

FACTORS LEADING HMONG YOUTH TO JOIN GANG

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Abstract

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This paper examines some of the elements that lead youth to join gangs. A questionnaire developed by the investigator was distributed to gang members and at-risk Hmong youth in two northern states. This questionnaire was developed in an attempt to assess some of the factors that have a high probability of leading youth to join gangs to compensate for what is lacking in Hmong youths' life.

A 12-item questionnaire was developed and distributed to at-risk Hmong youths residing in two northern states. The questions were examined by calculating the percentage of males and females responding to different targeted areas. The questions were also examined to determine the internal validity between male and female subjects in responding to the different targeted areas.

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Introduction

A dramatic increase in gang activity during the past decade caught most everyone by surprise and left many unprepared to speak in an informed way to the challenge it posed. However, violence in America is nothing new. Even before the Nation declared its independence, outlaw groups with names like "The Sons of Liberty" formed in several colonial towns to express their opposition to the British rule (Brantley & DiRosa, 1994). As the nation grew, gangs emerged in the large urban centers that developed in the mid-west and on the west coast. Cities as diverse as Chicago and San Francisco have long histories of gang-related crimes (Di Rosa, 1994).

European immigrants came to the United States in the early 1900s to seek a better life and better future. These immigrants lacked the skills necessary to be productive in the mainstream and were exploited in the labor force and faced poverty and discrimination. The second generation of these immigrants were faced with cultural and identity crises. They then formed their own gangs for support and protection because they did not fit into the mainstream society (Wang, 1994). This is a pattern with every wave of immigrants who came to the United States. They all faced similar experiences of poverty and discrimination. After a couple of generations in America, most of the immigrants assimilated into the mainstream; and the problems became less severe.

In the early 1900s, the United States government established immigration priority and granted many Chinese naturalization in America when it received a flood of Chinese immigrants

into the United States. The number of Chinese immigrants grew dramatically in the 1960s as a result of this new law. Large cities where immigrants settled were not prepared to assist with the problems these immigrants brought with them. Many of the Chinese youths experienced racial tension in the form of unequal treatment and opportunity; therefore, crime and gang involvement became a serious problem for the communities. Many of those Chinese youths started to form social support groups but later became involved in prostitution, drug dealing, and other criminal activities (Spergel, 1992).

Since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the United States has received over a million refugees from the Southeast Asian countries. These immigrants had very little education and limited labor skills. These refugees found themselves in a strange society where they were not accepted due to their unique physical characteristics and their lack of productive labor market skills. One such group of refugee from one of those Southeast Asian countries is the Hmong. The Hmong is an ethnic minority group that helped the United States fight the spread of communism during the Vietnam War. In 1975, the communists won the war in Vietnam.

The Hmong were persecuted in Laos because of their involvement with the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Many fled to neighboring Thailand to avoid being persecuted. As the years went by, many Hmong decided to settle in different countries, such as the United States, France, Australia, and many other western countries. The largest group of Hmong settled in the United States. The three states that received the most number of Hmong refugees are California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

Historically, the Hmong people lived in a society where there was very restricted educational opportunity for Hmong children. For many Hmong boys to have opportunities to learn to read and write, they had to go to far away educational settings. While boys were encouraged by parents to pursue high levels of education, the Hmong girls were expected to forego their education to take care of the family and the farms.

As Hmong re-settled in the United States and other countries, educational opportunities improved for Hmong children. Hmong parents continued to have high expectations for their children. However, some Hmong children were not prepared to start school, because the family did not speak English in the home. Many children struggled in school, because many Hmong parents simply did not have the necessary skills to prepare their children for school.

Many Hmong children also struggled in learning how to balance the two very different cultures and values on a daily basis. Those Hmong children who had supportive parents who understood what they were going through seemed to be better off educationally than the rest. Hmong children who had supportive parents with a good social support system also seemed to have a better footing toward pursuing their dreams.

Hmong people consider love, respect, and helping each other to be the highest values in their society. Traditionally, Hmong children are taught from an early age to respect their elders and authority figures. Those not following the norms and expectation are viewed as unwise and are regarded as self-centered individuals. The decisions of an individual are to be reflected on the well being of the whole group rather than an individual interest.

As Hmong children worked their way into the U.S. educational system, they learned that the mainstream culture has a different value system than that was taught to them by their parents. Many Hmong children were lost in the shuffle between the two different belief systems.

Like most immigrants, the Hmong feel conflict between new and traditional values in the U.S. At school, children are American; but at home, Hmong children are in another totally different world. Many Hmong parents worry about their children losing their traditional family values. At the same time, they know that they must encourage their children to go to school and adapt to the new culture in order to be successful. More and more Hmong children are rebelling against their parents. This is partly due to the pressure to do well in school and the pressure from parents to maintain their traditional values.

The younger Hmong generations found themselves caught between two starkly different cultures. They struggle to honor their heritage and traditions while taking advantage of rights to independence and choice in the United States. Consequently, they sought love and support from gangs who understood and accepted them for who they were. At the same time, the older Hmong refugees found themselves distanced from their own children. These older refugees felt disrespected and not valued by their children due to their cultural differences.

This research will describe several possible causal factors that put Southeast Asian (Hmong) youths in such a high-risk group to join gangs. This researcher hopes that by becoming more aware and understanding of the characteristics that most likely influence youth to join

gangs will help social services personnel and other professionals forge effective prevention and intervention programs that will help Southeast Asian youth become law abiding citizens.

There is very little research investigating Southeast Asian youth posing a serious problem to the community. This is, in part, due to the fact that professionals know very little about assessing these kids and how to deal with them effectively. In order for the community and the professionals to help solve the problems, they must have some knowledge of the core issues. Since there was very little research on this group of youth, professionals and other community agencies may not know how to best utilize their resources to help these youth and prevent them from becoming criminals.

A review of the literature shows that youth who are from families that have adequate incomes generally possess an ability to adopt a future-time perspective, have access to good role models, receive love and support from parents, and feel welcome by their communities. Consequently, these youth are less likely to join gangs.

