

Street Gang Violence in Europe

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ABSTRACT

Levels and descriptors of violence among European street gangs are summarized from studies reported primarily under the aegis of the Eurogang Program initiated in 1997 and continuing still. European gang violence is placed in the context of its American counterpart, of European non-gang youth violence, and of the definitional and structural components of the Eurogang Program. European gangs in over a dozen countries reveal a wide pattern of violent behaviour and levels of violence that are far greater than among non-gang youth, but largely less serious than in the USA. Some of these latter differences may be attributable to the recentness of the European gang development, the lower levels of firearms availability, and lower levels of gang territoriality in Europe.

KEY WORDS

Eurogang Program / Street Gangs / Violence.

Introduction

It is widely recognized that street gangs are connected with violence. Aggressive and violent youths are at greater risk of joining collectivities that we call street gangs or troublesome youth groups. But it is also true that such groups themselves promote and facilitate violence. Various authors have reported on the symbolic or group-enhancing importance of violence in street gangs, and violence is also often a means for illegal

activity and maintaining a territory (Short and Strodtbeck 1965; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Klein and Maxson 1989; Klein 1995).

Many European countries face such youth groups, which may be called street gangs although researchers and policy makers often hesitate to call them this because they compare their own groups to American stereotypes (see Klein 1997; Klein et al. 2001; Covey 2003; Decker and Weerman 2005). Indications exist that there is a growth in street gang problems in different countries in Europe. Therefore, the study of European street gangs and troublesome youth groups may be very important for understanding better the causes of youth violence in European countries. In this article, we summarize and discuss findings about the level and nature of violence among European street gangs that resulted from studies reported under the aegis of the Eurogang Program. In this article, we use the term 'street gangs' for those youth groups that meet the criteria of the Eurogang consensus definition (durable and street-oriented youth groups whose involvement in illegal activity is part of their group identity), groups that may alternatively be called 'troublesome youth groups'.

Until recently, knowledge about street gangs and street gang violence was derived principally from research in the United States. So, too, were the public stereotypes of gangs and gang violence. It is this first context that sets the stage for confronting our results on gang violence in Europe. A second context in which to place European gang violence is that of violence among European youth in general, for which reports are available from the International Self-Report Delinquency (ISRD) programme. Future reports from the programme – ISRD II – will include data on the prevalence of gang members in a score of European countries, but for now the current youth violence data provide a useful background for evaluating emerging knowledge about European gang violence. Finally, a third context for our discussion is provided by work reported by Eurogang Program participants on the development of a common definition of street gangs as well as the structural variety of gangs developed in the USA and then applied to Europe. Each of these three contexts – American gang violence, European non-gang youth violence, and depiction of European gangs – will be discussed as a prelude to our description of European gang violence as summarized over a number of recent empirical reports using both quantitative and qualitative data.

The American gang context

In conventional wisdom, street gangs in the United States are large, well-organized entities that can control neighbourhoods. This stereotype, which often includes high levels of violence, derives most commonly from police

and media reports about gangs in Los Angeles and Chicago. The names are universally recognized: Crips, Bloods, Latin Kings, Black Gangster Disciples, El Ruk'n. But, as noted elsewhere (Klein et al. 2001), the stereotype is not applicable to most street gangs in the USA, and even less so in Europe. Our emphasis in this paper is on the violence associated with street gangs and on the victims of that violence.

Despite all the decades of research on street gangs, including levels of gang violence, American criminology has paid scant attention to the victims of gang violence. A summary of gang victim findings has recently yielded the following generalizations (Klein and Maxson 2006):

- The most common victims of gang homicides and drive-by shootings are other gang members; gang membership can be hazardous to one's health. Joining a gang for protection is ironic, at best.
- The presence of females generally suppresses violence and therefore victimization. Female victimization is far lower than that for males, but gang membership exposes females to the heightened risk of physical and sexual violence from their gang mates, and to violence generally in their neighbourhoods.
- Fear among community members, certainly one form of victimization, can be fuelled and increased both by media attention to gangs and by official gang awareness and gang suppression programmes.
- Contrasted with other violence, gang violence is more likely to appear in public places, and to involve more weaponry and more lethal weapons, more assailants and victims with fewer personal acquaintanceships, younger participants (with victims being a few years older, on average, than the assailants), more motor vehicles, and more injuries and associated charges. In a word, gang violence is more complex and more destructive than non-gang violence. The victims are more likely to be either 'accidental' or at least non-predictable.

It is useful to ask how much violence is committed by American gang members. The longitudinal study by Thornberry et al. (2003) in Rochester provides a recent answer: the lifetime prevalence of overall violence for male gang members is 90.6 percent, compared with 46.4 percent for non-members. For the female participants, the rate for gang members is reported as 72.2 percent, contrasted with 39.0 percent among non-gang members.¹ The authors also reported that this gang/non-gang difference is principally found at the actual time of reported gang membership, and differences are much smaller both before and after. Similar findings have emerged from longitudinal studies in Denver, Pittsburgh, Seattle and Montreal.

¹ Violence survey items were: attack with a weapon with intent to hurt seriously, hit with the idea of hurting, being involved in gang or posse fights, throwing objects at people, robbery, and forcible sexual assault.

Esbensen and Lynskey (2001) provide a more general depiction of the levels of American gang violence, with data from 11 sites, ranging from very rural to very urbanized. Regardless of their placement on the rural/urban dimension, these 11 sites yielded remarkably similar levels of 'life-time prevalence' rates based on self-reports among gang members. The rates are: gang fights (82 percent), hidden weapon (76 percent), assault (50 percent), robbery (28 percent) and shooting at someone (27 percent). The youth reporting these acts were in 8th grade (i.e. on average about 14 years old). Life-time prevalence rates would obviously be even greater at older age levels.

