ABSTRACT
Children involved in gangs are both more likely to injure others and to fall victim to violence. Prevention aims to prevent them from gang involvement in the first place, or to disengage them from the gang if they are involved. Suppression interventions seek to suppress gang activity and thereby, to prevent violence and injury. Early prevention is cheaper and easier than disengagement or suppression operations, since the latter are far more labour intensive. Successful intervention programmes operate in more than one domain – for instance, prevention programmes may teach children social skills and help parents with parenting skills, while disengagement programmes may help young people with recreational opportunities and employment, and work collaboratively with the community. Successful disengagement programmes always include opportunities for employment, since one key driver of gang involvement is economic gain. Suppression programmes that focus only on suppression run the risk of inciting the gangs to lash back with violence. Therefore, these should always be accompanied by other interventions that provide opportunities for employment (and other activities, such as pro-social recreation). Interventions that combine prevention, disengagement and suppression are only successful insofar as they successfully achieve inter-agency cooperation. Although many interventions have been implemented in high-income countries, a number of them focus exclusively on boys and few of the implemented interventions in low-to-middle income countries have been thoroughly evaluated. All novel programmes, or adaptations of programmes (for instance, to include girls), should be evaluated.

Keywords: gangs, prevention, suppression, disengagement

INTRODUCTION
In the case of gang-related injuries, child safety has to do with preventing intentional injuries, often committed by other children. North American literature suggests that young people who identify themselves as gang members are more likely to commit violent acts and more likely to become victims of violence, than those who do not (Huff, 1998). The primary prevention of gang-related injuries, therefore, has to do with preventing children from joining gangs. Secondary prevention has to do with helping children who are already in gangs to separate from them, while tertiary prevention seeks to suppress gang violence.

Gangs range from informal groups of young people who “hang out” on street corners (Pinnock, 1980), who might commit minor acts of delinquency together, and who might be drawn into illicit activities by other groups while others incorporate young people into a more formal structure that is run by adults and may even have links to organised crime.
(Standing, 2005). The extent of the problem, both in terms of how many children are involved in gangs, and how many are likely to be injured or to injure others as a consequence, is hard to assess. Official estimates at the end of the 1990s put the number of gangs in Cape Town at 130, with approximately 100,000 gang members (Standing, 2005). Although it appears that gangs are growing in numbers by recruiting local youth (Standing, 2005), no estimates of the involvement of young people are available. Gang activity is, by its very nature, clandestine and therefore membership is hard to quantify. Similarly, it is difficult to establish whether a particular injury results from gang-related activity.

There is tremendous overlap between gang membership and delinquency in general. One South African study found that children begin their involvement in gangs around age 12 (Legget, 2005), and children (particularly boys) begin to carry out delinquent acts at around the same age (Stolzenberg & D’Alessio, 2008). Risk factors for gang membership, and for delinquency and violence, also overlap considerably (see Table 1 for a summary of these risk factors). Based on ecological understandings of how risk factors operate, these may be characterised as factors that operate at the individual level, the level of children’s everyday contexts, and at the level of those contexts within which the everyday contexts nest – the community and societal levels.

The risk factors described here are drawn from several sources (Dowdney, 2005; Hill, Howell, Hawkins & Battin-Pearson, 1999; Hill, Lui & Hawkins, 2001).