Research also shows that the majority of Hmong youth are not from well-to-do family households. They are less likely to adopt a future-time perspective, because they are caught between two very different cultures. They have very few good role models and feel unappreciated by their parents and their communities. Therefore, the research hypothesis for this study is that the responses for the majority of the Hmong-American youth will support the theory that most youth identify positively to characteristics that lead to gang involvement.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine some of the social factors that are more likely to influence Hmong youth to join gangs as measured by individual reports obtained through field surveys in two northern states. This study will focus on the following objectives:

1. To determine and describe the motives that influence youth to join gang.
2. To determine and describe the opinions of Hmong youth toward gang and sex.
3. To determine and describe whether Hmong youth view illegal activities as an essential part of the gang culture.
4. To determine and describe how Hmong youth perceive the love and affection their parents give to them compared to the love and affection their siblings receive from their parents.
5. To determine and describe whether Hmong youth want their siblings to join a gang.
6. To determine and describe whether Hmong youth gang members use active recruitment procedures.
7. To determine and describe whether Hmong youth gang members are required to recruit new members.

Definition of Terms

Evolution: The development, process, or change of form through time.

Gang: Group of people with a common purpose who join for various reasons, including illegal activities and tend to display anti-social behavior against the rest of society. "1: A group of persons working together. 2: A group of persons working to unlawful or antisocial ends" (Webster 9th New Collegiate Dictionary).

Hmong: An ethnic group from Southeast Asian (primarily Laos) who had many members flee Laos as refugees during and following the Vietnam War.

Racism: The belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial difference produces an inherent superiority of a particular race.

Prejudice: 1. a. An adverse judgment or opinion formed beforehand or without knowledge or examination of the fact. b. A preconceived preference or idea; bias. 2. The fact act or state of holding unreasonable preconceived judgments or convictions. 3. Irrational suspicion or hatred of a particular group, race, or religion. 4. Detriment or injury caused to a person by the preconceived and unfavorable conviction of another or others (Webster's 9th New Collegiate Dictionary).

Discrimination: 1. The act of discriminating. 2. The ability or power to see or make fine distinctions; discernment. 3. An act based on prejudice (Webster's 9th New Collegiate Dictionary).

Laib: 1. A habitual criminal. 2. A disobedient or disrespectful person. 3. A person who commits unlawful action that violates the rights of others.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

This section will discuss some issues and the possible causal factors that lead youth into gang. Research shows that antisocial behavior evolves over the course of childhood, often beginning in the preschool and elementary school years and peaking in late adolescent/early adulthood. Research also shows that memberships of gangs were drawn from a fairly broad spectrum of ages, and the size and age profile of gang changes over time. According to Cummings, most gangs are composed of persons of the same race or nationality (Cummings & Monti, 1993).

Definition of Gang

There appear to be no single definition for gang due to the fact that they come in a variety of forms. Here are some of the definitions research scholars attempted to use to define gang: Thrasher (1936) defined gang as, "An interstitial group originally formed spontaneously and then integrated through conflict, and characterized by meeting face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict and planning. The behavior develops a tradition, unreflective internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, group awareness, and attachment to a local territory." (Thrasher, 1936). However, the definition of gang has changed over the years. For instance, Klein defined gang as any notable adolescent group of youngsters who are:

1. Generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood.
2. Recognize themselves as a notable group (almost invariably with a group name).

3. Have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or law enforcement agencies (Klein, 1971).

Walter B. Miller defined a gang as "a self-formed association of peers bound together by mutual interests. A gang has an identifiable leadership, well-developed lines of authority, and other organizational features who act in concert to achieve a specific purpose or purposes which generally include the conduct of illegal activity and control over a particular territory, facility, or type of enterprise (Miller, 1980). Yet, some of the current definitions of gang seem to reflect the description given by C. Ronald Huff. He stated that what separates a gang from other adolescent groups are:

1. The gang regular routines involve in illegal activities.
2. More deliberate quality of these illegal activities by the group.
3. A greater tendency to claim some forms of "turf" (although for more recent gang, this "turf" is not necessarily neighborhood based).
4. They have generally, better-developed leadership within the group (Huff, 1990).

Other scholars, as well as educators, define gang as any group of people who engage in socially disruptive or criminal behavior. They are usually territorial, often but not always of the same gender, and operate by creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation in a community. The gang may choose a name, logo, specific color, or method of dress used for purposes of identification for their own members and their

counterparts. They will have some form of leadership and a method of operation and recruitment. Schools have become a breeding ground for gang, and this can have a tremendous negative impact on the learning environment. Gang should be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly (www.totse.com/en/politics/police/163533).

Gang Structure and Membership

There are different types of gangs existing in many countries in the world. The structure of a particular gang is based on the needs for group maintenance or development. Some gangs are viewed as loose knit, and others are well organized. According to Thrasher (1936), it is possible that the loosely knit characterization refers to process, while the well-organized characterization refers to gang structure, form, or longevity of the gang (Thrasher, 1936).

Within each type of gang, there are certain roles required to be performed by each member according to the position within the gang. For example, the core members may be regarded as an inner clique that is actively engaged in everyday functioning of the gang. Also, core members may make key decisions, set standards, and provide support and sanction for the action of leaders. They may also be the key recruiters for the gang (Reiss, 1987). It is important to recognize that there are, however, many groups of people, such as core members, wannabes, and non-members, who are also involved in a particular gang. The peripheral members are those who do not recognize or are not recognized by others as members of the gang but may enjoy having some type of association, such as attending gang events or gathering with the gang. The "wannabes" are generally younger in age and are potential members of the gang. The potential

new members of the gang are the targets or efforts by core or regular members to increase the size of the gang (Collins, 1979). Joining a gang may vary from one gang to the next. In most cases, once a "wannabe" joins the gang, he/she usually goes through some kind of gang initiations, which will be elucidated later. The youth may graduate from a lower status to a higher status as they mature into the gang culture. However, they may also shift from core to peripheral roles and back again within the gang.

A youth may switch membership from one friendly gang to another and even to a formerly hostile gang. This happens particularly in gangs that require little or no formal identification or investment of time and energy. Gang leadership and membership in low-income communities may be viewed as long term for core members, because such roles assume greater responsibility and articulation within the gang and its future, (Jacobs 1974).

According to Ponce (1990), there are three general types of gang. One type of gang is the Social Gang. The social gang is a group that hangs out at a specific location to do things together, and they value group activities more than individual activities. This type of gang is very unlikely to participate in delinquent or violent activities. Instead, this type of gang likes to do other activities that are more morally right. For example, they like activities, such as dancing and playing sports. The second type of gang is the Delinquent Gang. This type of gang is organized for the purpose of monetary gain from delinquent activities. The members are emotionally stable and, therefore, can organize and plan their activities carefully. This type of gang exists to meet the needs of their members. The third type of gang is the Violent Gang.

This type of gang is organized for the emotional gratification that violent activities can bring them. Members are usually not stable as other types of gang. This type of gang usually changes the structure and the relationship within the group more often than necessary. The members within the group may be friends one day and enemies the next (Ponce, 1990).

