



# Research *at a glance*

## Gang Cohesion and Intervention Strategies: A Review of the Literature

**KEY WORDS:** *gang, definition, cohesion, management, intervention, community-based, institutional*

### Why we did this study

The proliferation of gang membership and activity has become an increasing concern in Canadian society. As the gang problem becomes more severe, CSC's need to better understand this population and find effective strategies to deal with gang-affiliated offenders has become more important.

### What we did

A review of current literature was conducted to outline the status of gangs in Canada, examine gang cohesion, and provide an overview of gang management and intervention strategies, both in the community and in the institutional settings.

### What we found

Despite a lack of consensus on the definition of a 'gang', some key elements of gang activity and structure have been identified and several typologies of gangs have been proposed. Based on continuous changes and their complex nature, gangs must be defined in the local Canadian context.

In the community setting, street gangs are growing in number and type and are becoming more violent and sophisticated; Canada is becoming the center of operations for some trans-national organized crime groups; and there has been an increase in female gangs. Further, the line between different types of criminal groups is becoming less distinct.

In the institutional setting, differences have been identified between gang affiliate types suggesting unique offender profiles rooted in gang groupings. Street gangs and prison gangs present a major challenge for correctional officials because of the high level of violence and criminogenic need commonly associated with these groups.

Individuals may join gangs, maintain membership and leave gangs for a myriad of reasons; what is key is the understanding that gangs often serve to meet

unfulfilled needs of their members. Variations in gang cohesion are related to the conditions under which the gang is founded or developed, the characteristics of the members, their collective choices, and the level of loyalty expected.

Community-based interventions include suppression, detached-worker and school-based programs displaying limited success, and recent multi-faceted approaches showing promise. Management and suppression strategies are important for ensuring institutional safety and security, however their effectiveness is limited. Emphasis should be placed on research and development of correctional programming and treatment that respond to the unmet needs of gang-affiliated inmates.

### What it means

CSC has a number of policies in place to address the management of gangs in its institutions and it is moving to incorporate more of the promising practices identified in the research literature. It has acknowledged that in order to address the increasing complexity of the gang problem facing Canada, a coordinated and integrated approach involving key criminal justice stakeholders is needed.

### For more information

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