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「少女參與群黨的狀況」研究
A Study on Girls in Gangs



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Summary Report

The problem of youth gangs in Hong Kong has always been a concern. In 1993, the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (the Federation) conducted a thorough study on the possible factors which might contribute to the youth of Hong Kong joining juvenile gangs. As new townships developed over the years, the problem of gangs in these densely populated areas drew further scrutiny. Accordingly, in 2000, we conducted another study on youth gangs in new town developments. Other youth services groups, scholars, and community organizations have been engaged, over the past decade, in their own investigations regarding various issues including the emergence of youth gangs, their culture, acts of deviant behaviour, as well as public perceptions of them. These related studies provide valuable data for an enhanced understanding of the problem of youth gangs in Hong Kong.

However, previous studies seldom focused on “females” as their subjects and there have been limited studies on the phenomena of girls in gangs. In 2001, Dr. T W Lo conducted a survey with all Youth Outreach Teams and Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres in Hong Kong for information on the membership structure and distribution of local gangs. 109 questionnaires were completed and returned. Among the 3,587 gang members surveyed, 94% were male and only 6% female. The figures showed that female gang members were a significant minority.

In contrast, the latest figures collected by the Federation in 2005 present a different picture. Of the 484 gang members contacted by two Youth Outreaching Teams of the Federation, 84, or more than 15%, were females. Data from the above mentioned studies, taken together with information from field worker’s observations, suggest that the involvement of girls in gangs merits attention.

What is the current situation regarding young girls becoming members of gangs? Is there an upward trend? What are the features and causes of concern? The Federation, increasingly concerned about this issue, has now undertaken to examine this area of juvenile delinquency through an in-depth study. This Study was conducted through (1) An opinion survey of girls involved in gang activities; (2) In-depth interviews with girls in gangs; and (3) Interviews with educators and specialists. It is hoped that this study will provide a clearer picture of the issues

surrounding girls in gangs and that it will result in specific recommendations for relevant authorities concerned with these issues.

In this study, "girls" refer to females who are below the age of 21 and who have been members of juvenile gangs. Gangs, as used in this study, consist of the following features: (1) Having stable groupings with regular gatherings; (2) Exhibiting deviant behaviour such as vandalism, bullying and fighting; (3) Affiliated with triad sub-culture or triad societies.

In this study, data revealing the phenomena of girls being gang members was collected mainly from questionnaires and case studies. To facilitate data collection, we targeted only the service recipients of two Youth Outreach Teams of the Federation. One of the teams serves in Tsuen Wan and Kwai Chung ("Tsuen Kwai"), and the other serves in Sai Kung and Wong Tai Sin ("Sai Wong"). Therefore, this study only presents the situation in these two geographical areas and does not cover the whole of Hong Kong.

The questionnaire survey was conducted between late May and June 2005, and was accomplished by the social workers of two Youth Outreach Teams (Tsuen Kwai and Sai Wong) making contact with suitable service recipients. 70 questionnaires were successfully completed; 55 in face-to-face meetings and 15 completed by telephone conversation.

In addition case studies were conducted between mid June and July 2005 investigating the causes, behavioural features and their perception of those who take part in gangs. With the assistance of our two Youth Outreach Teams, interviewees who had completed questionnaires in the first round were invited to take part in the in-depth interviews so that they could share feelings and experiences about their life in gangs. 18 participants interviewed met at least one of the following criteria: (1) was an active member of a gang; (2) was affiliated with triad gang members; (3) assumed a role in her gang; (4) took part in deviant behaviour.

At the same time, in order to further understand the phenomena and features of girls in gangs and seek comments on currently available services, our study was supplemented by interviews with educators and specialists on the subject. Interviews were conducted with scholars, youth outreach social workers, educational practitioners, police officers and government officials. Educators and specialists gave their views on girls joining gangs and made suggestions for improvements in the

services and facilities provided.