When closer look is taken within the different types of gang, it could be found that the relationship between gang and violence depends primarily on the gang's organization. Some gangs are organized to fight, while others are organized to make money. Yet, others are organized for protection as was stated above. The level of violence depends exclusively on the type of gang. Research shows that gang involvement in violence and homicide is more often turf related than drug related. Research showing the relationship among gang, drug sales, and violence concluded that gang-motivated homicides were less likely than other homicides to involve drugs, and victims of gang motivated homicides were less likely to involve a gang members.

Gang Initiation

Gang initiation varies from gang to gang and from individual to individual. A new gang member goes through some type of gang initiation, ranging from drinking, using drugs, fighting other members, shooting at members of a rival gang or even a police officer (Spergel, 1966). As it was informally observed over many years of working with youth who are gang members, a new gang member had to endure gang initiation not mentioned by earlier research, such as cigarette burnings or getting "jumped" by the very gang that the youth wanted to join. The core

members may determine the length of time (in minutes) a new member will get burned by a lit cigarette or to be "jumped" by the gang members. It is a process for the new member to prove to the core members that he/she is committed and capable of enduring pain and suffering and/or capable of defending him/herself against potential conflict with rival gangs.

Individual

Individual factors play a significant role in a person's decision to join gang. For example, research shows that children who have an inability to adopt a future-time perspective or to grasp future consequences of behavior have an increased risk of joining gang or engaging in antisocial activities than other children. Yet, there are other factors, such as the inability to delay gratification; the inability to regulate emotions; the need for stimulation and excitement; low harm avoidance; low frustration tolerance; central nervous system dysfunction; low cortical arousal; a predisposition to aggressive behavior; low general aptitude or intelligence; exposure to violence and abuse (either as victim, or witness); alienation; rebelliousness; association with deviant peers; favorable attitudes toward deviant behavior; peer rejection; alcohol and drug abuse; and early onset of aggression or problem behaviors; which also have a significant impact on an individual child's decision to engage in antisocial behaviors or to join delinquent peer group (www.ldonline.org. 1998, P.2).

Similar researches also show that psychological factors, such as the need for affiliation, the need for achievement, low self-esteem, lack of positive role models, and boredom, also contribute to a child's decision to join a gang (Lawson, 1994). For some kids, guns, gangs, and

drugs are simply the vehicles through which to satisfy more basic yearnings. Often, the fast route to get attention for many youths is through money or material goods. The absence of fear of the criminal justice system is what drives many hard-core youths to commit crimes. Gang members know that the system is "jammed," and they also know that juvenile penalties lack real consequences, which draws many youths to do dirty works for older gang members.

Young people join gangs for a variety of reasons. According to Witkin (1991), adult gang members hire youngsters to run drugs, because penalties are so much weaker if they are caught (Witkin, 1991). A study of African-American gang in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, revealed that the founder of each gang who was interviewed had left school prematurely--most were expelled for fighting (Brantley & DiRosa, 1994). Yet, other researches show that some youth join gang because of their needs or wishes for recognition or status, safety or security, power, excitement, and new experiences--particularly under conditions of social deprivation (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918). Joining a gang is also a way for youth to achieve status, as well as self-importance (Yablonsky, 1962).

Low self-esteem

Joining gang give youth who have low self-esteem a sense of love and respect from gang members. Youth whose self-esteem has been damaged by parents, peer rejection, and school failures may find new identity and self-worth through being in the gang. From personal observations, many Hmong youth who had joined gang indicated time after time that either their parents were "too strict," with a "traditional" mindset or that they lacked structured/productive

activities at home. Joining a gang gave them a social structure and the freedom to roam the street without fear of rejection from parents or the community, because gang was their substitute families. Also, gang gave them a sense of acceptance and accomplishment that was lacking in the home.

Family

Studies show that gangs still draw most of their members from less well-to-do households. Family plays a very important part in children's lives. The absence of family support leaves the process of social development open to deviant influence. The weaker the relationship between parents and children, the more chance children will end up in some sort of gang affiliation. Gang give youth a sense of security and structure that is lacking at home (Arthur, 1989).

Other family factors that are related to potential gang participation include: (1) "Rigid or ineffective parenting styles" which decreases emotional closeness and warmth between parents and children. (2) "Family conflicts, which create a highly-distressed relationship between parents and children." If the home environment is cold and uncaring, it affects the developing child. As indicated by Montemayor (1994), children in this type of family are at high risk for a variety of psychological and behavioral problems (Montemayor, 1994). (3) "Homes that are lacking structure or adult supervision greatly increase children's chances of joining gang." For example, if parents are not able to provide structure, support, and supervision, children may turn to gang to fulfill their unfulfilled needs. Similarly, Brantley and Di Rosa (1994) indicated that

those youth who willingly join gang do so in an attempt to satisfy needs unfulfilled in other aspects of their lives (Brantley & Di Rosa, 1994). The basic needs of youth who join gang may include the lack of family structure, lack of a nurturing home environment, lack of economic opportunity, and/or lack of a sense of belonging (Brantley & Di Rosa, 1994). Gang provides young people with identity, protection, and friendship that may not exist in the home. The dynamics of gang formation is a normal developmental processes for many youth. As was indicated by Ponce (1994), at a certain age, youth change their focus from bonds from adults to bonds with peers. It is a process of self-identity, autonomy, and social support (Ponce, 1990). Other family factors that put a youth at an increased risk of joining gang or engaging in antisocial behavior include limited access to food, shelter, transportation, health care, parental history of deviant behaviors, inconsistent discipline technique, low parental education, etc. (www.ldonline.org, 1998 P.2).

Yet, other youth who join gang may simply be living in a family system that has strong traditional identification with the neighborhood where they live. In that case, the gang may be seen as a vehicle for preserving the "barrio" and protecting its honor. The gang, therefore, became an extension of the family in that neighborhood; because all the young adults or even older adults, such as relatives, older brothers, friends, and friends of friends, belonged to the same gang (Torres, 1980).

Research also shows that the origins of youth delinquency or youth affiliation with delinquent groups are related to the defect of individual personal and social disorders in family

relationships. That may include such thing as parental characters and/or early child rearing practices by adults or caregiver of an individual youth (Rutter & Giller, 1983). Researchers like Vigil stated that gang members are generally "raised in a disproportionate mother-centered family situation with more siblings and impoverished neighborhoods." He argues that the process of becoming a gang member occurs through an accumulation of physical and emotional neglect by parents and poor role models (Vigil, 1988).