Thornberry et al. report prevalence data that are cumulative over a full nine waves of data collection in Rochester. Ratios of male gang to non-gang percentages range from 1.9 for alcohol use to 2.7 for serious violent acts. Gang girls show even higher violence ratios over non-gang girls. The raw percentages for serious violence are 80.4 for males and 86.6 for females. For both sexes, then, engaging in serious violent acts is the delinquent behaviour that best distinguishes gang from non-gang youth, more so than less serious violent acts, property crimes, public discord, drug sales, drug use and alcohol use. In the USA, gang membership begets violence at levels higher than any other form of delinquency when compared with levels among non-gang youth. This positions us to consider the comparative violence levels in Europe.

The European delinquency context

Most gang members, especially in the groups studied recently in Europe, are juveniles or very young adults. It makes sense, then, to assess violence levels among young European youth generally as a frame for assessing violence among European gang youth. Such a context is available from the work in the ISRD programme, which surveyed young people aged 14–21 in 11 European countries (Junger-Tas et al. 1994). The advantage here is that each country's report is based upon an almost identical survey instrument. The violence data we report here are based on six survey items:

- carrying weapons
- threatening someone
- engaging in riots or group fights in public
- beating up a family member
- beating up a non-family person
- hurting someone with a weapon

These are 6 violence items out of a total of 32 delinquency items included in the full ISRD list of offences. Obviously, the proportion of offences called violent will be a function of the total number of offence categories

enumerated. Klein and Maxson (2006: Table 2.1) have illustrated this in the case of gang crime data from five police departments, where use of the greatest number of offence categories yields a violence rate of 12 percent, and the use of the fewest offence categories yields a violence rate of 56 percent. Untabulated categories reflect police recording practices not youth behaviour. The 12 percent rate is the most stable of the five reported, being based on a total of 1022 arrests. It is in much closer agreement with the findings in many youth survey reports: gangs do perpetrate violence, but they do far more of other things.

The data summarized here come from the reports of 11 locations, confounded to some extent by two problems (see Junger-Tas et al. 1994 for full reports). The first is that six reports are more national in scope (England and Wales, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Portugal, Spain and Italy) whereas five come from a single city (Helsinki, Belfast, Liège, Mannheim and Athens).

The second problem is that, in five reports, 'violence' included violence against property, such as graffiti, vandalism and arson. On average, the six countries reporting the six items of violence against persons yielded 'life-time prevalence' of 32.1 percent, whereas the five countries including violence against property averaged a rate of 54.7 percent. Clearly, the inclusion of property crimes is a difference that makes a difference.

A similar disparity occurs for 'last year prevalence' rates. The average in personal violence is 17.8 percent, compared with 32.4 percent in the five countries with combined person and property violence. In this paper, we are concerned with violence against persons only, as this is the form of violence included in most American research and in all of the Eurogang reports we will discuss. For comparative reasons, Junger-Tas et al. included ISRD data from Omaha, Nebraska, where person violence yielded a life-time prevalence rate of 48.2 percent and a last-year prevalence rate of 34 percent.

If we recognize the effect of adding property violence, and look at the person rates presented above for both ever and last-year prevalence, it seems fair to suggest that European self-report violence for the ages of 14–21 is quite modest. The Omaha comparison certainly suggests that. Across all reports, the male to female ratios of violence are in the neighbourhood of four to one where reported. The peak age bracket for violence is 14–15 in five countries, 14–17 in three countries and 16–17 in three countries. There were no reports of violence peaking at 18 or older.

One other set of data confirms the generally low level of violence in these general (non-gang) youth studies. The last-year rates are reported in all countries for the six offences against persons separately. In almost every case, the two items with the highest rates are carrying weapons and

engaging in riots or group fights in public. The reported rates for these highest offences ranged from below 10 percent to a high of 26.9 percent, but averaged only 14 percent for the highest item. Most single item rates for last-year prevalence were well below 10 percent and many in the 1–4 percent range.

These are very low rates indeed, even though youth violence levels are said to have increased in many European countries during the 1990s. The only reason the rates over the combined items were at 17.8 (persons) and 30.4 (persons plus property) for last-year prevalence is that those two rates were cumulative. That is, they were based on *any one or more* offences reported for the year. At the time of the ISRD research, European youths aged 14–21 were not engaged in very troublesome rates of violent offending (although male rates were certainly higher than female rates).

This summary suggests two contrasting contexts for gang violence in Europe. The first is there is not much fodder for the development of street gangs in Europe, if we believe that engaging in violence is a critical issue for engaging in gang activity. The second, however, is that research demonstrating even moderate levels of violence in European gangs should force criminologists to attend to gang delinquency and crime far more specifically than they have done to date. Fortunately, as we noted in the Introduction, the next ISRD study now under way in both Western and Eastern Europe includes the seven items from the Eurogang Program that operationalize that program's definition of street gangs. This should yield extensive prevalence and analytical data on gang versus non-gang crime and violence patterns.

The Eurogang definition and gang structures

A major advantage available to European street gang researchers is the opportunity to overcome the difficulties of the far more extensive American gang research history. Two examples are important to this paper. First, whereas American researchers have failed over almost a century to achieve agreement on a uniform definition of street gangs, the Eurogang participants have been able to settle on a consensus definition (see Klein 2002 and Klein and Maxson 2006 for a full description of the issues involved in achieving this consensus).