In this chapter, the results of our survey are summarized for discussion and conclusions drawn with relevant recommendations.

Summary of the Research Findings

A. Results of Questionnaire Survey:

Based on the data collected from the 70 successfully completed questionnaires, the results are categorized into 6 areas: (1) The respondents' perception of their families; (2) The respondents' perception of their schools; (3) Membership in gangs; (4) Reasons for joining gangs; (5) Taking part in deviant behaviour; and (6) The respondents' perception to being part of a gang.

1. Perception of their families:

Most of the respondents lived with their parents and families. When asked about their relationship with their father and mother, the respective average scores exceeded the median of 5 (5.26 & 6.93 respectively), on a scale of 0-10. Besides, most of the respondents were happy living with their families, scoring 5.85, out of possible 10.

2. Perception of their schools:

Most of the respondents found the secondary school curriculum impractical and they had little interest in going to school. The average scores for these two aspects were below the median (4.72 & 4.41 respectively), on a scale of 0-10.

3. Membership in gangs:

Most of the respondents (54 respondents) were a part of gangs that could be categorized as "mixed group" i.e. with male and female members and only 4 belonged to an "all-female group". 3 of them indicated that they were the leaders of their own gangs. As to whether they were the "core" or "influential" member of the gang, the average scores are below median (4.85 & 4.75 respectively), on a scale of

0-10.

Conversely, more respondents identified themselves as being of “triad society affiliation” (20 respondents) or “peripheral followers” (34 respondents), with only 2 admitting to being “triad society members”.

4. Reasons for joining gangs:

Most respondents regarded “feeling good to hang around in this circle” (40 respondents), “having poor relationship with family” (18 respondents) or “dating my boyfriend” (14 respondents) as the compelling reasons for their joining gangs.

5. Taking part in deviant behaviour:

Most respondents have taken part in group assaults / fights (46 respondents), thefts / shoplifting (36 respondents) or illicit dealings led by gang leaders (34 respondents). A number of them had sexual activities as well, either voluntarily (32 respondents) or against their will (10 respondents).

6. Perception to being part of a gang:

Most respondents have taken part in gang activities for over two years (44 respondents). The majority regarded their life in gangs as happy (46 respondents). 1 out of 3 said they would still be a part of a gang if they were given the choice again.

B. Results of Case Interviews:

According to the 18 case studies conducted, results can be categorized into the following 7 areas: (1) Reasons for joining; (2) Membership in gangs; (3) Features of girls’ participation in gangs; (4) Emerging phenomenon; (5) Gender roles; (6) Reasons for leaving; and (7) Perception of gangs.

1. Reasons for joining gangs:

The reasons for joining gangs can be classified into the following: (1) Personal factors; (2) Family factors; (3) School factors; (4) Peer factors and (5) Environmental factors.

At the personal level, the interviewees said it looked "smart" being part of a gang. For girls, getting protection and free entertainment in the company of gang members were the major attributes.

At the family level, many felt out of place with their family due to poor relationships with parents, marital problems between parents or excess family pressure. As a result, they did not like staying home and preferred hanging out with gang members.

As for their schools, the interviewees said being forced to attend classes made it more likely for them to misbehave, as they could not get along with their teachers and had little interest in going to school. Those who were suspended from attending classes had more time to take part in gang activities.

At the peer level, many of them became gang members after they had met boyfriends or friends with gang backgrounds and became connected with other gang members.

The environment also plays a part. Public housing estates are a likely breeding ground for youth gangs. Many of the interviewees got "hooked" when they lived or frequented these areas and eventually became part of the groups.

2. Membership in gangs:

The membership in gangs can be understood from two aspects: (1) Structure of groups; and (2) Gender roles.

- (1) Structure of groups: "Mixed groups" are predominantly a mix of boys and girls. There are also "all-female groups".
- (2) Gender roles: Most girls interviewed assume the role of being either the "wife" or "little sister" of male group members. Images as being "big sister" or "fighting girl" are emerging. It shows that female members are taking on more aggressive / specific roles within the gangs.