### Table 1. Risk factors that increase the likelihood that a child will join a gang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk factors in the individual</th>
<th>Risk factors in the child’s everyday contexts</th>
<th>Risk factors in the community</th>
<th>Risk factors in society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Children are more at risk of gang involvement if they:</em></td>
<td><em>Children are more at risk of gang involvement if they experience one or more of the following in their home, school or peer groups:</em></td>
<td><em>Children are more at risk of gang involvement if one or more of the following is true of their communities:</em></td>
<td><em>Children are more at risk of gang involvement if they experience one or more of the following in their society:</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use drugs</td>
<td>- Their parents have pro-violent attitudes</td>
<td>- Drugs are available</td>
<td>- Cities have pockets of poverty within them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are violent or aggressive</td>
<td>- They have only one parent (even if there are other adults in the home), or no parents</td>
<td>- There are a number of delinquent young people in the neighbourhood</td>
<td>- There is a high proportion of young people in the population, together with low levels of education and high levels of unemployment (particularly youth unemployment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have beliefs that justify breaking the law</td>
<td>- They have delinquent siblings</td>
<td>- They don’t like their neighbourhood</td>
<td>- Limited state services (for instance, a lack of policing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are hyperactive</td>
<td>- They have a poor educational record at primary school</td>
<td></td>
<td>- State corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are unable to resist others who draw them into delinquent activities</td>
<td>- They have poor attachment and commitment to school</td>
<td></td>
<td>- The state itself is violent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have a learning disability</td>
<td>- Their household is poor</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Access to illicit economies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cooper & Ward (2007).
These sources describe how individual children’s beliefs and attributes put them at risk because their behaviour and beliefs are similar to those of other gang members prior to joining the gang (for instance, they believe that violence is acceptable and they use drugs), or they have attributes that weaken their connections to conventional social institutions such as schools (for instance, children with learning disabilities may find it hard to succeed at school and therefore aim to succeed in other things). If their environment does not offer positive alternatives, gang membership may hold some hope of success at something. Risk factors at the other levels indicate that poor role models and opportunities afforded by children’s environments for involvement in antisocial rather than pro-social activities, lead to increased risk (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996).

Programmes that successfully target these risk factors are likely to prevent delinquency and aggressive behaviour, and – because of the overlap in risk factors – are likely to become successful in preventing gang involvement (Shaw, 2001).

Although boys tend to commit delinquent acts at higher rates than girls (Howell, 1998), it would be incorrect to assume that all gang members are boys. Some gang members are girls, and some gangs are girl gangs (Joe & Chesney-Lind, 1995; Ward, 2007). This issue of gender is unfortunately not clearly addressed in the prevention literature: the gender bias of the literature is demonstrated in that some programmes have been tested only with boys. Although girls and boys face common problems, gender heavily influences how they cope with those problems, and programmes may need adaptation if they are to be applied to girls (Joe & Chesney-Lind, 1995). This Chapter’s objectives are to:

a. Review the literature on interventions to prevent children from joining gangs.
b. Review the literature on interventions to detach children from gangs.
c. Review the literature on suppressing gang activity.

Most of the concepts and much of the material is drawn from a report written for RAPCAN (Resources Aimed at Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect) in 2007 (Cooper & Ward, 2007). It is not an exhaustive review, but rather one that seeks to identify exemplar programmes. Most of the evidence for effectiveness is unfortunately weak, but where a programme has been evaluated thoroughly using a randomised controlled trial and found to be effective, this is noted. Spergel’s (1995) typology is used to classify the programmes: prevention programmes are those that aim to prevent young people from getting involved in the gang in the first place; disengagement programmes help young people who are already involved in the gang to withdraw; suppression programmes are law enforcement strategies that seek to keep gang activities to a minimum; and mixed models are, of course, a combination of the three.

PREVENTION PROGRAMMES

Two prevention programmes that successfully prevent delinquency are worth mentioning here, as they are among the only effective prevention programmes. These are nurse-home visitation (Olds, Hill & Rumsey, 1998) and the Olweus Bullying Programme (Limber, 2006). However, these have been covered in the child maltreatment and bullying Chapters respectively, and will therefore not be discussed here.

The Montreal Preventive Treatment Programme is an early intervention programme that has demonstrated effectiveness for preventing gang involvement. Forty-three boys who displayed disruptive behaviour received 19 sessions of social skills training, and their parents 17 sessions of positive family management skills, over the period that the boys were aged 7-9 (Tremblay, Pagani-Kurtz, Mâsse, Vitaro & Pihl, 1995). Boys who received the programme had significantly lower rates of delinquency, substance use and gang involvement at age 15, as compared with similar boys who did not
receive the programme (Tremblay, Mâsse, Pagani & Vitaro, 1996).

