



# International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.

## Understanding gang dynamics: Exploring prevalence and student perceptions among high school students

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### Article Info

**ISSN (online):** 2582-7138

**Volume:** 05

**Issue:** 02

**March-April 2024**

**Received:** 15-04-2024;

**Accepted:** 17-05-2024

**Page No:** 886-893

### Abstract

This study investigated students' perspectives on gangs and gang involvement within Balite National High School, Schools Division of Surigao del Norte, Philippines. Utilizing a quantitative approach, the study examined 191 students' awareness and understanding of gangs. The findings revealed a high level of awareness among students regarding active gangs, suggesting the prominence of this issue within the school environment. Interestingly, students generally disagreed with perceived positive aspects of gangs and potential consequences of joining/leaving, hinting at a potential disconnect between awareness and accurate perception. Notably, the study did not find significant differences in perception based on demographic factors like age, grade level, or sex, suggesting the need to explore other influences shaping student views. Additionally, a diverse range of perceived prevalence across the student body emerged, emphasizing the importance of tailored interventions catering to different levels of awareness and concern. Most concerning, a significant portion of students reported personal experiences with gang activity, highlighting its potential impact on their well-being and safety. These findings offer valuable insights for policy and intervention strategies. Proactive measures are crucial to address the perceived prevalence of gang activity. Tailored approaches considering diverse perceptions are essential for effectiveness. Bridging the awareness-perception gap and focusing on personal experiences can further guide intervention efforts. Collaboration between educators, law enforcement, and community organizations is vital to address root causes and implement effective interventions, fostering a safer and more positive school environment for all students.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2024.5.3.886-893>

**Keywords:** Gang, dynamics, prevalence, perception, Philippines, high school

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### Introduction

The prevalence of gang membership among students is a pressing concern that has far-reaching implications for the safety and well-being of both individual students and the broader educational environment. Gang involvement in schools not only poses a direct threat to the safety of students and educators but also disrupts the fundamental mission of educational institutions. As such, this research study aims to shed light on the extent of gang membership among students, the factors influencing their involvement, and the consequences for both students and the educational system.

Gang membership represents a complex and multifaceted phenomenon within school settings. It challenges the conventional view of schools as havens for learning and personal development, highlighting the influences and conditions that lead some students to become affiliated with gangs. By exploring the prevalence of gang membership among students, this research seeks

to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue, grounding it in empirical evidence.

Delving into the world of gangs, researchers have examined various aspects of gang involvement, particularly its impact on youth behavior and safety. Studies like Pedersen's (2014)<sup>[2]</sup> highlight the prevalence of gang membership in disadvantaged neighborhoods, while Higginson *et al.* (2018)<sup>[6]</sup> point to the need for further research understanding its drivers in different contexts. Exploring delinquent behavior, Alleyne and Wood (2010)<sup>[3]</sup> found nuanced patterns where gang members committed more minor offenses, while peripheral youth engaged in more violent ones.

Interestingly, Terrance and Esbensen (2006)<sup>[7]</sup> discovered that gang members experience higher victimization rates, even after leaving the gang, suggesting a complex relationship between membership and violence. Katz *et al.* (2011)<sup>[8]</sup> further nuance the picture, showing that while gang membership increases victimization risk, other factors like involvement in gang crime seem to play a more significant role.

Beyond behavior, researchers like Murphy (2014)<sup>[4]</sup> explored young people's perceptions, revealing diverse perspectives towards joining gangs, underlining the need for varied prevention approaches. Additionally, Alleyne and Wood (2010)<sup>[3]</sup> found that gang members exhibited stronger anti-authority sentiments and placed greater value on social status compared to non-members. Despite these insights, gaps remain. Higginson *et al.* (2018)<sup>[6]</sup> highlight the need for more research on gang membership in different contexts, particularly low- and middle-income countries.

Additionally, while the increased victimization risk for gang members is acknowledged, further exploration of underlying mechanisms and contributing factors is needed, as suggested by Katz *et al.* (2018)<sup>[8]</sup>.

Finally, understanding the diverse motivations and perceptions of youth regarding gang involvement, as emphasized by Murphy (2014)<sup>[4]</sup>, is crucial for informing effective prevention strategies. In conclusion, research on gangs paints a complex picture, highlighting the need for further exploration to inform effective prevention and intervention strategies and create a safer environment for all young people.

Despite the significance of gang-related issues in the Philippines, there remains a notable gap in the existing research literature regarding the prevalence of gang memberships and student perceptions among high school students in the country. While some studies have explored gang dynamics in various contexts, including urban centers and marginalized communities, there is a dearth of comprehensive research specifically focusing on the experiences and perspectives of Filipino high school students. Existing studies often overlook the unique socio-cultural factors that may influence gang dynamics in the Philippine context, such as community dynamics, cultural norms, and socio-economic disparities. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to understanding how demographic characteristics, such as grade level, age, and gender, may shape students' perceptions of gang memberships. Addressing this research gap is essential for developing targeted interventions and policies aimed at effectively addressing gang-related issues within the Philippine high school system and promoting the safety and well-being of students.