3. Features of girls' participation in gangs:

Six features can be drawn from the interviews of the 18 cases. They are: (1)

Frequent “group switching”; (2) Highly involved in love affairs; (3) Enjoying free entertainment; (4) Gossip and jealousy; (5) “Boy hits boy, girl hits girl”; and (6) Rationalisation of deviant behaviour.

- (1) Frequent “group switching”: Most girls interviewed do not stay in one group for long. They switch from one group to another, because of: (i) changing boyfriends; (ii) bored of sticking to one group for a long time; (iii) escaping from home and contact with family; (iv) the fact that most girls are not “hooked” onto triad gangs and are free to go as they wish.
- (2) Highly involved in love affairs: It is common that girls date or have sexual relationships with male members within the gangs.
- (3) Enjoying free entertainment: Girls often get free entertainment when being a part of a gang.
- (4) Gossip and jealousy: Gossip and jealousy are frequent among girls in gangs and there are frequent disagreements between them.
- (5) “Boy hits boy, girl hits girl”: There is an unwritten rule of fighting among gangs, that is: boys only hit boys, girls only hit girls. Girls usually assault each other by slapping others on the face, scratching with their nails or by pulling the others hair. Besides, some interviewees regard fighting as a way to vent their emotions or even gain pleasure from it.
- (6) Rationalisation of deviant behaviour: Deviant behaviour is deemed very common and rationalised among the female members. Moreover, girls in gangs are usually associated with drug sales and street fights.

4. Emerging phenomena:

The following are emerging phenomena as illustrated by the responses received during 18 case studies: (1) Female leadership; (2) Fighting girls (3) Cross-district activities; (4) Potential risks; and (5) Awareness of self-protection.

- (1) Female leadership: There are female leaders in gangs. As a leader, the interviewee said she should be able to fight as well as appear to be mature in order to protect her followers and also to avoid losing face.

- (2) Fighting girl: Girls who like fighting not only keep themselves fit by repetitive exercise, but also assault female members outside on behalf of their own gangs, to be eventually dubbed as a “fighting girl”.
- (3) Cross-district activities: Girls easily acquaint themselves with members of other gangs through ICQ on the Internet, which increases their mobility and thus facilitates the appearance of cross-district networks.
- (4) Potential risks: Girls in gangs are faced with the potential risks of being lured into prostitution, sexually assaulted or raped.
- (5) Awareness of self-protection: The interviewees believed they could protect themselves by keeping a clear head or being able to fight in order to survive in gangs.

5. Gender Role:

According to the interviewees, gangs are still male-dominated. Female members believe they must know how to protect their reputation so as to avoid being rejected or despised.

Male-dominance: There is no equality in gangs that are predominantly ruled by men. Women are seen as subordinate or mere ornaments. Female members believe there is a clear hierarchy between male and female, that is, men are to show off and women are to be protected.

Girls' perspective: To survive in gangs, female members believed they should stay away from promiscuity in order to protect their reputation and avoid being despised.

6. Reasons for Leaving:

The reasons for leaving gang groups can be classified into the following: (1) Being fed up with the life in gangs; (2) Marriage or pregnancy; (3) Feeling it is a waste of time; (4) Dispelling family worries; and (5) Knowing there is no future in gangs.

- (1) Being fed up with the life in gangs: Some interviewees became fed up with their life and decided to leave the gang and turn over a new leaf.

- (2) Marriage or pregnancy: Some had settled down with a man or given birth and decided to leave the gang.
- (3) Feeling it is a waste of time in gangs: Some felt they had wasted time fooling around with gangs and left with regret.
- (4) Dispelling family worries: Some withdrew from gang activities to dispel family worries.
- (5) No future: Some believed they had no future as a female in the male-dominated gang circle.