One widely cited, though weak, programme, is the Gang Resistance Education and Training Programme, or GREAT. The GREAT programme has law enforcement personnel delivering nine one-hour skills-training sessions to 11-13 year-olds at school, skills that are intended to help learners resist joining gangs. An evaluation showed that those who received the programme had significantly more pro-social attitudes than a control group, four years after receiving the programme, including lower levels of risk-seeking and victimisation, more negative attitudes towards gangs, and more friends involved in positive social activities (Esbensen, Freng, Taylor, Petersen & Osgood, 2002). However, actual gang involvement was not measured, and so conclusions about the programme’s effectiveness on gang involvement cannot be drawn. In addition, GREAT has two further drawbacks: it is delivered through schools, which means that young people who are most at risk (who have dropped out of school, or who are playing truant) will not receive the programme; in addition, it works only in one domain, the school. Successful prevention programmes typically work in more than one domain (Nation et al., 2003). GREAT is therefore not a programme that can be described as effective.

A school-based programme which has included another domain is the Broad Urban Involvement and Leadership Development (BUILD). BUILD combined a school curriculum with an after-school programme that provided recreational activities, job skills, educational assistance and social activities (Thompson & Jason, 1988). Although it was evaluated and fewer young people in the experimental group joined gangs than in the control group, the difference between the two groups was not significant; this may have been because the evaluation suffered from methodological problems (a small sample size and a short follow-up period). Theoretically, this programme targeted many of the reasons young people say they join gangs, and appears to have been well-designed. However, until an evaluation shows more of an effect, the best that can be said is that it may be shown to be promising if evaluated more rigorously.

The remaining programmes in this review include those from high-income countries and South Africa which (all but one) have not been rigorously evaluated. They are included here because they address locally pertinent socio-economic risks for gang membership.

The Guatemalan Ministry of Education has supported an alternative form of education to address poor education and unemployment, two risk factors that may make gangs attractive, especially to older teenagers. This programme, called DIGEEX (Direccion General de Educacion Extra-Escolar), aims to provide relevant education in a particular community context that is directly linked to employment. For example, training for a community whose economy is driven by the textile market would involve textile-industry relevant skills and problem-solving tailored to the textile industry. ‘Capacitation centres’ linked to DIGEEX have been established to provide technical and vocational training and there are currently 425 such centres (USAID, 2006). In Rio de Janeiro, the Afro Reggae Cultural Group (GCAR) offers a range of programmes to young people, including extramural sports, dance and martial arts programmes, as well as education and training (Dowdney, 2005). GCAR is also unique amongst the other interventions reviewed thus far, because it describes a programme that is based on creating a cultural identity for otherwise marginalised youth. The programme is rooted in the community it serves; is a “bottom-up” programme, and therefore may also be far more successful than...
those that are imposed (Shinn & Toohey, 2003). One other aspect of GCAR is worth mentioning: in the favela in which it first worked, Vigario Geral, access to the young people was first negotiated with the gang that held sway in that community (John Hagedorn, personal communication). This is a little-recognised aspect of gang prevention programmes but is worth mentioning, since in many communities it may be the route to success.

For young men living in poor urban neighbourhoods, one of the drives towards joining a gang is that they seem to meet a need for a rite of passage into manhood by providing a sense of independence from family, as well as a sense of belonging to another group which is not provided anywhere else in these neighbourhoods (Cooper & Foster, 2008; Huff, 1998). In South Africa, the Usiko prevention programme seeks to meet these needs through eco-therapy. Eco-therapy interventions use wilderness experiences to teach pro-social values with regard to others and the environment. Currently Usiko works in two local communities. It provides alternative rites of passage for both boys and girls; and in one of the communities the organisation’s activities have expanded to include other areas such as life skills, mentoring programmes, and small farm development. The programme has undergone an evaluation (see www.usiko.org for details) but this was not a randomised controlled trial, and therefore it is not possible to comment on its effectiveness. In addition, although eco-therapy programmes for young offenders have been shown to have weak or negative effects on their behaviour (Van der Merwe & Dawes, 2007), their promise, and that of rites of passage programmes, as prevention programs has not yet been investigated.