This study aims to delve into the sensitive topic of gang

involvement among high school students in one of the schools in the Philippines. Firstly, it seeks to gauge the perceived prevalence of gang members within the school and communities where these students reside. Understanding how widespread students believe gang activity to be is crucial for assessing its potential impact and informing prevention strategies. Secondly, the study delves deeper into the perceptions students hold towards their peers involved in gangs. This exploration covers a range of aspects, including both positive and negative views of gang membership, students' understanding of the motivations and behaviors associated with gang involvement, their feelings of safety and security concerning gang presence, and their overall perception of the impact of gang activity on individuals and communities. By examining these facets, the study aims to provide a multifaceted understanding of how students in the Philippines navigate the realities of gang activity within their surroundings.

It is essential to recognize that understanding the prevalence of gang membership among students is not merely an academic endeavor but a critical issue for public safety and educational policy. Educational institutions are entrusted with the responsibility of fostering an environment conducive to learning and personal growth, and the presence of gangs within schools poses a direct challenge to this mission. By exploring this issue through a quantitative lens, this research aims to provide valuable insights for the development of strategies aimed at preventing gang involvement, thereby promoting safer and more effective educational environments for all students.

### Statement of the problem

This study aimed to determine the Prevalence of Gang membership among Students.

Specifically, this sought to answer the ff. Questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the students in terms of grade level, age, and sex?
2. What is the perception of the students on the gang memberships?
3. Is there a significant difference on the perceptions of students on gang memberships when they are group according to their demographic profile?
4. Based on the findings, what intervention program can be designed?

### Methodology

#### Research Design

This study utilized the quantitative research. The quantitative research design requires numerical data. In like manner, this also used descriptive research design in order to describe the Prevalence of Gang membership among Students.

#### Research Environment

The research locale of the study was Balite National High School, Balite San Francisco, Surigao Del Norte, Philippines. This school is a medium school headed by Secondary School Head with one master teacher. It has 29 teachers and 3 non-teaching staff with the population of 368 students.

#### Research Participants

This study used a simple random sampling method under probability sampling approach to determine the participants of the study. Students of Balite National High School shall be the participants of the study.

**Table 1:** Distribution of Participants

Respondents	Population	Percentage	Sample size
Grade 7	41	11.10%	21
Grade 8	41	11.10%	21
Grade 9	59	16.00%	31
Grade 10	73	19.80%	38
Grade 11	60	16.30%	31
Grade 12	94	25.50%	49
Total	368	100	191

### Research Instrument

The study utilized survey questionnaire as prepared by researcher in the classroom. Apparently, this assessment tool tested the ability of the students to write their answers in a structural presentation. Students have given enough time to think to complete the survey.

### Ethics and Data Gathering Procedure

To adhere courtesy and decorum, the researcher asked permission from the principal to conduct the study. Students served a letter asking for permission to conduct a research. Then, upon approval, a copy of which was presented to concerned teachers for permission to conduct the study in the classroom. To respect their privacy, participants were assigned with code to hide their real identity. The research participants individually took the survey questionnaires in a specified duration of time.

### Data Analysis

For the data analysis, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) using Welch's test was employed to assess the significance of differences in students' perceptions of gang memberships across different demographic profiles, including grade level, age, and sex. Welch's ANOVA is robust to violations of the assumption of equal variances and is appropriate when sample sizes and variances are unequal across groups.

On the other hand, the mean, also known as the average,

provides a measure of central tendency, indicating the typical or average value of a set of data points. In the context of this research, the mean is used to represent the average level of agreement or disagreement with statements related to gang memberships among the respondents. It allows researchers to understand the overall tendency of students' perceptions regarding gang involvement.

Moreover, the standard deviation quantifies the dispersion or spread of data points around the mean. It provides information about the variability or consistency of responses within the sample population. A higher standard deviation indicates greater variability among responses, while a lower standard deviation suggests more consistency. In this research, the standard deviation is used to assess the degree of agreement or disagreement among students' perceptions of gang memberships. A higher standard deviation may indicate a wider range of opinions or attitudes among respondents, whereas a lower standard deviation may suggest more uniformity in perceptions.

### Results

This section presents the results, analysis, and interpretation of data. All specific questions in the statement of the problem were answered in this section and supported with tables.

### Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The following table displays the respondents' profile.

**Table 2:** Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Profile	f	%
<b>Grade Level</b>		
Grade 7	21	11.0%
Grade 8	21	11.0%
Grade 9	31	16.2%
Grade 10	38	19.9%
Grade 11	30	15.7%
Grade 12	50	26.2%
	191	100%
<b>AGE</b>		
12-14	63	33.0%
15-17	105	55.0%
18 & above	23	12.0%
	191	100%
<b>SEX</b>		
Male	76	39.8%
Female	114	59.7%
	191	100%

Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. As for Grade level, Grade 12 has the highest count with 26% of the total, compared to Grade 7 with 11%, Grade 8 11%, Grade 9 16%, Grade 10 20%, and Grade 11 16% in total. Thus, there are numerous grade 12 respondents who answered the survey. As for age, respondents in the age

bracket of 15-17 have the highest number of participants in this research, compared to ages 12-14 with 33% and ages 18 & above which have 12% only. As for Sex, the highest count with 59.7% is the female students, compared to Male students with a count of 39.7%.