The predictors of a youth joining gang may differ from one ethnic group to another. For example, Spergel and Curry (1988) found that the absence of a father was a fairly strong predictor of arrests for Hispanic youth but was a weak predictor of arrests for black youth. However, Spergel and Curry stated that the presence of a gang-member sibling or parent in the home was the best predictor of gang activity, particularly for Hispanic youth (Spergel & Curry, 1988).

Research observers and gang members have indicated that the gang is like a family in many ways for many disadvantaged children. Also, the gang can be very appealing to immigrant or newcomer youth in urban areas where they are more likely to be isolated culturally, socially, and/or economically from their communities. Gang leaders provide guidance, warmth, and affection that are very likely missing in the young person's life (New York City Youth Board, 1960).

School

Research shows that having low expectations for completing school significantly predicted gang membership among young girls. The same study indicated that those young males and females who have sexual activities at an early age also have greater chance of having gang ties/gang membership. Gang members usually recruit youth who are vulnerable, such as those who are not doing well in school or who have already dropped out of school. When comparing gang members to non-gang members, gang members were more than twice as likely to carry a gun with them than non-gang members were. Also, gang members most often engage in serious delinquency and are more than three times as likely to engage in drug sales (Bjerregaard and Smith, 1993). Similar research shows that factors, such as academic failure, poor Academic aptitude test scores, lack of commitment to school, and a lack of belief in the validity of rules, contributes to the likelihood of engaging in deviant behavior. Studies also show that children who demonstrate early aggressive behavior, lacking attachment to teachers, having low aspirations and goals are also at risk for engaging antisocial behavior or joining gang. Similarly, the association with deviant peers, such as the grouping of antisocial children together for instruction and/or punishment, increases the chance of children joining gang. Likewise, schools that have school disorganization, poor management of students, or assignment of students into special education classes without taking a student's culture into consideration increase children chance of joining a gang or engaging in antisocial behaviors (www.ldonline.org, 2002 P.2).

Neighborhood

Research shows that youth living in poor neighborhoods or who were poor at least once before the age of eighteen comprise nearly one-third of the U.S. children. Many children in the United States are living in poor neighborhoods where access to alcohol and drugs runs high. Many of these kids who live in neighborhoods where accessibility to illegal drugs are easy had more than three times greater odds of joining a gang than those from other neighborhoods (Lale, 1992). Similarly, research shows that youth who lived in neighborhoods where many young people were in trouble had three times greater odds of joining gang than youth from other neighborhoods (Hill & Howell, 1999). Joining a gang may also result from a rational calculation to achieve personal security, particularly by males in gang-infested neighborhoods. The youth may be attacked on the street or in school if he doesn't belong to a gang, or belongs to the wrong gang, or perhaps simply comes from the wrong neighborhood (Savitz, Rosen, and Lalli, 1980).

Economy

Researchers believe that poverty and economic marginality were associated with the emergence of youth gangs. A study of gang formation in Milwaukee, WI, shows that although the parents of most gang members usually held good jobs, these good jobs had disappeared by the time their children were grown (Hagedorn, 1998). It is also believed that the loss of hundreds of thousands of factory jobs in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s made the condition even worse for people in the inner cities.

Female gang members were believed to be affected more during periods of economic shifts than the male gang members. For example, female gang members were not only faced with the job loss but also with the welfare reform system that was enacted in the mid-1990s. Welfare has been an important economic resource for many female gang members for decades. Many of them get pregnant on average by the age of 18. They tend to rely on welfare, combined with work and help from their families, to survive (Moore & Hagedorn, 1996). Since the introduction of the welfare reform system in the mid-1990s, it is unclear what female gang members will do to replace welfare payments.

Media and Politics

Other researchers agreed that a gang becomes a gang when the community or another gang recognizes it as a gang. Once a group of young people is recognized as anti-social or deviant by the community, the group becomes more cohesive and organized and evolves into a gang (Taylor, 1989). Yet, sociologists contend that another factor of gang formation is the "rejection of middle-class values." During the 1950s and 1960s, many youth gang came to represent the sub-cultural group who were rejecting the societal values in America. During the same period, many Black youth gang members had confrontations with the police. A conflict between white middle-class values and Black youth gang values was apparent as a result of social changes and political unrest (Yablonsky, 1962).

Gang and Intelligence

Very little is known about the intellectual abilities of gang members compared to non-gang youth. There is, however, speculation that core members are unlike non-gang or fringe members; they are more troublesome (Yablonsky, 1962). It is the common opinion that a gang member's intelligence may be somewhat below normal (Klein, 1971) and that they tend to be more than normally "hostile, disruptive, defiant, aloof, distant, arrogant, and defensive" (Camp, 1985). Also, other analysts tend to characterize gang members as troubled, perceptually disoriented, or emotionally disturbed, but not in such a fearsome term, such as emotionally unstable individuals. Most gang members were viewed as individuals who have difficulty making satisfactory interpersonal relationships and poor impulse control (Klein, 1971).

Based on a sample of standardized test performance of 243 gang members, only eight youths tested above 100. The median score of the sample was 84, suggesting that one third of the boys from the sample tested fell in the range that would dictate their placement in special education classes (Klein, 1971). According to a number of writers, leaders of gangs who are considerably older than the average age of members are often very personally troubled (New York City Youth Board, 1960). These descriptions of gang leaders, in general, seem to depict gang leaders in Asian communities, as well. Asian gang leaders tend to be in their 20s or 30s.

Asian Gangs

Since the 1970s and 1980s, ethnic gangs became a concern to community leaders in the United States. Over the past several decades, a number of violent crimes committed by Asian gang has increased dramatically, especially in areas with large Asian populations. Regarding

Asian gang formation, there seems to be some similarities with the ethnic gang formation in an earlier era faced by European immigrants. Many Asian gangs were formed by local Asian delinquent youth who claim to be part of the larger, well-known gang to intimidate their victims (Le, 1997).

Some of the characteristics that set Asian gang members apart from other gangs seem to be that Asian gang place less emphasis on graffiti or the protection of turf and territory. They also tend to be more secretive than non-Asian gang members (Chen & True, 1994). Similarly, Asian gang are less interested in status, honor, or reputation; they are more involved in criminal-gain and money generating activities, such as extortion, burglary, and the sale of narcotics (Spergel, 1995).