In the Western Cape, three provincial strategies seek to provide an alternative, positive peer group to the negative one of the gang (Kagee & Frank, 2005): the Bambanani Strategy, the Chrysalis Youth Academy and the Youth Leaders Against Crime Programme; all aim to train young people from high-risk communities to set up and lead youth clubs. The Chrysalis Youth Academy in particular offers a wide-ranging and intensive programme over five years, which includes an emphasis on youth employment skills and parent training. In 2006 the programme was evaluated and recognised as a best practice example in youth crime prevention.

### Chrysalis Academy

The Chrysalis Academy is a non-profit organisation funded by the Western Cape Department of Community Safety. Its vision is to develop “youth at risk” into community leaders; it targets young people between the ages of 17 and 25 who have no criminal record, who have a minimum education of Grade 9, and who are unemployed at the time of entry into the programme. Both young women and young men may enter the Academy.

Their five-year programme starts with a 3-month residential training programme at their headquarters in Tokai, Cape Town. After a 3-week orientation phase, students go on a 2 week outdoor programme, followed by a 3-4 week skill-building phase and then a community phase, which focuses on preparing students for returning to their home communities. Accompanying this group programme, students have access to individual counselling and life coaching as needed, and parent workshops and family sessions are offered, to promote positive parenting.

After graduating from this intensive training programme, graduates are encouraged to remain involved as volunteers with the established Chrysalis Community Youth Clubs. The graduates are enrolled in the Aftercare Programme, which tracks and supports them for a further five years. These clubs “give back” to the community, and have different programmes depending on the needs of those communities. They might provide sports programmes in primary schools, organise holiday clubs, or be involved in community structures such as Community Policing Forums.

Source: www.chrysalisacademy.org.za.
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prevention (www.chrysalisacademy.org.za). See the Box for further details of this effective programme.

Disengagement programmes

Disengagement programmes seek to help young gang members withdraw from – disengage from – the gang. In this section, several types of programme are reviewed. Some are “detached worker” programmes, or outreach programmes, while others work via the criminal justice system. Both detached worker and criminal justice system programmes tend to see the young person’s behaviour as a problem and try to change that behaviour, while a third type of disengagement programme views gang membership as arising from socio-economic conditions, and tries to address it by providing opportunities, rather than treatment.

The Midcity project in Roxbury, Boston was one of the most rigorously evaluated detached worker interventions. It worked with over 400 members of 21 gangs (Howell, 1988) and included family casework, organised group work, recreation and job referral (Spergel, 1995). Despite a careful evaluation and a programme of excellent quality, it was found to have negligible impact (Howell, 1998). However, another detached worker project, the Ladino Hills project which began in South-Central Los Angeles in 1961, does seem to have been effective in helping young people out of the gang (Howell, 1998). Gang members were helped to find employment, recreational activities were organised, individual therapy was provided, and parents’ clubs were started. As an aside, it should be noted that this project actually aimed to test whether gangs themselves would be weakened if their members participated in more non-gang activities (Spergel, 1995); what was found, however, was that while individual gang members were able to leave the gang lifestyle, the gang itself continued to exist (Howell, 1998). This is a salutary reminder that gangs come into being under particular social and economic conditions; interventions directed at individuals will not affect these, and so are unlikely to affect the existence of the gang itself.

At the same time as these detached worker projects were implemented, the House of Umoja (a Swahili word for “unity”) project was developed in Philadelphia as a grassroots programme led by community residents. The programme targeted youth who generally lived on the street and were involved in gangs, and who received through the House of Umoja a comprehensive programme, including education, career development, employment assistance, housing and individual counselling (Howell, 1998). The House of Umoja also organised a gang summit that resulted in a truce between gangs, during which no gang members died. The project was instrumental in reducing the number of gang deaths in Philadelphia, from 39 in 1973 to 6 in 1976 and 1 in 1977 (Howell, 1998; Spergel, 1995). This again illustrates that successful programmes may include some form of negotiation and even compromise with existing gangs in communities, and that community-driven programmes may be more successful than those developed by outside agencies (such as the police).

