for change in our work in the community. Our members reported their increased attention to identifying risks of criminal gang involvement in their work with children and youth from immigrant families. Several members used their learning directly in their work with gang involved and high-risk youth.

Gaining solid understanding of the issues these youth face has helped me change my practice immensely. I am able to ask the youth the right questions. This collaboration has also supported me to appreciate the importance of working closely with families of gang involved youth. I have realized that we need to support the young people, and to help change the environments that they are living in.

Our awareness of existing services and programs enabled more efficient, effective connection of youth to relevant, responsive support. We also continued to work together to advocate for and address the critical issues of comprehensiveness, coordination, accessibility and sustainability in services for high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families in Calgary.

Our collaborative inquiry network also offered positive space for personal growth. We felt honoured to learn about the deeply personal experiences of gang involved youth and former gang members. The sustainable, reflexive group process encouraged us to be inquisitive and patient in working with our community members. Our members reported that the research had moved them from intellectual, objective awareness of issues to personal understanding and a commitment to support our young people. Our experience of the group process had transformed our practice in the community. As a member noted:

The inquiry and the relationships that were created during the process have challenged the way I approach immigrant gang offenders. I have personally grown as a result of my involvement.

Collectively, we had overcome our fear of gang involved youth, and acknowledged the humanity of all community members.

I loved being part of the collaborative enquiry. I felt privileged to be invited into what was surely a personal experience for the participants interviewed for this research. I found the stories of these individuals to be very compelling. I have gained personal awareness of challenges faced by immigrant families.

I have learned to look at societal issues differently, and to question problems that we face on a day-to-day basis. I feel more mature now that I have gained insight on the issues that immigrant youth face, and feel empowered with knowledge on how to approach them

IMPACT ON THE PARTICIPATING GANG INVOLVED YOUTH AND FORMER GANG MEMBERS

The warm, respectful and engaging environment that was created in our interviews with the gang involved youth and former gang members invited the participants to reflect deeply upon their experiences. The participants were able to move beyond recounting of their experiences,

and offer their insights and wisdom. A participant commented on his experience in the interview:

It [the interview] made me reflect on my life, and about where it went wrong. It is liberating to tell my story. It also gives me ideas on myself too, cause I know sometimes people live, I was talking with my friend, and everybody has their story to their life, but if you can somehow use that and make it positive thing out of something negative, that's good. It's good reflecting.

In addition, the participants experienced emotional understanding in their interaction with the interviewers, and demonstrated their emotional intelligence. For some participants it was a milestone accomplishment to experience trust and connection with others. They felt comfortable and validated in presenting their authentic selves. They were able to put down their guard and speak from the heart.

I wasn't sure if I wanted to be here. But, as I talked with you [the research assistant and I], I felt it in my heart and decided I'm going to say whatever I feel like saying.

Honestly, I love it. I don't think I've talked that much in my life. You get somebody that's real, not somebody that's fake.

Even though the interviews were not intended to be therapy, the participants found their participation in the process therapeutic.

It feels good that I'm telling you everything. I don't like keeping stuff in too long, because it's bad. It's going to make me stressed out or make me angry...Like, I don't do this on the outside [the youth detention centre]. I keep it to myself. I do something to avoid thinking about things. But here, you can't. I feel a lot better. I got something off my chest.

Participation in the interviewing process helped reconnect or connect the gang involved youth and former gang members to the community. The participants appreciated that the members of the collaborative inquiry network would honour their stories, and use their learning to support other youth. For some young people who shared their struggle to find role models in the community, especially those from visible minority and immigrant backgrounds, their positive interactions with the research team validated their experience, and offered hope for future mentorship. The positive cross-cultural experience between the participants and the research team also opened up new possibilities for meaningful intercultural interactions.

The participants played an important role in shaping the practical framework for gang prevention and intervention (see Chapter Five). At the end of each of interview, the participants were invited to reflect upon their personal experience, and to suggest effective strategies to support high risk and gang involved youth. Their input served as a basis for the members of the collaborative inquiry network to think creatively about solutions to youth gang issues.

Subsequent to their participation in the interviewing process, several participants (with no current involvement in criminal gang activity) stepped up to make positive contributions to the community. Some participants helped promote the research in their social networks. A young hip hop artist was connected to a local service organization to provide a week long music workshop on song writing and performance to a group of socioeconomically disadvantaged youth in Forest Lawn. Several participants participated in an interactive theatre production that explored issues related to criminal gang involvement. Other participants indicated their commitment to use their stories to educate community members about youth gang issues.