7. Perception of Gangs:

Perceptions of gangs for the interviewees were viewed from two aspects: (1) The meaning of being gang members; and (2) Their aspirations.

- (1) The meaning of being gang members: Most had a positive view of their gang membership. They regarded their gang as a second family, which provided care and shelter from life's problems. On the other hand, some regarded their gang negatively, as a trap that led people astray.
- (2) Aspirations: Their aspirations include completing Form 5 education, working hard for future savings and marrying a rich husband. Some of them however dared not have expectations for the future.

C. Interviews with Educators and Specialists:

Two observations can be drawn from interviews with educators and specialists including scholars, outreach social workers, education practitioners, police officers and government officials: (1) Features of young girls taking part in gangs; and (2) Comments on existing services and facilities.

1. Features of young girls taking part in gangs:

There are 10 features that can be drawn from the interviews with educators and specialists. They are: (1) The trend of girls' participation in gangs seems to be

increasing; (2) Form 2 is the most vulnerable period for girls; (3) Girl gangs are more likely to congregate in schools or shopping malls; (4) The emergence of the 'all' girl gang; (5) The characteristics of female leaders; (6) High mobility among girl gang members; (7) Participation in drug sales and assaults; (8) Complicated relationships within gang groups; (9) Girls are more emotional and liable to gossip; and (10) Girls are less persistent in gang participation.

- (1) The trend of girls' participation in gangs seems to be increasing: According to the experts, gangs were once a male phenomenon and girls' participation was minimal. As society became more equalitarian, the social gap between men and women began to blur. At about the same time, the emergence of female participation in gangs became more prevalent. However, there is still a tradition of subservience of females to males in gangs, as men are still dominant in terms of their numbers and authority.
- (2) Form 2 is the most vulnerable period for girls: Educational practitioners pointed out that many girls go off track in Form 2. As Form 1 is the critical year for students to settle in secondary school life, schools usually pay more attention during this period. In the same way, Form 3 is another critical period as far as schools are concerned regarding the future career choices of students. It is at this crucial time that the well being of Form 2 students may be overlooked. As a result, some vulnerable female students are liable to fall prey to certain types of boys, and thereby become associated with gangs.
- (3) Girl gangs are more likely to congregate in schools or shopping malls: Girl gangs usually make their presence felt in schools or shopping malls because they seem to prefer the security in schools to gather there, or to go shopping or take the opportunity to meet boys in malls. Girls in gangs are usually more mature than boys of the same age and are not shy of dating older guys. They are liable to be aggressive and may bully junior members.
- (4) The emergence of independent girl gangs: According to experts, while most girl gangs are connected with triad societies, an increasing number of them have no triad background. These groups are generally overbearing and more or less bear the same features as male gangs in the way they behave and solve problems.

- (5) The characteristics of female leaders: According to youth work practitioners, the leaders of girl gangs seem to be independent, presentable and eloquent. They have the ability to fight to protect their turf and have a wide network of contacts. These attributes are important for them to remain influential within the gang, protect fellow members and be the intermediary for members looking for free entertainment.
- (6) High mobility among girl gang members: As information technology advances, young people nowadays can easily extend their social circles through the Internet. They sometimes come across unscrupulous people on the Net. Once girls get hooked onto gang members, they go out with them which then increase their mobility.
- (7) Participation in drug sales and assaults: According to experts, triad societies usually make use of girl gang members to commit crimes, such as drug sales and assaults. In addition, girls quarrel more easily with each other, and when it happens, it usually turns violent. The triad members feel that the girls can sort out their problems amongst themselves without them having to get involved.
- (8) Complicated relationships within gang groups: The girls tend to get involved with boys in gangs. In order to survive, a female gang member may go out with 7 to 8 members at different times in a male gang of 10. Some girls had even traded their bodies for power or attention from male members, believing that it is the price they have to pay to hang out with gangs.
- (9) Girls are more emotional and tend to gossip more: Some experts point out that it is more difficult to deal with girls than boys. This may be because girls are more emotional and erratic than boys. Secondly, being more sensitive, girls tend to care about what others think of them and do not easily reveal details of personal affairs with others.
- (10) Girls are less persistent in gang participation: Girls are less persistent than boys in staying with the gang and quit for different reasons. As females have little prospects of moving up the hierarchy within a gang, many leave for a non-gang related future. Some girls quit when they became involved in a serious relationship or when they gave birth.