It is important to recognize the variation between the ethnic Asian gangs. For instance, many of the Asian gangs from Asian countries, such as Japan, China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, are reported to be better organized and more secretive (Spergel, 1995). These gangs are more into organized crimes, engaging in activities, such as money laundering, illegal gambling, or prostitution. Indochinese gangs, Pacific Islander gang, and Filipino gang, on the other hand, have typical characteristics of street gangs. These gangs are more likely to engage in criminal activities, such as resale of illegal weapons, burglaries, and auto theft. These gangs embrace characteristics of Latino and African-American gang. Some good examples of such characteristics are their speech, clothing styles, and behaviors. According to Spergel (1995), Vietnamese gangs are often extremely mobile, because they are not embedded in the community

where they live. In addition, violent acts are said to be relatively more likely among Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodian, and Laotian youth gangs as compared to Khmer or Hmong gangs (Spergel, 1995).

Evidence shows that Asian communities do have serious concerns with youth gang all across the country. When youth gang target their own communities, Asian communities are reluctant to report crimes committed by Asian gang due to their “distrust” of authorities. Many are afraid to report crimes committed by gang to law enforcement due to the fear of gang retaliation. In addition, the language barrier is one major problem facing many Asian communities. Many of the older generations could not speak the English language, and, therefore find it hard to communicate comfortably with law enforcement. Another problem is that many Asian parents are not well educated about the gang problems and what they can do to make a difference.

Most Asian parents either lack knowledge about gang or do not want to believe that they have gang problems in their communities. For the most part, Asian parents, particularly Hmong parents, see gang problems as nothing more than a rebellious group of kids. In fact, the word “gang” is non-existent in the Hmong communities. The Hmong word that is equivalent to the word “gang” is “laib” (pronounced ‘laih). This word is quite broad and is not well understood by many parents. The word “laib” has quite a different meaning in different social milieu. For example, “laib” = *to have* (verb), or *a bad person* (noun). Many Hmong teenagers are being mistakenly labeled or categorized as “laib” by adults and parents alike for the simple fact that

they "talk back" or are disrespectful of their parents or adults. That is an indication that gang education is necessary to help Asian parents combat gang problems in the community.

From personal experience working with Hmong families and Hmong youth over the years, it was observed that many parents are lacking the necessary knowledge and skills to help their children once these children get involved in gang activities. Many parents are so caught up in making a living outside of the home that at times they appear like they are neglecting their own children. Because the adults have to make a living outside of the home, many adolescents and young adults are left home to fend for themselves with no or very little adult supervision. That kind of environment is a typical fertile gang breeding ground for immigrant youth in the United States. Most of the time, many parents are not even aware of the brewing problems at home until it is too late.

According to Yang (1996), there are three factors that lead Hmong youth to join gang. First, Hmong parents don't understand the laws in the United States and, therefore, are unable to discipline their children according to what the laws allow. Second, poverty is another factor that led Hmong youth to join gang. Third, the need for belonging seems to be a driving force for youth to join gang. Similarly, many Hmong youth join gang for protection against bullies or adults who dislike them. Identity also seems to be another driving force for many Hmong youth to join gang. Due to the distinct physical characteristics that these youth possessed, many Asian youth do not feel they can mingle themselves into the mainstream society without discrimination

or be looked down upon from the mainstream culture. Therefore, they look for groups that have similar physical traits that appreciate and accept them for who they are (Yang, 1996).

Hmong gangs started forming in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s for protection against neighborhood and school bullies where large members of Hmong refugees settled. Very similar to other youth gang in the United States, Hmong youth gang evolved into criminal gang as their membership increased. Their criminal activities included stealing cars, robberies, and/or breaking and entering gun stores for the purpose of stealing guns for protection and for criminal activities (Yang, 1996).

The current trend of violence shows that these gangs stepped up their criminal activities from just simple car theft, robberies, and breaking and entering private properties to crimes as serious as drive-by shootings, cold-blooded murders, drug dealing, as well as prostitution and sexual assaults. This trend will only get worse if community leaders continue to neglect and bandage the core issues in the Asian communities. Community resources will need to be set aside for more in-depth studies involving Asian gang and the problems Asian gang present to the community. This study is nothing more than a scratch on the surface of the Asian youth gang, but it is hoped that studies like this will provoke the interest of researchers to do in depth researches involving Asian, particular Hmong youth gang in the years to come.

Chapter III

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects of this study consisted of mainly at-risk youth or gang members from the two northern states. The male subjects comprised about three-fourths or 74% of the total sample. About one-fourth or 26% were female subjects.

Methods for Gathering Data/Instrumentation

The data was collected using questionnaires. The subjects were handed questionnaires that consisted of thirteen items. The items were constructed to uncover the respondent's motivation to join gang.

Most of the items use the Likert scale with a range of A--"Strongly disagree" to E--"Strongly agree." Five of the thirteen questions inquired about the benefits of joining a gang. Four of the questions attempted to identify the primary motivations of youth for joining a gang. The remainder of the questions reflected the demography of the subjects.

Data Collection

All of the data was collected by this researcher and one other Hmong female volunteer. Most of the data was collected from public, social, and educational events where many Hmong youth and young adults were congregating. These events included soccer tournaments, parties, new-year celebrations, as well as other school and social events. However, some of the data was collected in the private homes of Hmong youth in a number of different communities.

Upon approaching a group of youths/young adults, the researcher explained the purpose of the study as described above to all of the subjects. When subjects agreed to participate in the study, they were asked to sign a consent form. Parents were also asked to sign the consent forms for those who were minors. If his/her parents were not around, the youth(s) were not included in the study. After the consent forms were signed, the researcher handed out the questionnaire and asked the subjects to proceed in answering the questions. Subjects were also encouraged to ask questions if they did not understand a particular question. This researcher and the volunteer remained available to explain and clarify questions.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed in two ways: (1) Calculation of percentile: Converting raw data to percentages; (2) Bivariate: using Spearman's Rho to compute the different correlation coefficients with their significance levels; and (3) Inferential: using a comparison of responses between those Asian youth males and females participating in the study.

Limitations

The methodology of this study has at least four limitations. The first limitation is that many of the subjects were asked to complete the questionnaires in a group setting. There is a high probability that a subject may answer the questions based on what the socially acceptable answer is for his/her particular group rather than what he/she actually believes.

The second limitation is that many subjects were high school dropouts and may not have received a strong formal education. These subjects' ability to understand and comprehend the

questionnaires may be in question. This could have been true, even though the researcher stressed time after time that if they had any questions, they should ask the researcher before they proceed.

The third limitation is that most of the subjects were asked to complete the questionnaires in neutral or public places. There is a high probability that these environmental settings may influence the subjects' perceptions toward certain issues. For example, a subject may be unwilling to disclose certain type of personal information or activities that could incriminate them or get them into trouble. Therefore, this study may not necessarily get the same responses from participants as if it was conducted in a more confidential setting.