The Boys and Girls Club of America, in conjunction with the United States Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), developed the Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach (GITTO) initiative (Arbreton & McClanahan, 2002). This programme offered young people positive after-school activities, with the aim of enrolment in Boys and Girls Clubs (neighbourhood-based after-school facilities), and individualised case management intended to decrease gang involvement. In addition, services such as drug treatment, tattoo removal, remedial education, life-skills, and job training were also offered (Arbreton & McClanahan, 2002). In an evaluation in which 66 GITTO youth were matched with comparison youth from similar neighbourhoods,
the intervention group had significantly greater expectations of graduating from high school, a significant reduction in gang associated behaviours (less stealing with other gang members, wearing gang colours, flashing gang signals, spending time with gang members) and significantly less contact with the juvenile justice system (Arbreton & McClanahan, 2002).

Programmes offered through the criminal justice system are directed at individual offenders, and intended to re-integrate them into society. Operation New Hope was one such example. In this programme, participants received 13 weekly sessions of life skills training. In an evaluation of this programme, participants were significantly different from those in the control group in that they had significantly less contact with former gang friends, were significantly more likely to find employment, were significantly less likely to use illicit drugs and had significantly reduced recidivism during programme participation (Josi & Sechrest, 1999). However, these differences dissipated over time; the key variable seems to have been that those participants who could not find successful employment returned to the gang.

The Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT) Home Run Programme was also a juvenile justice system programme, but used individual case management. The programme offered a range of services, over six months, to first-time offenders. Each team included a probation officer, public health nurse, clinical therapist and social services practitioner and others as needed, providing comprehensive treatment to first time offenders. Depending on the needs of the offender, treatment might have addressed substance abuse, education, family functioning, the offender’s own social functioning, his/her delinquent peer group, and other areas as necessary (and might have included such restorative justice elements as victim restitution and community service). In an evaluation that included 145 gang members and 137 non-gang members, both groups improved significantly in terms of academic performance, attendance of classes, suspensions from school, self-perceived family functioning and number of arrests (Schram & Gaines, 2005). MDT is very similar in spirit to Multi-systemic Therapy (Henggeler, Schoenwald, Borduin, Rowland & Cunningham, 2009), which has been shown to be effective in reducing delinquency, and is therefore also likely to be effective as a disengagement strategy (Lafontaine, Ferguson & Wormith, 2005). In terms of transfer to South Africa, however, it should be noted that both interventions are very intensive, and demand a high level of staff skill. They may therefore not be easy to implement in an environment where demand for services is high but there are relatively few highly trained professionals to deliver such services.

In South African prisons, an organisation called The President’s Award for Youth Empowerment runs a programme called Reintegration and Diversion for Youth, or READY (Steyn, 2005). Although not specifically targeted at gang members, its work with young offenders serving custodial sentences will inevitably include gang members. The programme requires young people to perform community service, to go through a skills training program, to take part in an outdoor expedition of several days, and to participate in regular sports and recreation. Evaluations (unfortunately not meeting criteria of methodological rigour) suggest that it is successful in reducing recidivism (Steyn, 2005).

Other programmes in our prisons are the Tough Enough Program, run by NICRO, and Khulisa’s Destinations programme (Steyn, 2005). Tough Enough runs over 9-12 months, starting 3 months before release, and works with both offenders and their families. Although the programme has not been formally evaluated, informal records of programme staff indicate that recidivism rates of participants are low and are mostly because of
parole violations rather than re-offending (Steyn, 2005). Destinations is a three-month programme that aims to prepare people for employment, and works with them on release from prison. Again, there is no formal evaluation of this program, but programme staff records suggest that the recidivism rate for graduates of this programme is lower than the national average (Steyn, 2005).