The Eurogang consensus nominal definition of street gangs

A street gang (or a troublesome youth group corresponding to a street gang elsewhere) is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose own identity includes involvement in illegal activity.*

* For those preferring not to use the word gang (*bande*, etc.), the phrase 'troublesome youth group' can be substituted.

1. 'durable' is a bit ambiguous, but at least several months can be used as a guideline. Many gang-like groups come together and dissipate within a few months. The durability refers to the group, which continues despite turnover of members.
2. 'street-oriented' implies spending a lot of group time outside home, work and school – often on the streets, in malls, in parks, in cars, and so on.
3. 'youth' can be ambiguous. Most street gangs are more adolescent than adult, but some include members in their twenties and even thirties. Most have average ages in adolescence or the early twenties.
4. 'illegal' generally means delinquent or criminal, not just bothersome.
5. 'identity' refers to the group, not the individual self-image.

This definition has been used in almost all of the European research reports mentioned in this article. In very broad terms, it 'works'. It is a minimalist approach, specifying five 'definers': durability, street orientation, youthfulness, group, and identity involving illegal behaviours. All other gang characteristics may be considered 'descriptor variables' rather than definers: patterns of age, gender and ethnicity; special indicia such as clothing, argot, tattoos, hand signals, emblems; structural issues such as sub-grouping, leadership, size, gang names.

Further, the Eurogang definition separates street gangs from other criminal groups such as prison gangs, motorcycle gangs, terrorist groups and adult criminal cartels and organizations. It also separates street gangs from the far more numerous formal and informal youth groups that feature in so much of pre-adolescent and adolescent life.

The second example of a European research advantage is comparative; it can make use of the Maxson–Klein gang typology only recently derived from the American experience but found also to be applicable to the European situation. Based upon the six structural characteristics of size, sub-grouping, age range, duration, territoriality and crime versatility, this typology yields five street gang forms that account for 75–95 percent of all American street gangs. Preliminary applications to European reports suggest that it applies there as well, although the five forms appear in different proportions from the US picture.

These five types – Traditional, Neo-Traditional, Compressed, Collective, and Specialty – are described elsewhere (Maxson and Klein 1995; Klein and Maxson 2006), as are their implications for both comparative research and the development of type-specific gang prevention and control programmes. We present here a brief review of how the structural types

and other descriptors apply to the gangs reviewed in this article.² The review is based on 15 of the reports included in the two existing Eurogang Program reports (Klein et al. 2001; Decker and Weerman 2005) and papers presented at the 7th Eurogang workshop, held in Albany, New York, in 2004. Some of the reports are about only one gang, and some cover a number of gangs. The six factors reviewed here can be extracted from most of these reports. Ethnographies are the most complete, whereas surveys of individual youth occasionally do not yield data on a gang's duration and size.

Gang types

The predominant form of gang in both Europe and the USA is the Compressed gang in the Maxson–Klein typology. It is predominantly an adolescent group of a few years' duration, ranging in size usually from 10 to 50 members. Its criminal behaviour pattern is versatile. Next most common in Europe are Specialty gangs, smaller in size but older in average age with a predominantly narrow criminal focus. Included would be skinheads and groups principally involved in robberies, assaults or drug distribution.

Traditional or Neo-traditional gangs,³ which are quite common in the USA, are as yet seldom reported in Europe. Examples have been described in Manchester, Oslo, Tuebingen and Kazan (Russia). They resemble the stereotypes of Crips and Bloods, Latin Kings and Black Gangster Disciples in the USA. They are large, multigenerational groups with denotable subgroups based on age or residence. They tend to be strongly territorial and versatile in crime patterns.

Ages

As may be surmised from the typology descriptions, European gang membership has primarily an adolescent or early adult character. Older ages are found particularly in the few Traditional and Neo-Traditional forms.

Size

In line with the typology descriptions, most European street gangs have 50 or fewer members, the exception primarily being in the Traditional and Neo-Traditional types.

² The cities involved in these reports include The Hague, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Bremen, Tuebingen, Oslo, Copenhagen, Kazan, Moscow, Genoa, Brussels, Paris, Manchester and Edinburgh.

³ In some European settings, these may alternatively be called Classical and Neo-Classical because the word 'Traditional' has a more formal connotation there than in the USA.

Duration

In most European settings, the development of street gangs has been so recent that groups with durations of more than 10–15 years have not had a chance to stabilize. Only in Kazan is there a report of groups exceeding 20 years' duration.

Gender

When explicitly reported, European gangs are predominantly or even exclusively male.⁴ Survey research tends to report higher female participation than do observational studies. In some cases, the researchers infer this male depiction but do not address it directly.

Ethnicity

Members of American gangs are used to hearing of Hispanic and black gangs, while less commonly of Asian or white. In Europe, the street gangs are also primarily composed of ethnic or national minorities, reflecting the immigration and refugee patterns of those countries. Indigenous street gangs are reported in Holland, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Russia and Italy, but the more common gangs are composed of Algerians, Moroccans, Turks, Indians, Pakistanis, Jamaicans, Chinese and Albanians, among others. It is social marginality, not specific ethnicity or race, that ties US and European gang memberships together.

In sum, it seems that European street gangs are quite varied along important structural lines, possibly excepting their principally male composition. The fact that they all fit well under the consensus definition of gangs and also are quite fully describable using the five-part Maxson–Klein typology happily suggests that the noted variety nevertheless permits reasonable generalizations about the nature of European gangs and their comparability to gangs in the USA and perhaps elsewhere.

