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Abstract

News reports of an escalating youth gang problem are frequent in current Canadian media. However, empirical study of factors contributing to youth gang affiliation, particularly in regards to protective factors that may be targeted in intervention and prevention efforts is lacking, especially in Canadian populations. This study was initiated as an exploratory study to examine the relationship between degrees of gang affiliation and measures of social/emotional competency, with a view to identifying a tool that could possibly be utilized to guide intervention planning efforts. The relationship with group affiliation, as well as the relationship to measures of aggression were also included to lend further depth to the analysis. The target population was youth between the ages of 12 to 15 years old who may have been at earlier (lesser degree and more transient) stages of gang affiliation.

Data for this study were collected in self-report survey format from 109 youth between the ages of 12 and 15 years of age from several urban Saskatchewan schools. Correlational analysis was performed to investigate the relationships between group and gang affiliation on the BarOn EQ-i: YV (BarOn & Parker, 2000), and the Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992). Significant relationships were found between gang affiliation and the BarOn EQ-i: YV Interpersonal and Adaptability composites, and Total EQ scores, as well as with the Physical Aggression subscale of the Aggression Questionnaire. Differences in relationships emerged when the sample was separated by gender. There was a lack of significant relationship found between degree of group (non-gang) affiliation and gang affiliation amongst respondents in this study. Significant correlations were found between degree of group affiliation and the BarOn EQ-i: YV and

between group affiliation and the Aggression Questionnaire results. Independent sample T-tests were utilized to investigate gender differences, with significant findings noted. An ANOVA was performed to assess for differences in the social/emotional competency and aggression measures, between outlier groups on the group and gang affiliation measures, with significant findings of between group differences.

While the BarOn EQ-i: YV emerges as a potentially valuable tool for the identification of alterable characteristics related to youth gang affiliation, the results of this study are preliminary in nature. Limitations of study design, measures, and sample group are identified, along with recommendations for future research.

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