Opportunities provision programmes are a particular form of disengagement programme that are less treatment-oriented in nature. Rather, they recognise that gangs provide a livelihood to their members, and that if disengagement is to succeed, ex-gangsters must have a viable, legitimate means of making a living outside of the gang. One example of such a programme comes from Medellín, Colombia: both state and private institutions offer long-term employment programmes and opportunities for social mobility, if Medellín gangsters withdrew from gangs (Rodgers, 1999). These youth gang leaders have been encouraged to immerse themselves in community politics and aid in the development of their communities, using their gang networks to these ends. Gangs have even been given incentives to collaborate with each other on social development projects and have been transformed into community conflict mediators (McLlwaie & Moser, 2001; Rodgers, 1999).

Disengagement programmes thus run a gamut from “detached worker” programmes, which have successfully helped individual gang members (although not eradicated gangs), through juvenile justice programmes, of which the same could be true, to opportunity-creating programmes which have not been rigorously evaluated.

It is also worth noting that disengagement programmes are far more labour-intensive (and hence costly) than prevention programmes. If one contrasts the Montreal Preventive Treatment Programme, which required 36 hours of treatment (over both boys and their parents), with the Ladino Hills Project, which required many hours of an outreach worker’s time, it is clear that early intervention is easier and cheaper – without even considering the costs of the crimes committed by the young gang member. This is true, in general, for most early intervention programmes (Carneiro & Heckman, 2003).

Suppression programmes
Suppression programmes contrast with prevention and disengagement programmes in that they do not attempt to work with individuals at all: their sole aim is to suppress the activity of existing gangs. As injury prevention programmes, they may have two roles: one is that, in suppressing gang activity, they may reduce the number of injuries that result from such activity; the other is that they may, at the same time, make gangs less accessible to young people. Suppression programmes are typically criminal justice programmes – policing programmes, such as targeting gang activities and preventing them, or reducing the number of firearms; or criminal justice programmes, such as focusing on the efficient prosecution of gang members; or legislation to increase punishment for gang membership.

One example of a joint policing and prosecution strategy is TARGET (the Tri-Agency Resource Gang Enforcement Team) of Orange County, California, which operated in eight cities in the year 2000. High-profile gang members were arrested and tried; of those placed in custody, there was a 99% conviction rate and a 62% reduction in gang-related crime. In 1998, 3,475 criminal charges were laid against gang members and a cumulative 47% decrease in gang crime occurred over a seven year period (Howell, 2000). Similarly, the Anti-Gang Initiative in Dallas, Texas targeted seven of the city’s most prominent gangs, using high visibility patrols in gang hotspots, curfews for suspected gang members, and aggressive
enforcement of truancy legislation (Fritsch, Caeti & Taylor, 1999). Areas targeted were compared with control areas, and it was found that there was a 57% decrease in the target areas and a 37% decrease in the control areas (Fritsch et al., 1999).

However, not all such operations have shown success. “Gang sweeps” – policing operations where the police arrest as many known gang members as they can on a single night – do not seem successful. For instance, in one gang sweep, known as Operation Hammer in South Central Los Angeles in 1988, one thousand police officers arrested 1,453 likely gang members on a Friday and a Saturday night; however, ultimately charges were only filed in 32 instances and the operation was described as “remarkably inefficient” (Klein, 1995, p.162).

However, suppression approaches can backfire. So-called mano dura (“heavy hand”) policies were introduced by governments in El Salvador and Honduras. In El Salvador, mano dura policies led to 11,000 arrests in 2003, but these policies seem to have increased cohesion and violence of response from the gangs, who united against the government actions. Due to this response the government reformed some of its strategies, setting aside 20% of total funding for gang interventions to be dedicated to ‘friendly hand’ and ‘extended hand’ approaches, or prevention strategies (USAID, 2006).