European gangs and violent behaviour: Quantitative approaches

Comparative studies

Only two comparative studies have appeared, to our knowledge, in which survey data from a European and an American study were combined

⁴ Much of this reflects the Muslim culture to be found in gangs with Algerian, Moroccan, Turkish and Pakistani backgrounds.

(Huizinga and Schumann 2001; Esbensen and Weerman 2005; Weerman and Esbensen 2005). Both of these studies report, among many other things, on violence levels of European school youths in gangs or troublesome youth groups as compared with American students who report that they are in a gang.

Huizinga and Schumann used longitudinal data from a study in the US city of Denver and from a study in Bremen, Germany. The American sample consisted of 570 youths in high-risk neighbourhoods. The German sample of 380 youths was recruited among early school leavers who left school at the earliest possible moment legally, also a group with a higher risk. Both samples consisted equally of boys and girls, but they differed in that the respondents from the American sample were younger, 13 or 15 in the first survey wave, than those from the German sample, with a mean age of 16.6 in the first survey wave. In the American study, respondents were asked if they had belonged to a youth or street gang in the previous year. The Bremen study asked respondents if they belonged to a group or clique of friends and, if yes, if it was right to call this group a *bande*.

Huizinga and Schumann report results over four subsequent years of study. In both their studies, a substantial number of respondents had belonged to a gang (or *bande*) during these four years: 14 percent in the Denver study and 13 percent in the Bremen study. Gang members in both studies made a disproportionate contribution to the total volume of delinquency of all respondents. This was especially true for the category of violent offences. In the Bremen study, gang members accounted for 44 percent of all self-reported violent acts. In the Denver study, this contribution was even higher at 64 percent. Thus, in both studies, gang members had a disproportionate share in the violent acts committed by young people, but especially so in the United States. It is also the case that gang members in Denver had higher overall mean delinquency scores than those in Bremen. The mean delinquency level in Denver was 10 times higher for gang youth than for non-gang youth, whereas in Bremen it was only 3 times higher. Although Huizinga and Schumann do not report separate results for violence, they mention that similar findings are true for violence and property offences.

For the Bremen study, Huizinga and Schumann also compare mean delinquency scores for respondents in a gang, for respondents in a friendship clique that is rather delinquent, for those in a rather conforming clique, and for respondents who are not in a group. The results show that mean delinquency scores are highest for those in a gang, followed by those in a delinquent clique that is not called a *bande*. Those in a conforming clique have the lowest mean delinquency rate, followed by non-group respondents. Interestingly, the difference between those in a gang and those

in a delinquent clique is large for the category of violent offences but absent for property offences. For the latter category, respondents in a delinquent clique have on average even higher scores than those in a gang. These results suggest that the effect of gang membership in Germany (and possibly elsewhere) may be especially present for violence.

In the second comparative study, Esbensen and Weerman used data from two relatively large survey samples in the United States and The Netherlands. The American sample consisted of 5935 8th-grade public schools students in 11 cities throughout the United States. The students were predominantly 13, 14 or 15 years old. The Dutch sample used in this study came from the first wave of the NSCR (Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement) school study; this sample consisted of 1978 students who were in classes comparable to American 7th and 9th graders. These students came from The Hague and a few other cities in The Netherlands and were aged between 12 and 17, but on average 13 or 15 years old. Both samples were multi-ethnic and had a balanced distribution of boys and girls and the mean age was almost the same (13.8 in the American sample, 14.0 in the Dutch sample). The American study used a self-nomination technique and asked students if they were in a gang. The Dutch study adopted an earlier version of the Eurogang funnelling technique, a set of items in which students were asked if they belonged to an informal youth group, how long this group had been in existence, where this group was in the habit of hanging out, and if the group members engaged in illegal activities.

Esbensen and Weerman report that quite similar proportions of their respondents belonged to a gang or troublesome youth group (6 percent for the first wave of the Dutch study; 8 percent for the American study). For those in a gang and those outside such groups, mean scores for different categories of offending were calculated. For all categories, the ratio between the scores of those in a gang and those outside a gang were remarkably similar in both samples. Gang youths in the Dutch sample were 4.11 times more involved in violent offences than those outside a troublesome youth group (raw scores 2.30/0.56); this ratio was 4.26 in the American sample (raw scores 2.81/0.66). This result strongly suggests that gangs as measured in The Netherlands and the USA have a similar relationship, with an enhanced level of violent offending among those who belong to a gang.

Esbensen and Weerman also present results on the prevalence of different violent activities in the group as a whole. For the Dutch sample, assaults were reported for 95 percent of respondents in a gang; robberies were committed by other group members in 45 percent of cases. The data for the American sample show that gang fights took place in the groups of

91 percent of the gang respondents; 61 percent of gang respondents also reported robberies taking place. In short, in almost all of the gangs reported on by Dutch and American students, fighting was very common and robberies were committed by fellow gang youths of almost half (Dutch) or more than half (American) of the gang members. Violence in several forms was present in many of the troublesome youth groups and gangs in both The Netherlands and the United States. Clearly, in both cases, gang violence exceeded that among non-gang youth (as would be anticipated from the ISRD reports).

European studies

Recently, detailed quantitative results with regard to the violence of European gang youths compared with non-gang youths were presented at the Eurogang meeting in Albany, New York (Shashkin, 2004 Albany Workshop; Weerman, 2004 Albany Workshop). The first study is a relatively small pre-test of the Eurogang Youth Survey, conducted in two cities in Russia (see Salagaev et al. 2005). The second one is based on data from the second wave of the NSCR school study in the south-west of the Netherlands. The first wave of this study was used for the comparative study discussed earlier.