Chapter IV

Results

Two hundred twenty one Hmong youth from various communities in the two northern states participated in this study. Of the 221, 164 participants were male, and 57 were female. They responded to the questionnaire at school or social events that were held in various communities in the two states. A youth was only offered a questionnaire if he or she responded positively to the question of whether or not they were either in a gang or associated with a gang. Ages of the respondents ranged from 11 years old to 21 years old. The mean age for all of the participants was 16 years old.

Findings

The majority of both males and females indicated that they discovered the gang they were involved with through their friends (see Table 1). More females (61%) reported discovering gang through friends than that of the males (54%). While no females reported being recruited to join the gang, 7% of the males indicated that they were recruited into the gang. The rest indicated that either they discovered gang through their neighborhoods, schools, or other settings.

Table 1. Responses to the question "How did you discover gang?"

	Friends	Neighborhood	Recruitment	School	Others	Total
Male	54%	13%	7%	9%	16%	164
Female	61%	16%	0%	7%	14%	57
M + F	56%	14%	5%	8%	16%	221

Both males and females were fairly evenly split on the topic whether or not gangs recruit. Of the males, 47% agreed with this statement while, 52% of the females did so (see Table 2). One possible explanation of the contradiction may reflect their perception of reality on how they were raised. That is, the expectations from parents are different from boys than that of girls.

Culturally, boys are allowed to have more freedom than girls. Therefore, boys come and go as they please to hang with friends around the neighborhood. Because boys socialize more freely around the neighborhood, they have a greater chance to come into contact with gang members. The boys may view their contacts with gang members not necessarily as "recruitment" but rather a socialization process. That may be one possible explanation that mirrors the result of the males in this particular question.

Girls, on the other hand, are very protected by their parents. Girls are not allowed to go as freely as boys. They are loaded with household responsibilities, as well as being expected to do well in school. As a result of that, most of them don't get the opportunity to socialize as freely as they would like. Those who get the chance to distance themselves from parents are either become rebellious against parents than recruited by friends who are gang members or have friends that have connection with gang. Therefore, females may actually be recruited more frequently than boys.

Table 2. Responses to the question “Do gangs recruit for new members?”

	No	Yes	Don't know	Total
Male	53%	47%	0%	164
Female	46%	52%	2%	56
Total: M+F	51%	48%	2%	220

However, another yet similar question was included to determine whether or not youth believe that gang members are actually required to recruit new members. The data show that they definitely think that gang members were required to do recruiting. Of the males, 52% agreed that members were required to recruit, while 60% of females support the question that gang members were required members to recruit (see Table 3).

Table 3. Responses to the question “Are gang members required to recruit?”

Gender	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
Male	52%	48%	.6%	162
Female	60%	40%	0%	55
M+F	46%	54%	.5%	217

Males and female Hmong youth largely agreed on the three top reasons to join a gang. Protection was the most often cited motivation to join a gang, (31% of males giving this response and 36% of females giving the same response). The second strongest motivation to join a gang was that of the possibilities for socialization (21% for males and 25% for females). The third most popular reason for joining gang was the freedom that the gang offers to its members, with 19% of males and 18% of females giving this response. The fourth highest

response for males was the opportunities the gang gave them to meet girls (17%), while the females credited gang membership giving them much desired change to rebel as the main reason to join a gang (16%) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Response to the question "What is the main reason a youth join gang?"

	Protection	Socialization	Girls/guys	Freedom	To rebel	Total
Male	31%	21%	17%	19%	12%	161
Female	36%	25%	4%	18%	16%	55
M+F	32%	22%	14%	19%	13%	216

Among males and females mirrored each other in identifying the most attractive component of gang activities. Males reported that having friends was the most attractive aspect of being in a gang with power being the second most attractive factor. Females reversed this order, citing power as being number one and friends as the second most attractive component of being in the gang. For both males and females, the response percentages were identical: 40% for the number one choice and 33% for the number two choice. Both male and female participants chose drug use as the third most attractive part of being in a gang. Freedom was to be the fourth most attractive part of being in a gang (9% males & 5% females) for participants. Dating was to be the least attractive part of being in the gang, with only 4% of males and 5% of females giving dating as the most attractive part of being in a gang (see Table 5).

Table 5. Responses to the question "What are most attract parts of being in a gang?"

	Power	Friends	Drugs	Freedom	Dating	Total
Male	33%	40%	15%	9%	4%	164
Female	40%	33%	16%	5%	5%	57
M + F	35%	38%	15%	8%	5%	221

Among males and females gave remarkably similar responses to the question of whether or not they wanted their siblings to follow them into the gang. About one third of both sexes indicated they never would want their siblings in a gang (32% of males and 40% of females). Around half of both groups gave strong indications that they would want their siblings to follow them in the gang. Of the males, 55% wanted their siblings in the gang either "often," "most of the time," or "always," For females, 47% of them wanted their siblings in either "often," "most of the time," or "always" (see Table 6). There is a statistical significance between male and female subjects for whether or not they want their siblings to follow in gang, females < males; ($X^2 = 9.8$; $df = 4$; $p < .05$).

Table 6. Responses to the question "Would you want your siblings to be in the gang?"

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Most of the time	Always	Total
Male	32%	13%	38%	7%	10%	164
Female	40%	14%	33%	14%	0%	57
M+F	34%	13%	36%	9%	8%	221

An item was specifically constructed to investigate whether or not Hmong youth believe that joining gang gave them more freedom to do what they wanted. There were 27% of the female participants who either chose "Strongly agree," or "Agree," as their choice in answering whether youth believe that joining gangs gave them more freedom as compared to 42% of males. The data shows that more males than females chose either "Strongly agree," or "Agree," that joining gangs gave them more freedom. When we look at "Strongly disagree," or "Disagree," the percentage for female seems to be slightly higher than that of the males'. A large percentage of both males and females (39% males and 42% females) chose "Neutral," as their answer to the question (see Table 7). The Chi-Square Tests indicate that there is a statistical significance for whether or not gang gave youth the freedom (Females < males ($\eta = 7.9$; $df = 1$; $p < .01$) for this question), indicating that youth believe joining gang gave them the freedom to do what they want that, otherwise they would not have had a chance to do; if they were not gang members.

Table 7. Responses to the question "Gang gives youth freedom."