2. Comments on existing services and facilities:

The interviewed experts raised the following comments and suggestions:

- (1) The extent of service areas outstripped the existing capacities of the outreach teams: Following a restructuring of services, 16 District Youth Outreaching Teams were set up in Hong Kong. In light of the extensive scope of services, it is very important for each team to work with various Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres across the community. In the current situation, there are difficulties in providing efficient services.
- (2) Suggested "peer counselling" for problem students and better outcomes for schools cooperating with non-governmental organizations: According to education practitioners, some schools provided "peer counselling" to problem students by assigning a senior student who assumed the role of a mentor. They provided the problem student in question a role model of the same sex to follow. The experts believed that greater cooperation between schools and non-governmental organizations helped achieve better results and this was the attitude which should be adopted among the different organisations / bodies.
- (3) Difficulties in reaching out to girls exhibiting deviant behaviour who hung around in friends' homes: Many girls exhibiting deviant behaviour hang around in friends or boyfriend's homes rather than on the streets, which makes it difficult for the outreach teams to provide help.
- (4) Comparatively fewer vocational choices for girls exhibiting deviant behaviour: According to youth work practitioners, the job market allows for more choices for boys than girls. Girls are usually confined to positions having age restrictions, such as salespersons, waitresses and beauticians. Vocational choices for girls remained limited.
- (5) Insufficient recreational facilities for girls: An interviewed expert pointed out that the existing recreational facilities in the community neglected the needs of girls. Most basketball and soccer fields catered to boys, and girls are not encouraged to take advantage of such facilities.
- (6) Learning from overseas experiences in setting up "Youth Clinics" providing health and legal education for juvenile delinquents: In dealing with these

problems, some countries set up "Youth Clinics" which provide relevant health and legal education to juvenile delinquents, with an aim to helping disturbed young people achieve a healthier future.

Discussion

1. Latest figures from the Study of girls joining gangs, taking part in deviant behaviour, taking on specific roles within the gangs and the emergence of the "all-female group", indicates that the participation of girls in gangs appears to be increasing.

From the following observations of the Study, including the latest figures of girls joining gangs, taking part in deviant behaviour, taking on specific roles within the gangs, and the emergence of the "all-female group", indicates that the participation of girls in gang related activities appears to be increasing. Further studies are required to be conducted to grasp the latest phenomena of gangs and girls with the aim to provide appropriate, timely intervention.

- (1) The latest figures of girls joining gangs: In 2001, Dr. T. W. Lo conducted a survey with all Youth Outreaching Teams and Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres in Hong Kong for information on the membership structure and distribution of local gangs. 109 questionnaires were completed and returned. Among the 3,587 gang members surveyed, 94% were male and 6% were female. The figures showed that female gang members were a significant minority.

Conversely, the latest figures provided by the Federation in 2005 presented a different picture. Of the 484 gang members contacted by two Youth Outreaching Teams of the Federation, 84, or more than 15%, were females. Data from the above-mentioned study, together with information from field workers' observations, suggest that the involvement of girls in gangs deserves increased attention.

- (2) The deviant behaviours of girls in gangs: According to the survey, most respondents have taken part in group assaults / fights (46 respondents), thefts / shopliftings (36 respondents) or illicit dealings led by gang leaders (34 respondents). In addition, from the interviews of the 18 cases, deviant

behaviour is deemed quite common and rationalised by female members. Moreover, girls in gangs are usually associated with drug sales and street fights.