The Russian study was conducted on 371 students in the 7th and 9th grades, with ages ranging from 12 to 17 years, and with 51 percent boys and 49 percent girls. About 40 percent of the respondents came from Moscow, and 60 percent came from Kazan, a large city in Tatarstan and one of the first cities in Russia where violent gangs appeared. The study was carried out in six schools (three in each city) ranging from ordinary secondary schools to specialized lyceums and gymnasiums. The schools were also selected from geographically diverse areas of Moscow and Kazan, some located in the central districts of the cities and some in suburbs and the most deprived areas. The self-definition method (simply asking if someone is currently in a gang, or, in Russian, a *gruppировка*) was used as an indication of gang membership. Out of the total sample, 36 respondents (almost 10 percent) claimed gang membership.

The Dutch study (Weerman 2005) has been described earlier in this article. For the analysis of violence and gang membership, data from the second survey wave were used. This wave resulted in a sample of 1830 respondents (55 percent boys, 45 percent girls) in school classes comparable to American 8th and 10th grades, with ages ranging from 13 to 17 years. This time, an improved version of the Eurogang funnelling method was used to determine which respondents belonged to the gang. A set of increasingly detailed questions led respondents to indicate whether or

not they fitted within the definition of a gang or troublesome youth group: 150 respondents (about 8 percent of the total sample) appeared to be in a troublesome youth group or gang.

Both studies used self-report questions to investigate the prevalence of certain types of violence among gang members and non-gang youths during the previous year. The Russian study asked about more violent acts than the Dutch study, but did not analyse differences between boys and girls (owing to the low numbers in each category).

Table 1 shows clearly for both countries that youths who belong to gangs or troublesome groups commit violent offences remarkably more often than youths who do not belong to such groups. A large proportion (40–50 percent) of the Russian youths in a *gruppировка* have been involved in assaults and gang fights, as have more than 40 percent of the Dutch youths in troublesome youth groups. Substantial proportions of the Russian gang youths are involved in carrying a hidden weapon (more than 30 percent) and using weapons or force to get money or objects (almost 20 percent). Many of the Dutch gang youths are involved in serious assaults resulting in injuries (26 percent). Smaller but substantial proportions are found for Russian gang youths attacking someone with a weapon (more than 11 percent) and for Dutch gang youths committing a robbery (5 percent). These proportions are all much higher than the proportions

Table 1 Last-year prevalence of violent offences among gang and non-gang youths

	% of gang youths	% of non-gang members	Ratio of gang to non-gang members
<i>Russian study^a</i>			
Hit someone with the idea of hurting them	44.8	20.0	2.24
Been involved in gang fights	50.0	17.9	2.79
Carried a hidden weapon for protection	30.6	15.8	1.94
Attacked someone with a weapon	11.1	3.0	3.70
Used a weapon or force to get money or objects	19.4	2.7	7.19
<i>Dutch study^b</i>			
Fought on the street or hit someone	42.7	18.0	2.37
Fought or hit someone with an injury as result	26.0	5.7	4.47
Robbed someone or committed a robbery	5.3	0.5	10.60

^a $n = 371$ total, of which 36 in a gang.

^b $n = 1830$ total, of which 150 in a gang.

among respondents who are not in a gang. The ratios that are presented in the table indicate that the prevalence of the several violent offences among gang youths is about 2 to 10 times higher than among other youths. It appears that the more serious the violent offence, the higher the ratios between prevalence among gang youths versus non-gang youths. Assaults, fighting and only carrying a weapon are about 2 to 3 times more prevalent among gang youths, whereas committing a robbery is 7 (in the Russian sample) to over 10 (in the Dutch sample) times more prevalent.

In the Dutch study, ratios of gang versus non-gang members were calculated for boys and girls separately, as were ratios for gang members versus non-gang members with delinquent friends in order to assess gang violence beyond the delinquent peer effect (following the work of Bradshaw 2005, which will be described next). Table 2 presents these figures for the three violent offences that were covered in the Dutch study. The two columns on the left report the ratios of boys and girls for gang members versus non-gang members; the two columns on the right present boys' and girls' ratios for gang members versus those who were not in a gang but had delinquent friends.

Table 2 shows that there is a strong relationship for both sexes between being in a gang and committing violent offences. The strength of the relationship is somewhat stronger for boys than for girls for all three offences. The finding that the ratio of gang youths versus non-gang youths with delinquent peers is quite high indicates that, even when we control for having delinquent peers, gang membership is connected to more violence.

Table 2 Last-year prevalence ratios for gang members versus non-gang members in general and versus non-gang members with delinquent friends, by gender (Dutch study only)

	<i>Ratio of gang to non-gang youth in general</i>		<i>Ratio of gang to non-gang youth with delinquent friends</i>	
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Fought on the street or hit someone	2.41	1.82	1.79	1.09
Fought or hit someone with injury as result	4.66	3.67	2.73	1.74
Robbed someone or committed a robbery	10.14	6.67	6.45	3.33

Note: $n = 1830$ total, of which 99 boys and 51 girls in a gang/troublesome youth group.

All the differences in Table 2 are statistically significant, with only one exception: girls who are in a gang are not significantly more often involved in fighting and hitting than are non-gang girls with delinquent friends. For the other violent offences (wounding and robberies), however, there is still a substantially higher ratio for girls in gangs than for non-gang girls with delinquent friends.