Community policing approaches to reducing the number of guns available to young people and the number of firearms-related injuries and deaths are other forms of suppression programmes that have shown some success, but only where they are intensively implemented and only on violent firearms crimes, not necessarily on gang membership (Dunworth, 2000).

In South Africa, the Prevention of Organised Crime Act (Act 121 of 1998) criminalises gang membership, or any criminal activities related to gangsterism. Although it had been passed in 1998, it was only in 2005 that this Act was beginning to be used to obtain convictions of gang members (Kagee & Frank, 2005). However, Standing (2005) warned that whole-hearted enforcement of this Act was only likely to cause exactly what had happened in El Salvador: a uniting of the gangs against law enforcement officials. Similarly, there are other suppression programs in the Western Cape that run the same risk. Operation Slasher identifies police stations in areas where there have been high levels of gang violence, and applies a “zero tolerance” approach to policing in those areas (Kagee & Frank, 2005). The High Flyer Program, on the other hand, may be less likely to evoke a response from the gangs of uniting to address a common threat (law enforcement), since it targets only a relatively few individuals known to be responsible for high levels of serious organised crime (Kagee & Frank, 2005). Suppression through law enforcement may be effective if it deters and deals with adults involved in gangsterism, as young gang members are significantly less likely to leave the gang if the gang has adult leaders (Knox, 1997).

There is therefore evidence that targeting the most dangerous gang members, hotspots or drug dealers can effectively decrease gang crime. Carrying this out, however, needs an efficient and well coordinated law-enforcement team. Limiting the number of available firearms has also proven to work to decrease gang crime in the United States. Suppression strategies can therefore perform important tasks, such as keeping people not involved in gangs safe and protecting community residents, if they are carried out thoughtfully and carefully, and do not provoke a backlash from the gangs.

**Mixed models**

Given that prevention programs may help to prevent young people from joining gangs in the first place, but do not help those already involved; disengagement programs help young people to leave but do not keep community residents safe since the gang still
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exists; and suppression programs may (if they do not cause a backlash) increase safety but do not change the gang itself; it makes the most sense to combine effective elements of these different interventions. Having said this, however, a ‘one size fits all’ approach to gang interventions, a strategy which assumes that the same programs can be implemented unaltered in different contexts, is not effective (Spergel, 1995). Therefore, mixed model interventions stress tailoring programs to the needs of specific communities. This requires thorough research on the actual situation, in a specific location, before the programme is implemented (Spergel, 1995).

In the US, the OJJDP and the University of Chicago’s Irving Spergel have been developing a comprehensive community-wide model to gang interventions since the 1980s. This model incorporates prevention, disengagement and suppression components and attempts to provide guidelines to develop community structures and leadership (Spergel, 1995). The so-called “Spergel model” is not a programme as such, but a framework that assists communities in setting up a coordinated range of programs (Howell, 2007). Key to the Spergel model is the cooperation of different agencies.

Using the Spergel model, six comprehensive community-wide approaches have been tested and implemented. The first was The Gang Violence Reduction Programme based in the Little Village area of Chicago. In this program, a team of community youth workers (often themselves former gang members), police officers dedicated to the project, adult probation officers and representatives of neighbourhood organisations worked under the aegis of the Chicago Police Department to mobilise community agencies to work together (rather than separately) on the gang problem in Little Village; to provide opportunities such as job opportunities and training for older gang members, and remedial or alternative education for younger gang members; to reach out actively to gang members through street work, and to provide family counselling, crisis intervention, substance abuse treatment, and the like; to carry out suppression activities targeted at specific youths and at gangs, with an emphasis also on positive information sharing with youths and on co-ordination of agencies to develop collaboration between the various organisations in a tightly-knit structure, targeting specific young people, gangs and social contexts that were at high risk for a crime situation (Spergel & Grossman, 1997). The project had several outcomes: older youths who had been specifically targeted by the programme were less likely to be arrested for violent crimes in the three-year period of the program; and Little Village had the lowest increase in gang violence (compared with similar areas) over the four years of the project. However, subsequent implementations of the model achieved success only in some communities, and this depended on the extent to which inter-agency collaboration was achieved (Spergel, Wa & Sosa, 2005a, 2005b).

