

**Glasgow children can become socialised into gang culture at 12 years of age, new research says**

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Children in Glasgow can become socialised into the city's gang culture from as young as 12 years old, new research says.

Johanne Miller told the British Sociological Association's annual conference in Glasgow today [Wednesday 15 April 2015] about the lifecourse of gang members in the city and the violence they take part in.

Miss Miller, of the University of the West of Scotland, researched 60 members of 21 of the 170 gangs in Glasgow as part of her PhD, spending weeks working with them.

She told the conference: "The process that emerged from participants was that young people aged between four and 12 began playing in the few streets that made up their scheme – a council-built estate – and began from a young age to be socialised into street culture." After the age of 12 they could be part of the gang and become drawn into violence against rivals when protecting their territory.

She found that the gangs were not hierarchical, organised criminal groups but friends that had grown up in the same area. "These children have grown up hearing stories of territorial rivals and the crimes they enact. So within the child's conscious there is a known enemy, an 'other' out there who is already a threat in their minds. There is a tradition of associating your scheme as something that needs to be protected.

"They would begin absorbing street culture transmitted through story-telling and observations of older children in the area and family members. They would adopt the gang name, start using it and decide whether they wanted to fight or not. This is how they grew into the gang. This violence then becomes more serious for core members, and conflict becomes a central binding agent of the gang."

Between the ages of 14 and 18 gang members spent four to six hours each day on the street, more at weekends.

"They are constantly on the margins of the community. They occupy derelict buildings, parking lots, abandoned houses and factories and forests where prying eyes cannot see them. They begin to operate within dangerous terrains, gathering injuries and getting involved in fights which at first seem like fun but soon escalate in seriousness and have consequences for many.

"They fight on roads, abandoned bridges, at canals, and rivers, anywhere that is a boundary marker and away from CCTV or regular police patrols.

"I was told stories about broken arms, a broken back from falling from a cliff, nails through feet, being hit with cars, someone being set on fire, suicides, shootings, stabbings, a boy's brother buzzing gas and it blowing up, killing him. People being hurt and dying was an accepted part of their lives, it was just another inevitable part of occupying the streets for the young people."

By age 18 "the fighting has reached serious levels to the point that every core member had first-hand experience of being stabbed, beaten, keyed or canned – a juice can is opened and used as a weapon for slashing – and practically every other participant could discuss how friends or family had been killed as a result of gang fighting or territorialism.

"To start a fight one only needs to enter another gang's territory and shout one's scheme name – this is seen as an indicator of a fight. Territorialism is the conflict that creates tensions between other

groups, and it separates and divides them from other young people and eventually traps them into their scheme through fear of reprisal.”

Miss Miller found that their time in a gang was usually quite limited, and after three years or so they began drifting away, usually in their late teens. “For some members they naturally mature out of the gang but for others there are increasing consequences of gang and street life that act as a catalyst in changing their perception of the gang and the negative effect this has on their lives.

“The older ones discussed getting curfews, asbos, jail sentences and dispersals from certain areas. The consequences of street and gang life that older core members cited were numerous and included physical injuries, loss of friends and family, criminal justice sanctions and limited work prospects.

“There was a real fear from them that they would turn out to be worthless – this was manifested into what they termed as junkies and long time drug or drink addicts who occupy the streets. Many of the participants had drug or drink addicts in their close family or had lost relatives to it and this was something they vehemently wanted to avoid.

“They were resilient, funny, daring and courageous, battling every day with their positioning in life, the outcomes of urban inequalities, territorial violence and the turbulent lives that many of their parents lived. There were many times within this research journey where I had to remind myself that these were children and young people, who tragically in some circumstances were dealing with life and death scenarios.

“We should be providing them with structural support not criminal sanctions that prevent them from being able to move on to productive lives. Every young person that took part in this research discussed how they wanted to progress to a job, but 72 per cent of them had not worked in the last year, even though two-thirds had been on three or more three or six-month training courses aimed to get them into employment.”

### **Quotes from different gang members:**

“If you’re brought up in a scheme, then you hang about with them and you start fighting because the younger ones follow in the footsteps of the bigger ones, like we all did.

“You have to make a name for yourself. If anybody starts arguing with us we will argue back with them.”

“I was young and hanging out with the older ones. But that’s all gang life was about to me. It was all about wanting to be part of their group, with the older boys. And when I actually did get to that stage that I was one of them that I realised that it’s just not what I want any more. I just wasted a few years of my life trying to get something that I didn’t even want.”

“About five of my pals in the past six months have got stabbed just for walking about their own scheme.”

“My social worker used to tell me all the time I would end up in a home, I would end up in the jail. I just look at my cousins and I don’t want to turn out like them do I? So I just stopped going to jail.”

“I would just like a job so I can get money and not fuck about the streets any more, just stay at home all the time.”

### ***For more information, please contact:***

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**Notes**

1. The British Sociological Association's annual conference takes place at Glasgow Caledonian University from 15 to 17 April 2015. Around 800 research presentations are given.
2. The British Sociological Association's charitable aim is to promote sociology. The BSA is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales. Company Number: 3890729. Registered Charity Number 1080235 [www.britsoc.co.uk](http://www.britsoc.co.uk)