In the past, girls were presented as "passive observers" when taking part in the gangs' deviant behaviours but now they have become more "active participants". It indicates that girls in gangs are assuming a more active role in gang activities.

- (3) The roles of girls in gangs: Most girls interviewed assume the role of either the "wife" or "little sister" of male gang members. Roles of being the "big sister" or the "fighting girl" are emerging. Moreover, according to the survey, more respondents identified themselves as being of "triad society affiliation" (20 respondents) or "peripheral follower" (34 respondents), with only 2 admitting to actually being "triad society members". It indicates that female members are taking on more specific roles within the gangs.
- (4) The structure of gangs: Most of the respondents (54 respondents) took part in gangs that belong to "mixed groups" with members of both boys and girls and only 4 belonging to an "all-female group". Three of these indicated they were the leaders of their own gang. The emerging independent girl gangs bear the same features as male gangs, in the way they behave and solve problems.

2. Gender differences in gang participation

According to foreign scholar Hilary Murrish and evidenced by the case interviews and experts of this Study, differences of gender in gang participation can be illustrated in 4 aspects: (1) Reasons for joining gangs; (2) Getting into the gang (3) Activities in the gang; and (4) Leaving the gang (Table 1).

Table 1 : Gender differences in gang participation.

Aspect	Boy	Girl
Reasons for joining gangs	1. Boys may be seeking the action that the gang provides and also fill some of the voids in their lives. 2. For showing off	1. Girls may be looking for an emotional attachment that is missing from their lives and it also provides a kind of family for girls. 2. For protection

(Continued) Table 1 : Gender differences in gang participation.

Aspect	Boy	Girl
Getting into the gang	1. Being "beat in" is a way to gain respect within the gang and demonstrate strength and toughness.	1. Being "sexed in" demonstrates subservience to the gang by surrendering their bodies; but the members of the gang do not respect them.
	2. Being affiliated with the triad society to gain power and influence.	2. Being the "wife" or "little sister" of male group members, thus getting into the gang.
Activities in gang	1. With triad society background and more stability when compared with girls.	1. Girls are not "hooked" onto triad gangs and are free to go as they wish.
	2. Boys hit boys and are more likely to use "fist" or "knife" as weapons.	2. Girls hit girls and usually assault each other by slapping the other on the face and scratching or pulling the others hair.
	3. Boys less likely to get free entertainment than girls.	3. Girls often get free entertainment by taking part in gangs.
	4. Boys are less emotional and gossip less when compared to girls in gangs.	4. Girls are more emotional and tend to gossip more.
	5. More involved in criminal and violent acts.	5. Less involved in criminal and violent acts. But drug offences are more common in girls.
	6. Boys are dominant.	6. Girls are subordinate.
	7. Boys have prospects in moving up the seniority ladder of a gang	7. Girls have little prospect of moving up the seniority ladder of a male-dominated gang circle.
Leaving the gang	For boys, the major reasons for them to leave the gang are seeking a job, getting arrested or growing up.	For girls, it is more flexible for them to exit from gang life and they quit when they have become involved in a serious relationship or give birth.

Integration from various sources: please refer to Hilary Murrish, interviews from the cases, and the experts of this Study.

3. **Many of the respondents showed little alertness against triad societies. Some respondents became gang members after they had met boyfriends or friends with gang backgrounds, or they wanted to get away from family pressure.**

According to the survey, most respondents regarded “feeling good to hang around with this circle” (40 respondents), “having poor relationship with family” (18 respondents) or “dating with boyfriend” (14 respondents) as the compelling reasons for their joining gangs.

Most respondents have taken part in gang related activities for over two years (44 respondents). The majority regarded their life in gangs as happy (46 respondents). One out of three (26 respondents) said they would still take part in gangs if they were to choose again.