Another mixed model approach was Boston’s Operation Ceasefire. Although primarily a suppression intervention aimed at youth firearm violence, what made this a mixed model was that, simultaneous to using every possible legal option when violence occurred to suppress further violence, gang members were offered services by police officers, probation officers, detached workers and later in the project’s term, community organisations and churches (Braga, Kennedy, Waring & Piehl, 2001). An impact evaluation indicated that Boston experienced lower levels of youth homicide, gun assaults and police being called out because shots had been fired, after Operation Ceasefire had been implemented (Braga et al., 2001).

Mixed models hold out hope, both for increasing community safety, as well as reducing young people’s involvement in gangs. The key to their
successful implementation, however, is efficient cooperation between the agencies involved, implementing a coordinated community-wide plan that has grassroots involvement and in obtaining genuine community participation. One of the key barriers to inter-agency co-operation is that individual agencies have their own budgets, goals and cultures. Future ‘mixed-model’ projects therefore need to find ways of dealing with the issues of cooperation and coordination, in order to implement genuine community-wide interventions. In addition, these projects need to be designed to deal with the particular kinds of gangs, and the particular risk factors and opportunities, which exist in the community in question.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS
Gangs in South Africa have been created in a particular crucible of economic disenfranchisement (Steinberg, 2004), and there is little that any prevention programme can do to tamper with their existence. However, programmes that successfully prevent delinquency can successfully prevent children’s involvement in gangs, and this will reduce their risk of injuries related to gang violence. Carefully-planned outreach programmes (that reach out to young gang members), or those that work with offenders in the justice system, also offer some hope in terms of disengaging young people from gangs. Common factors in the success of these programmes are tailoring the programme to the needs of the young person involved, working in more than one domain of the young person’s life (e.g., school and parenting) and ensuring that the programme ultimately leads to employment. These first two are characteristics of any good prevention programme (Nation et al., 2003); the last is particularly important in view of the role that economic considerations play in the attraction to gangs (Ward, 2007). Finally, carefully-considered suppression programmes can play a role in preventing gang activity – gang violence – and hence injuries from occurring. However, unless these are accompanied by some form of opportunities provision, they are only likely to draw from the gang a backlash of violent opposition to being policed – that may actually increase injuries. Mixed models – models that combine prevention, disengagement and suppression initiatives – hold promise, but are difficult to carry out successfully because the agencies involved may have competing objectives (Spergel et al., 2005a, 2005b). Working with the community is important in the success of programmes, and may be particularly so with regard to disengagement, suppression, and “mixed model” programmes (Shinn & Toohey, 2003).

Finally, it is important to note that many of these programmes have been developed with young male offenders and in high-income settings. Any adaptations that include young women, or have been made specifically for the South African context

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**Key messages**

- Early prevention is cheaper and easier than disengagement or suppression operations, since the latter are far more labour intensive and less likely to be effective; also, by the time a child is involved in a gang, s/he has had plenty of opportunity to injure or be injured.
- Successful intervention programmes operate in more than one domain – for instance, prevention programmes may teach children social skills and help parents with parenting skills; disengagement programmes may help young people with recreational opportunities and employment, and work collaboratively with the community.
- Successful disengagement programmes always include opportunities for employment.
- Suppression programmes that focus only on suppression run the risk of inciting the gangs to lash back with violence; they should always be accompanied by other interventions that provide opportunities for employment (and other activities, such as pro-social recreation).
- Interventions that combine prevention, disengagement and suppression are only successful insofar as they successfully achieve inter-agency co-operation.
- If a programme is adapted in any way, it should be evaluated.
– for instance, by using lower skilled staff – should be evaluated, because these adaptations may tamper with the programme’s effectiveness.

REFERENCE LIST


Gangs and Child Safety


Ward, C.L. (2007). “It feels like it’s the end of the world”: Cape Town’s youth talk about gangs and community