These quantitative findings concord with the well-established relationship between gangs and violence in the United States. They suggest that in Russia and The Netherlands being in a gang or troublesome youth group is connected to higher prevalence figures for all kinds of violent offences. Also, when having delinquent friends is held constant, there is still a relationship between being in a gang and committing violent offences. This is in line with findings from US research that being in a gang has an effect on delinquency above and beyond the effect of delinquent peers on behaviour (see Battin et al. 1998; Thornberry et al. 2003).

About half of the gang youths in these studies fight or hit others, 20–30 percent have weapons and injure others, and smaller but substantial proportions use a weapon or commit a robbery. These prevalence figures are lower than one finds in US gangs (especially when it comes to weapons and robberies), but, within Europe, these are still substantial numbers when compared with non-gang youths. Interestingly, the results show that the relationship between violence and being in a gang gets stronger for more serious types of violent offences. The relationship is valid not only for boys but also for girls: the latter have clearly elevated levels of violence when they report being in a gang or troublesome youth group.

In an earlier study conducted in Scotland (Bradshaw 2005), results were found that are comparable to those of Weerman. Bradshaw used data from the second wave of the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime. The sample contained 4299 respondents from different types of schools, predominantly 13 years of age. Gang membership was measured by asking respondents if they went about with a group of friends that was larger than three and, if yes, if they would call this group a gang. In addition, stricter definitions of a gang were investigated by distinguishing a category of those respondents in a gang with a name or a sign and a category with both a name and a sign.

Bradshaw reports that almost 20 percent of the respondents indicated that they belonged to a gang; 3.5 percent belonged to a gang with a name or sign; and 3.3 percent were part of a gang with both a name and signs. Gang members had higher delinquency scores; offending was more varied and frequent among gang than non-gang respondents. This was also true for violent offending. Of those respondents who were in a gang (of any sort), the variety of committed violent offences was about two times greater

than among non-gang youth, and the frequency was about three times higher. Youths who were in the more restrictive gang categories had even higher scores on the violence indicators. The differences were statistically significant for the volume of violent offending: the mean score for youths in a gang without a name or sign was 3.19; for those in a gang with a name or sign the mean was 5.69; and the mean for respondents in a gang with both a name and a sign was 7.13.

Bradshaw also compared mean delinquency scores for those who belonged to any type of gang with youths who were not in a gang but had delinquent friends. Respondents who were in a group of friends they called a gang had mean variety and volume scores for violent offending that were about twice as high as those for youths with only delinquent friends. Non-gang youths without any delinquent friends had the lowest scores for violence. As in the Weerman study, these results indicate that being in a gang is related to committing more violence, even when having delinquent friends is taken into account. It suggests that gang membership has an added effect beyond the effect of having delinquent friends, as has been reported in the USA (Battin et al. 1998; Thornberry et al. 2003). Thus, whether in Europe or the USA, the group processes that distinguish gangs from other youth groups seem directly related to higher levels of delinquency, generally, and to higher levels of violence in particular.

European gangs and violent behaviour: Qualitative approaches

Where there is violence, there are victims. Current European gang research reports seem more sensitive to this truism than has generally been the case with American gang research. This seems equally true of the motives for gang violence, motives that it turns out are directly related to the type of victim. The materials to follow are extracted from 19 articles in the two Eurogang books (Klein et al. 2001; Decker and Weerman 2005), as well as from reports at the 2004 Eurogang Workshop in Albany. Not all reports cover each issue discussed here – what has been reported is what we can offer – but the coverage is sufficient to reveal broad patterns worthy of attention. In most, but not all, cases, the data appear in ethnographic or observational studies rather than surveys, as in the previous section. The data refer to four gang violence topics: weaponry, comparative levels of gang violence, the motives for violence, and the most common victims of violence. As background, it might be useful to recall that, among the hundreds of reports on gang violence in the USA, the following conclusions seem true:

- Firearms are ubiquitous. Over 90 percent of American gang homicides involve guns.
- Levels of violence (and lethality) have grown measurably among American gangs (Klein and Maxson 2006), although there is still variation between low levels of acts of violence in most gangs and very high levels among a few gangs.
- Motives for American gang violence are most often noted as either inter-gang rivalries and territorial disputes or violence associated with drug marketing. Other types – intra-gang disputes and robberies, for example – have received some attention but not much emphasis.
- Victims of American gang violence are predominantly other gang members (both from rival gangs and from one's own gang).

Use of weapons

In Rotterdam (Van Gemert 2001), Kazan (Salagaev 2001) and Oslo (Lien 2005), firearms are explicitly discussed as used by gang members. Other reports explicitly deny the presence of guns, and others simply do not refer to the issue. The most common form of violence reported is physical fighting, with eight direct reports. In another four cases, emphasis is placed on the gangs' use of the *threat* of violence to achieve their goals. Two of these are in Holland (Van Gemert 2001; Van Gemert and Fleisher 2005), one in Russia (Salagaev et al. 2005) and one in Scotland (Smith, 2004 Albany Workshop). Clearly, gun violence is not a major feature of European street gang violence. A report from Manchester (Medina, 2004 Albany Workshop) suggests a low but growing level of gun violence, but this is the only such report to date.

Levels of violence

The Eurogang reports also include discussions of the level of gang violence based on the authors' observations and non-quantitative assessments. These views encapsulate the frequency, severity and lethality of the violence observed and, by way of summary, we have characterized them as low, medium and high levels.