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)	Total
Male	22%	20%	39%	9%	10%	164
Female	4%	23%	42%	18%	14%	57
M+F	17%	21%	40%	11%	11%	221

One of the items that asked whether Hmong youth believed that gang members have a better chance to sleep with the opposite sex. The majority of both sexes also chose "neutral,"

(39% males and 37% females) as their answer. The percentages indicate that they either disagreed that gang members have a better chance for sex than that of non-gang members, or they were unwilling to disclose personal information to the researcher. As table 8 below shows, the statistics skew more positively toward the strongly agree item. There are 47% of male participants who chose either "Strongly agree," or "Agree," indicating that they believe gang members do have a better chance for sex than youth who are non-gang members. The majority (53%) of the male participants chose either "Neutral," "Agree," or "Strongly disagree," as their choices. The females, on the other hands, 44% of them chose either "Strongly agree," or "Agree," as their response to the question, indicating that gang members have a better chance to sleep with the opposite sex. An overwhelming number of them (37%) chose "Neutral," as a response to the question. The rest (19%) indicated either "Disagree," or "Strongly disagree," that gang members have a better chance for sex than the general population (see Table 8).

Table 8. Responses to the question "Gang members have better chance for sex?"

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)	Total
Male	24%	23%	39%	10%	5%	164
Female	19%	25%	37%	14%	5%	57
M+F	23%	23%	38%	11%	5%	221

A similar item was constructed to investigate whether Hmong youth believe young people join gang to increase chances to meet guys/girls. The majority of both male and female

subjects chose "neutral," as their answer (48% males and 49% females). Of the males, 42% of them chose either "Strongly agree," or "Agree," while only about 11% of the males chose "Disagree," or "Strongly disagree," as their answer to the question. For the females, 38% of them chose either "Strongly agree," or "Agree," that people join gangs to meet guys, while 16% of the females chose either "Disagree," or "Strongly disagree," to the question (see Table 9).

Table 9. Responses to the question "Youth join gang to meet guys/girls."

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)	Total
Male	17%	25%	48%	8%	3%	163
Female	4%	32%	49%	12%	4%	57
M+F	13%	26%	48%	9%	3%	221

Of the male subjects, 31% chose either "Strongly Disagree," or "Disagree," that joining a gang was the only way one can express him/herself. About 33% of the male subjects chose "Neutral," as an answer, while 36% of them chose either "Strongly agree," or "Agree," indicating that they believe that joining gang is the only way for them to express who they are. Again, the majority of the female subjects chose "Neutral," as their answer to the question (42%). The percentage of those females who chose either "Disagree," or "Strongly Disagree," comprise about 37% of the total sample population. Those who chose "Strongly agree," or "Agree," comprise about 21% of the total sample population. As the table shows, there seems to be a difference of opinions between male and female regarding this item. For example, the answers

of the male subjects appear to be distributed more evenly from "Strongly agree," to "Strongly disagree," than that of the females'. The answers for the female youth appear to skew more toward "Strongly disagree," indicating that they do not believe that joining gang is the only way for one to express oneself (see Table 10). The Chi-Square Tests also indicate that there is a statistical significance between male and female for this question, as well. The Linear-by-Linear Association for this question is males < females ($\eta = 4.5$; $df = 1$; $p < .05$).

Table 10. Responses to the question "Joining gang is the only way to express oneself."

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)	Total
Male	13%	23%	33%	17%	14%	164
Female	2%	19%	42%	16%	21%	57
M+F	10%	22%	35%	17%	16%	221

This researcher constructed an item to measure whether youth turn to gang for love and support due to poor relationships with their parents. The majority of the subjects, both male and female (37% males and 29% females), chose "Neutral," as their choice in responding to the question. However, 39% of the male subjects chose either "Strongly agree," or "Agree," as their answer that youth turn to gang for love and supports. The percentage for the male participants who chose "Disagree," or "Strongly disagree," comprised about 24% of the sample population. The overall percentage for males and females appears to skew more toward "Strongly agree," than that of the "Strongly disagree," (see Table 11).

Table 11. Responses to the question "Youth turn to gangs for love/support."

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)	Total
Male	15%	24%	37%	13%	11%	164
Female	11%	30%	39%	14%	7%	57
M+F	14%	26%	38%	13%	10%	221

An item was designed to investigate whether Hmong youth believe that illegal acts are a necessary part of being in the gang. A large number of the youth were undecided as to whether illegal acts are a necessary part of being in the gang. There are 46% of males and 45% of the females who indicated "Neutral," as a response to the item. Of the males, 40% of them chose either "Strongly agree," or "Agree," supporting the belief that illegal acts are a necessary part of gang. Only 14% of the males chose "Disagree," or "Strongly disagree," as an indication that they don't believe illegal acts are a necessary part of being in the gang. The female subjects, on the other hands, 37% of them chose either "Strongly agree," or "Agree," while 13% of them chose either "Disagree," or "Strongly disagree," as their response to the question (see Table 12).

Table 12. Responses to the question "Illegal acts a necessary part of being in the gang?"

	Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)	Total
Male	18%	22%	46%	10%	4%	162
Female	11%	26%	45%	10%	3%	57
M+F	16%	26%	45%	10%	3%	219

The responses given by all respondents to every item on the questionnaire were statistically significant when they were correlated with the responses to all other items on the questionnaire (see Table 13).

Table 13. Spearman's rho Correlations (males vs. females).

		Illegal acts a necessary part	Member better chance sex	Join to meet guys/girls	Only way to express Oneself	Turn to gang for love/support	Want sibs to follow in gang	Gang gives freedom
Illegal acts a necessary part	Correl. Coefficient Sig (2-tailed) N	1.000 .219	.315** .000 219	.386** .000 218	.235** .000 219	.299** .000 219	.133* .049 219	.406** .000 219
Members better chance sex	Correl. Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	.315** .000 219	1.000 .221	.455** .000 220	.383** .000 221	.385** .000 221	.255** .000 221	.396** .000 221
join to meet guys/girls	Correl. Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	.386** .000 218	.455** .000 220	1.000 .220	.314** .000 220	.324** .000 220	.159* .018 220	.340** .000 220
Only way to express oneself	Correl. Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	.235** .000 219	.283** .000 221	.314** .000 220	1.000 .221	.393** .000 221	.171* .011 221	.270** .000 221
Turn to gang for love/support	Correl. Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	.299** .000 219	.385** .000 221	.324** .000 220	.393** .000 221	1.000 .221	.138* .041 221	.245** .000 221
Want sibs to follow in gang	Correl. Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	.133* .049 219	.225** .000 221	.159* .018 220	.171* .011 221	.138* .041 221	1.000 .221	.205** .002 221
Gang gives freedom	Correl. Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	.406** .000 219	.396** .000 221	.340** .000 220	.270** .000 221	.245** .000 221	.205** .002 221	1.000 .221

The data was used to determine the correlation between each of the items. That result indicated that the highest level of correlation (.455, $p < .0001$) was between the item asking if one

joins a gang to meet the opposite sex and the item asking if gang members have a better chance of meeting the opposite sex. The result can also be seen as evidence that the respondents responded to at least these two related items in a consistent fashion. The second highest level of correlation (.406, $p < .0001$) was between the responses that gang gives freedom and that illegal acts are a necessary part of gang activities. The third highest level of correlation (.396, $p < .0001$) was between the responses that a gang gives freedom and gang members have a better chance at having sex with the opposite gender. The fourth highest level of correlation (.393, $p < .0001$) was between the responses that the gang provides a way to express oneself and the gang provides love/support. The fifth highest level of correlation (.396, $p < .0001$) was between the responses that illegal acts are a necessary part of being in a gang and that a gang is a place to meet the opposite sex.