I always wanted to go back and speak with people in facilities, or younger kids, like I've been in group homes, open custody and closed custody. Just speaking with kids, or people that are in jail, and telling them that you've been there and done that, you've done all this, but there's a different way of life. And there are different choices you can make. I definitely would do that.

IMPACT ON EXISTING SERVICES AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Learning from the integrated inquiry process informed program development and enhanced the existing services at the Centre for Newcomers and other organizations that were part of the collaborative inquiry network. The Centre for Newcomers considered the various issues and dynamics confronting gang involved youth, and integrated the recommended strategies into the design of direct services for gang involved and high-risk youth from immigrant families. Its Stepping Out program, for example, used the learning from the integrated inquiry to develop strategies for outreach, recruitment, referral, assessment, intervention, and program evaluation. Another immigrant serving agency, Immigrant Services Calgary, also incorporated new understanding about issues facing youth from immigrant families into the Youth Inclusive Neighbourhoods Program and adopted effective practices to support immigrant youth at risk of gang and criminal involvement.

Our intention to expand the collaborative network beyond the immigrant serving agencies and ethnocultural communities brought to the table many organizations that had not traditionally focused on services for immigrant families. The collaborative process had raised significant awareness about the need for all service providers and institutions to examine their current approaches to service development and delivery, and their impact on culturally diverse families. Several organizational partners committed to embark on a process of organizational change to improve their organization's responsiveness to the changing diversity in the community. Some service partners allocated specific resources to support high-risk youth from immigrant families.

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Our collaborative inquiry was a unique effort in Canada that involved diverse community stakeholders in learning about issues facing gang involved youth from immigrant families, and taking collective action to deal with the identified issues. Over the course of more than a year, the members of the collaborative inquiry network had made positive contributions to the community. We had provided input into the development of the provincial strategies to deal with criminal gangs in Alberta. We had initiated and developed our relationship with the Calgary Police Service, and supported the senior leadership to consider big picture strategies and cultural competence in dealing with criminal gang issues. We had shifted the public discourse from blaming youth gang issues on others to collective ownership of youth gangs as a community issue.

Our collaborative forum had provided open, supportive and creative space for organizations to coordinate services, and to explore ideas for future collaboration. With due attention to and care for our group process, we had created a functional network capable of supporting evolving, continuing multi-stakeholder, collaborative efforts to deal with youth gang issues in Calgary and to promote community safety. In working together to achieve our shared purpose and to promote our learning and recommendations, our members had transformed the multi-stakeholder working group into a network of champions.

The inquiry brought key players from a broad spectrum of agencies together for one purpose. Being focused and guided towards a single cause has created a momentum to the issue. Many more key players are now coming together as a result of the initial work done. Having such a large group joined with one vision is a powerful tool when attempting to repair a problem such as gangs.

Our collaborative inquiry effort rejuvenated appreciation for research in the community. Prior to their participation in the collaborative inquiry network, many stakeholders expressed their doubts about and weariness with research. They had previously participated in research

initiatives that used their communities and organizations as instrumental sites for data collection, and did not offer opportunities for meaningful input and collaboration. Our collaborative inquiry process decisively rejected the “helicopter” approach to research, and instead invited the community members to provide strategic input into all aspects of the inquiry and to take collaborative action to address the identified issues. The members appreciated the high degree of transparency in the research process, deep respect for diverse perspectives, the asking of open-ended questions, the art of critical dialogue, and the possibilities for change.

It was an empowering process. I feel that I learned so much more because of the process than I ever would have- if it had been a more traditional project where just the final conclusions were presented. I also feel that by engaging others in the process, you have created champions for the issues - which is very powerful. I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

Personally, I felt that the collaborative gave me a sense of hope. I felt hopeful that there were so many individuals and organizations with a strong interest in preventing youth from becoming gang involved.

Looking ahead, the members of the collaborative inquiry network will continue to work together to organize a multi-stakeholder, collaborative symposium on criminal gang involvement of youth from immigrant families in Calgary on October 29, 2010. We will collectively present our learning and recommendations to diverse community stakeholders in all sectors, and invite them to work with us to develop a citywide action plan to prevent youth gang involvement, and to support high risk and gang involved youth from immigrant families. Following the symposium, we will continue to support the work of stakeholders to coordinate and implement the action plan.