Three reports deal with more than one gang. Significantly, each describes different levels of violence among the several gangs, as one would expect. The three reports are from The Hague and Rotterdam (Van Gemert 2001), Manchester (Mares 2001) and Oslo (Lien 2001), with low, medium or high levels described. Focusing on all the studies, there is no report from the Eurogang authors that denies the presence of violence, whether low, medium or high.

The only fully high levels of violence offered in the articles are in two reports from Russia (Salagaev 2001; Salagaev et al. 2005). In particular,

levels of gang violence are especially high in the city of Kazan, a location in which street gangs have grown and changed from neighbourhood groups to large traditional gangs to adult criminal gangs heavily involved in rackets and extortion.⁵ The analogy with Chicago's worst 'supergangs' seems appropriate. In the other 11 reports that attempt to characterize gang violence, we judge the reported levels to be about equally divided between low and medium levels, all of them *clearly* below the pattern described for Kazan.⁶

So far, then, combining the information on weapons and violence levels, it seems reasonable to conclude that levels of firearm use and of violence, although varied, do not approach the levels attributed to American gangs. For instance, reports of gang-related homicides are almost entirely absent from the Eurogang studies. The most persistent violence reported is of physical fighting, sometimes described as 'with the fists'.

Motives for violence

Of the 19 reports, 15 explicitly address the question of why the gangs or gang members engage in violence. This is a far higher level of attention to violence motives than appears in the American literature. Five types of motive emerge from these reports.

- Territoriality and inter-gang rivalries are very prominent as explanations of violence in American gang research. In the Eurogang reports, these receive acknowledgement in nine of the reports, get no mention in six others, and are explicitly denied in five more (including verbal reports at the Albany Workshop). The denials are primarily from Dutch research. To date, one would have to exercise caution in generalizing from the emphasis on territoriality in American studies to the situation in the newer European setting. Reports of inter-gang fighting, so far, come from Manchester, Oslo, Kazan, Paris, Tuebingen and Edinburgh.
- Revenge as a motive for violence is reported in Norway, Germany and Italy, usually in conjunction with ethnically based honour preservation. This is independent of inter-gang revenge. Some American writings also stress the honour function (e.g., Horowitz 1983), but it is not a common theme, any more than it is in Europe.
- Violence as an intra-gang control mechanism receives only three mentions. It may be a matter of retaliation or a response to 'grassing' ('finking' in American parlance; that is, reporting to the police on one's own gang).

⁵ The pattern in this city, since seen in other Russian cities as well, has come to be known as 'The Kazan Phenomenon'.

⁶ Readers may be familiar with a much earlier report from Scotland, which also described a fiercely violent street gang scene involving what we would call traditional gangs (Patrick 1973).

- Violence in support of or as a necessary component of crime is reported in 10 instances. Robbery and extortion are the two crime types principally involved, the first almost by definition and the second more commonly involving threats of violence. This might be classified as ‘instrumental’ as opposed to ‘expressive’ violence. However, the street gang world is one in which power, reputation and group status are very important, so that violent acts that might normally be labelled expressive are in fact quite instrumental to achieving individual and gang goals. Violence, be it by act, threat or the content of gang member conversation, is central to providing the sense of camaraderie that features in gang life.
- Identity, for lack of a better word, is also a strong feature of the street gang world. Individuals seek identity, in part, by joining gangs. Gang members establish identity or status through violent talk or behaviour. Gangs establish identity and reputation in part through their involvement in violence. This issue is explicitly mentioned in 13 of the Eurogang reports in explaining levels of violence in the street gangs. Eight countries and multiple city locations contribute to this compilation in various forms. Most common is violence as a source of gang cohesion. In five instances, the establishment of overt masculinity is reported. Other mentions include ethnic power, individual reputation and respect, and, in only one report, initiation into the gang (a feature heavily emphasized in American reports). In one way or another, each of these narrower motives for violence has to do with establishing a special identity for gangs and for gang members. Violence to achieve identity supersedes the use of violence for purposes of criminal activity.

In sum, then, qualitative research suggests that the purposes of European gang violence appear to be several, and vary from location to location. Some reports include several motive categories (e.g. Lien 2001; Weitekamp et al. 2005; Tertilt 2001; Van Gemert 2001). Others mention only one. Nowhere is gang violence characterized as ‘senseless’ or ‘random’, as it is so often in media representations. And nowhere is gang violence linked to drug trafficking, as is so often reported by the American media. A more intentional and focused attention to the functions of gang violence should be urged on those planning either quantitative or qualitative comparative studies between gangs, cities and countries.

Victims of violence

In all but five of the Eurogang reports, there is mention of the victims of gang violence. Among these, anywhere from one to three categories of victim are noted. Instances of multiple victim types usually result from the listing of more than one violence motive. Not surprisingly, violence motive and victim type are closely related in many instances. In eight reports, other gangs are the reported victims. Almost all of these are from reports citing

territoriality as a violence motive. As in the US literature as well as in media reports, territoriality and inter-gang hostilities are seen as connected.

In five cases, the victims are local businesses. These are connected to extortion in most cases and to robbery in some. The quintessence is found in reports from Kazan (Salagaev 2001; Salagaev et al. 2005) where the street gangs have developed into sophisticated racketeering entities. An interesting contrast is provided by Van Gemert (2001), who reports on three Dutch gangs. In one case, robbery is related to initiation into the gangs. In the second, girls known to the assailants are the robbery victims, and in the third the victims are local businesses. This violence is more by threat than by deed, and is undertaken in all three cases to establish reputation (the identity motive, in our terms) as well. Kazan's level of violence is high; the Dutch level is generally low to medium.