It is also important to note that there was a correlation in response to the item whether or not youth want their siblings to follow them into the gang. The result reveals that they would want their siblings to follow them into the gang. It is unclear as to what their reasons are for wanting their siblings in the gang at this time.

Chapter V

Conclusion

This purpose of this study was to examine some of the factors that draw at-risk Hmong youth to join gang. The results demonstrate that youth join gang for quite a lot of reasons. Some of the main reasons they reported are friends, socialization, protection, and power.

The result of this study indicates that Hmong teens join gang to fulfill developmentally appropriate needs that are lacking in the home, at school, or in their communities. Friends give youth a sense of acceptance and belonging. At the same time, a gang becomes a social domain for youth who may be searching for an identity. The majority of these youth appeared to have radical hairstyles, clothing, as well as choices of language used. These external appearances tell their fellow gang members and the rest of the world that they belong to and identify with the values of their gang.

Protection and power can be seen as opposite sides of the same coin. The protection the gang affords gives teenagers a sense of security at home, in their schools, and in their communities. They may not otherwise feel safe and protected if they were not in a gang. However, gangs typically provide protection through displays of power. These displays can include violence or threats of violence. Engaging in these types of activities can be very rewarding, particularly for adolescents who have felt downtrodden most of their lives.

It is assumed that most of the Hmong youth respondents are the children of first-generation refugees. It is generally true that most first generation refugees lack the labor market

skills necessary for them to compete with the mainstream labor market in a modern society. Therefore, they generally have a lower socioeconomic status than that of the mainstream population. As a result of their low socioeconomic status, many youth lack the necessary skills, esteem, and insight necessary for them to make friends with those who are goal-oriented people. In addition, being a member of an ethnic group who recently immigrated into the U.S. makes one vulnerable to repeated and chronic acts of prejudices and discrimination. All of these factors make it extremely difficult for adolescents of first generation refugees to smoothly transition into the mainstream culture in the United States.

In summary, the findings of this study suggest that Hmong youth experience a sense of isolation and discrimination from the larger community. These youths search for friends who understand them and the reality that they face. Hmong youth may also be experiencing a sense of boredom, as well as a sense of hopelessness about the future. Joining a gang increases a youth's chance to get these needs met and fulfill what is missing in his/her life.

Recommendation

The gang issue is a widespread concern for every community across the United States. For community leaders and professional workers to work toward reducing the Asian gang issues, special community resources will need to set aside to address the core issues. The data reveals a pattern that these youths lack the necessary community supports and protections they need. Consequently, they feel rejected and isolated from their families and the general population.

For a community to reduce the attraction Hmong youth have towards gang involvement, the community has to reach out to the youth to meet their needs in a way that is acceptable to the youth. Invariably this requires the time and commitment of adults who will spend time with the youth, getting to know them and providing assistance and guidance as needed. One good example of such a program is an after school program. Such a program can provide tutoring and English as a Second Language skill training, as well as opportunities for youth to gather for appropriate socialization and recreational activities. Ideally the staff in charge of the activities would consist of adults of the same ethnic minority group who have an interest in helping youth. Such a program can also both formally and informally teach anger management skills, conflict resolution and techniques to improve self-esteem.

Ideally, “boot camp” type of program that involve physical challenges, teamwork and problem solving would be a core component of such an after school program. Youth who are under court orders due to their gang activities could be mandated to be involved in this programming as a part of their court ordered treatment plan.

Programs could also be developed within the school system to reduce the attractiveness of gangs. First of all, students need to feel safe at school and officials need to do all in their power to maximize the subjective feeling of security on the part of the students. This can be accomplished, in part, with a comprehensive conflict resolution program. Such a program must deal promptly and decisively with small difficulties, thereby preventing youth from seeking protection from gangs. Connecting school programs with the after school programs described

above and other community programs would be beneficial in providing a more comprehensive sense of connection and security for adolescent and young adults.

It is vitally important for community leaders to bridge the gaps between the police and the Asian American communities in order to reduce fear and distrust of law enforcement officers. Often times, community leaders assigned gang task force officers that have no or very little cultural competency to work with ethnic gangs. This level of incompetence only works to foster alienation and distrust between the gang members and the Gang Task Force officers or law enforcement agencies. This is where a properly trained school liaison officer can make a significant contribution. Such an officer can get to know the students, be there to resolve issues and address safety concerns in the school. This can provide a positive impression of law enforcement for at-risk youth who are still in school.

Gang violence often makes headlines in the news and on TV. It is often accurately seen as an indicator of rising community problems. However across the country, community leaders seem to over-look the underlying issues concerning the attractiveness of gangs. Consequently they primarily take a punitive approach to solving gang-related problems. Scarce resources are directed toward reactive programs, rather than directing them toward establishing effective intervention programs.

Many of the current gang prevention programs in many communities work to bandage the gang problems but have no or very little long-term benefits. They merely try to contain or cover up the problems without addressing the root issues, such as reducing youth involvement in

gang or breaking the cycle of gang violence. Proactive programs that direct youth toward responsible and productive lifestyles are needed in cities around the states. Preventing children and adolescents from joining gang may be the most cost-effective way toward solving community problems.

Community leaders need to bring together various community member and social service agencies, as well as law enforcement agencies, to work in collaboration to address concerns related to Asian gangs. Resources are needed for the development of effective prevention programs that work to reduce the incidents of youths joining gangs. We must not only concentrate on what is most visible to us, but also look at the underlying community problems that erode our families and communities, as well. We must also become increasingly aware of the violent realities that penetrate the lives of youth, families, and communities across the country and take more proactive steps toward combating the youth gang problems.

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