Many of the respondents showed little alertness against triad societies. Some respondents became gang members after they had met boyfriends or friends with gang backgrounds or they wanted to get away from family pressure. Many had a positive view of their gang membership. They regarded their gang as a second family, which provided care and a shelter from life's problems. In light of the reasons why girls join gangs, it is important that the means to provide appropriate help gets further attention.

4. Three emerging phenomena as illustrated by the study deserve our attention. They are: (1) Cross-district activities; (2) Frequent “group switching”; and (3) Many deviant girls hang around in friends or boyfriend’s homes.

Results from the 18 case interviews and the scholars / experts, 3 emerging phenomena deserve our attention: (1) Cross-district activities; (2) Frequent “group switching”; and (3) Many deviant girls hang around in friends or boyfriend’s homes. The above-mentioned features to a certain extent make it difficult for the outreach teams to provide help.

Cross-district activities: Most girls interviewed find it easy to acquaint themselves with members of other gangs through ICQ on the Internet, which increases their mobility and thus facilitates the appearance of cross-district networks.

Frequent “group switching”: Most girls interviewed do not stay in one group for long, as they switch from one group to another, because of: (i) changing boyfriends; (ii) in pursuit of excitement before they feel bored after sticking to one group for a long time; (iii) escaping from home and contact with family; (iv) the fact that most girls are not “hooked” onto triad gangs and are free to go as they wish.

Difficulties in reaching out to girls exhibiting deviant behaviour who hang around in friends' homes: Many girls, who engage in deviant behaviour, hang around in friends or boyfriend's homes rather than on streets, which makes it difficult for the outreach teams to provide help.

The above-mentioned features make it difficult for the outreach teams to grasp the activities and information about girls in gangs, thus hindering the possibility of providing suitable counselling or help.

5. Form 2 is the most vulnerable time period for girls

Education practitioners point out that many girls go off track in Form 2. As Form 1 is the critical year for students to settle in secondary school life, schools usually pay more attention during this period. In the same way, Form 3 is another critical period as far as schools are concerned regarding the future career choice of students. It is at this crucial time that the well being of Form 2 students may be overlooked. As a result, some vulnerable female students are liable to fall prey to certain types of boys, and thereby become associated with gangs.

Moreover, results from the 18 case interviews, gossip and jealousy are frequent among girls in gangs and they are constantly fighting with each other. Besides, some experts point out that it is more difficult to deal with girls than boys, as girls tend to be more emotional and erratic. Secondly, being more sensitive, girls tend to care more about what others think of them and do not easily reveal details of personal affairs to others.

This study showed that F.2 is a high-risk period of time in which girls may take part in gang activities. How to strengthen help offered to F.2 students to fill the existing service gap demands our attention.

6. Becoming fed up with life in gangs and knowing there is no future in the male-dominated gang circle, provides an exit point for girls to get away from the gang.

Results from the 18 case interviews indicate that the reasons for the girls leaving gang groups could be classified into the following: (1) Being fed up with the life in gangs; (2) Marriage or pregnancy; (3) A feeling that it's a waste of time; (4) Dispelling family worries; and (5) Acknowledging that there is little future in gangs.

In addition, some experts point out that girls have no future in the male-dominated gang circles. As females have little prospect of moving up the seniority ladder of a gang, many leave for a better future. Some girls quit when they enter into a serious relationship or have given birth.

Being fed up with the life in gangs and knowing there is no future in the male-dominated gang circle, provides an exit point for girls to get away from the gang. Helping girls to face the problems of living in a gang and strengthening the perception that there is no future in a gang may provide an alternative direction for girls.

7. The results of the study show that girls in gangs are in a disadvantaged situation. These girls may over-estimate their self-protective abilities and neglect the danger of being involved in gangs, which inevitably ends in no good.