A third category of victim is specifically indigenous youth, that is, youth native to the country involved (occasionally including skinheads). This is, of course, a reflection in part of the immigrant or refugee background of many of the gangs. There are descriptions of local Norwegian, French and German youth victimized by Pakistani, Turkish, Algerian and Russian-German gangs (*Aussiedlers*, see Weitekamp et al. 2005). This is above and beyond local indigenous gangs targeting members of their own nationalities, and also reciprocally targeting non-native minority gang members. These inter-ethnic hostilities are clearly more common than are inter-racial gang hostilities in the USA.

Other victim categories mentioned in the Eurogang reports are singular: girls, local residents, public agencies and fellow members of the gang. There is no patterning in these. Other gangs, businesses and cross-ethnic or national victims are the rule, depending very much on the nature of the violence motives. This reciprocal motive-victim relationship, as we noted, is perhaps the most significant characteristic of European gang violence.

What is missing from all these reports is a detailed depiction of the nature of the violent incidents. It would take very focused interviewing to arrive at such a depiction, although extensive street observation (and listening) can also be helpful. The most extensive descriptions in the American gang literature were derived from detailed coding and analysis of homicide and assault investigation reports by the police (Maxson 1998; Maxson et al. 2000, reported in Klein and Maxson 2006). Here, as noted earlier, the character of the assailants, of the victims and of the physical setting of the acts allowed detailed comparisons of gang and non-gang violence. An analysis of this sort would be very useful in understanding European gang violence as determined by different ethnic populations and national settings.

Conclusion

Within the contexts of American gang violence and European non-gang youth violence, this article has tried to provide as systematic a view as possible of the relationship between European street gangs and violent behaviour. We used reports produced under the aegis of the Eurogang Program, based on quantitative as well as qualitative data. All of these reports dealt with youth groups that fitted well into the Eurogang consensus definition of a street gang and that were describable in terms of the Maxson–Klein street gang typology. The reports make it clear that it is not feasible to deny that Europe has youth groups that can be called street gangs (although some might prefer the term ‘troublesome youth’ groups for some of them); such groups exist and their various patterns are describable. Eurogang Program members have identified 50 cities that have gangs in 16 countries.

The data reported here suggest some important conclusions about the relationship between European street gangs and violent behaviour. First of all, the level, severity and lethality of youth violence are, generally speaking, lower in European countries than in the United States. This holds for gang members and non-gang members alike.

Second, once this general level of violence is taken into account, gang membership appears to have the same pernicious effect on behaviour for European youth as it does for American youth. Compared with non-members, gang members have substantially higher rates of violence, engage in more serious forms of violence and are more apt to use weapons.

Third, our review of qualitative reports of European gangs revealed that the nature of violence is varied and differentially motivated. The level of violence exists at low and medium levels, with the one exception of a highly violent gang situation in Kazan, Russia. The most common form of violence in European gangs appears to be physical fighting. In a few reports the presence of firearms was discussed, but gun violence and gang-related homicides are not major features in European street gangs. Inter-gang rivalries were mentioned in some of the reports, but in many cases territoriality seems to be absent in European gangs. Other motives were retaliation, violence as a tool of criminal activity, maintaining honour and respect, and status preservation. In general, violence appeared to be an important vehicle for establishing a special identity, a motive that seems to be more important than instrumental reasons to use force.

Fourth, as is true in American studies, gang membership has an impact on violence over and above the impact of association with delinquent peers, even highly delinquent peers. Gang membership appears to

elevate the level of violence well above the baseline that exists in each of these countries.

Overall, perhaps what is most impressive about these results is their near universality. As we have pointed out, there is diversity in the European gang scene with respect to gang structure, level and type of violence, and so forth. Nevertheless, in all cases there is a gang effect on violent behaviour. This holds across a diverse set of European countries that probably have more differences than similarities. It is observed in both quantitative and qualitative studies and in both comparative and single-country studies. When the American scene is added to the story, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that membership in street gangs is strongly associated with violent behaviour. In a sense, the only remaining question concerns identifying the strength, not the presence, of the association.

Although the similarity of the findings across countries is impressive, this summary is not without its limitations. These conclusions derive largely from unplanned comparisons and from single studies brought together after-the-fact so that patterns have been inferred rather than directly tested. It seems appropriate, then, to launch deliberately planned, multi-site comparative research on street gangs in Europe.⁷ This is now a distinct possibility because of two major accomplishments of the Eurogang Program over the past 10 years. First, a consensus definition of street gangs has been achieved and applied broadly. Second, a set of research instruments – surveys, ethnographic guidelines, and more – have been established, pre-tested and translated into several languages. These are available through the Program's website at www.umsl.edu/~ccj/eurogang/euroganghome.htm. A major, multi-method, multi-site research programme, or scaled-down versions of it, can now be initiated by willing researchers and policy makers. The patterns of gangs and gang violence reported in this article can serve as relevant hypotheses for such comprehensive research. The addition of studies like this will offer numerous advantages. By using identical measures and comparable methods the variability in the gang effect on violent behaviour in different countries can be measured more precisely. In turn, that allows for the systematic investigation of the cultural and structural characteristics that are associated with that variability. Knowledge of why gangs have larger or smaller impacts on violent behaviour would improve both our theoretical understanding of the processes by which gangs influence behaviour and our approaches to preventing and reducing gang violence.

⁷ And elsewhere, for that matter. Recent developments in Central America and Africa strongly suggest the need for similar comparative work there.

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