According to the survey, most of the respondents indicated that they do not worry about being arrested by police (48 respondents) or being hurt (59 respondents), respectively. In addition, results from the 18 case interviews reveal that deviant behaviour is deemed quite common and often rationalised among the female members. They said that girls in gangs are usually associated with drug sales and street fights. Moreover, the interviewees believed they could protect themselves by keeping clear-headed or by being able to fight. This reflects that girls may over-estimate their ability to protect themselves in gangs.

However, figures from the survey showed that girls in gangs have the potential risk of being lured into prostitution, being sexually assaulted or raped. A number of the respondents have had sexual activities either voluntarily (32 respondents) or against their will (10 respondents). It is noted that the average age of the respondents who have been engaged in sexual activities against their will is under the age of 16.

Besides, as revealed from case interviews, girls in gangs commit crimes such as drug trafficking, selling pirated material, fighting, etc. In addition girls in gangs may be forced to have sexual activities with other gang members. One of the girls revealed that it is easy to be raped when drunk; another respondent claimed to having been forced into sex by her boyfriend. This reveals that girls in gangs are in a dangerous position.

From the results of the study, girls in gangs are in a disadvantaged situation. If

girls over-estimate their self-protective abilities and neglect the inherent danger of being in gangs, serious harm may eventually result. Ways to help girls in gangs face these dangers, to increase their alertness and to help them understand more clearly their actual abilities deserves our attention.

8. Under co-operation with different sectors, resources can be gathered in order to share information and experience in preventing and solving gang problems.

The Police Force plays an important role in tackling the problem of youth gangs. Since 2001-02, the Police have created 33 Secondary School Liaison Officer posts at the rank of Police Sergeant to enhance the School Liaison Programme. School Liaison Officers are responsible for maintaining regular contact and communication with all secondary schools in their districts, providing the schools with professional advice as necessary. They also instil a spirit of discipline and proper values into students, to prevent them from going astray.

Furthermore, in recent years, a number of police stations have organized campaigns on a wide variety of topics to combat and prevent youth crime. Some district police stations have formed special teams or cross-professional cooperation units in dealing with the problems, such as Kowloon City District, which has organized a "Concerning the Youth in Kowloon City Networking Scheme". This highlights that the role of police in fighting youth gangs was not being confined to law enforcement alone, but also being active in prevention work.

Indeed, in dealing with youth problems, no one profession can tackle the issue alone. Under the cross-professional cooperation, resources can be gathered to challenge the problem together.

Recommendations

- 1. Collect further information on the area: Because of the limited studies on the phenomena of gangs and girls, this study focused on the issue by providing an exploratory description and discussions on the problem. The fact that the data of this study mainly came from gang members contacted by two Youth Outreach Teams of the Federation raised another limitation**

of this study. Therefore, the Federation suggests conducting further information collection to systematically grasp the latest phenomena of gangs and girls, with an aim to providing appropriate arrangements or services as early as possible.

- 2. Strengthen counselling to F.2 students:** This study showed that F.2 was a high-risk period in which girls began to take part in gang activities. Some professionals recommended the strengthening of services to F.2 students, in order to provide them with multi-development pathways, to nurture both their psychological and physical health and to increase their involvement in campus life. The Federation found the recommendations sound, and made further suggestions to increase support to schools, as well as to facilitate co-operation between schools and NGOs.
- 3. Set up a mechanism for co-operation among different sectors:** Police have played an important role in preventing and tackling gang problems. Currently, various police districts have carried out projects to prevent and tackle gang problems. The Federation suggests strengthening the co-operation between forces and local organizations in different districts by setting up a mechanism formed by Government officials, police, educators, districts members, youth workers, parents and youth, with an aim to share information and experience in preventing and tackling gang problems.
- 4. Provide appropriate services to girls in gangs:** Despite the fact that the proportion of girls taking part in gangs was not that alarming, the Federation believes that assistance must be provided to prevent the situation from worsening. The Federation suggests setting up a centre to provide special and professional services for girls in gangs and to conduct further studies on this problem so as to strengthen the knowledge of front line workers focusing on girls in gangs.