**Perception of students on Gang Memberships**

the involvement of gangs.

The following table displays the perception of the students on

**Table 3:** Perception of students on Gang Memberships

Perception of students on Gang Memberships	Mean	SD	Qualitative description
1. Gangs offer a sense of belonging and community.	1.91	1.011	D
2. Gangs offer protection from violence and bullying.	2.36	0.928	A
3. Gangs often get involved in illegal activities and violence.	2.47	0.980	D
4. Joining gangs can negatively impact your school performance and future opportunities.	2.91	1.040	A
5. Leaving a gang can be difficult and dangerous.	2.65	0.955	A
Total Mean	2.46	4.914	A

**Table 4:** Indicating a varied perspective on different

Range	Qualitative description
0.75-1.75	Strongly Disagree
1.76-2.50	Disagree
2.51-3.25	Agree
3.26-4.00	Strongly Agree

The data on table 3 reflects students' perceptions of gang memberships, indicating a varied perspective on different aspects of gang involvement. On average, students tend to disagree that gangs offer a sense of belonging and community (mean = 1.91), suggesting skepticism regarding the supportive nature of gang environments. However, there is a prevailing agreement that gangs provide protection from violence and bullying (mean = 2.36), indicating a perceived utility in joining gangs for safety reasons. Additionally, students generally agree that gangs frequently engage in illegal activities and violence (mean = 2.47), acknowledging the negative societal implications of gang involvement. Furthermore, there is a strong consensus that joining gangs can have detrimental effects on school performance and future opportunities (mean = 2.91), reflecting awareness of the potential consequences of such affiliations. Despite these concerns, students also agree that leaving a gang can be difficult and dangerous (mean = 2.65), underscoring the

complexities and risks associated with disengaging from gang culture. Overall, while there are variations in individual perspectives, the data suggests a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of gang memberships among students.

Based on the data, students generally disagree with the statements about gangs offering a sense of belonging, protection, and disagree with the statements about the negative consequences of joining and leaving gangs. It is important to note that the standard deviations are relatively high, which means that there is a lot of variability in the students' perceptions. This suggests that there is no single, clear-cut answer to the question of how students view gangs (Howell, 2010) [5].

It is also important to remember that this is just a small sample of students, and their views may not be representative of all students. More research is needed to get a better understanding of how students view gangs.

**Significant Difference between the perception of the students and their profiles**

The following table discusses the possible difference on the perceptions of the students on gang memberships when it is compared to the demographic profiles present in the study.

**Table 5:** Significant difference among the perceptions of the students compared to their profiles

One-Way ANOVA						
	F	df1	df2	p	conclusion	Decision on Ho
Grade level	0.657	5	74.0	0.657	Insignificant	Do not reject Ho
AGE	0.743	2	59.5	0.480	Insignificant	Do not reject Ho
Independent Samples T-Test						
	Statistic	df	p	Conclusion	Decision on Ho	
Sex	-1.61	189	0.109	Insignificant	Do not reject Ho	

Note.  $H_a \mu_{Male} \neq \mu_{Female}$

The research question aims to investigate whether there is a significant difference in students' perceptions of gang memberships based on their demographic profiles, specifically their grade level, age, and sex. To analyze this, statistical tools such as One-Way ANOVA and Independent Samples T-Test were employed.

Starting with the analysis based on grade level, the One-Way ANOVA yielded an F-value of 0.657 with a corresponding p-value of 0.657. Since the p-value is greater than the conventional significance level (typically 0.05), there is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that there is no significant difference in students' perceptions of gang memberships across different grade levels.

Moving on to the analysis based on age, the One-Way

ANOVA resulted in an F-value of 0.743 with a corresponding p-value of 0.480. Similar to the grade level analysis, the p-value exceeds the significance threshold, indicating that there is no statistically significant difference in students' perceptions of gang memberships across different age groups.

Lastly, the Independent Samples T-Test conducted based on sex yielded a test statistic of -1.61 with a corresponding p-value of 0.109. Although the p-value is slightly below the conventional significance level, it is still higher than 0.05. Therefore, there is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that there is no significant difference in perceptions of gang memberships between male and female students.

Generally, based on the analyses conducted using Welch's

One-Way ANOVA and Independent Samples T-Test, there is no significant difference in students' perceptions of gang memberships across different demographic profiles, including grade level, age, and sex. These findings imply that students' perceptions of gang memberships are relatively consistent regardless of their demographic characteristics. However, it's important to interpret these results cautiously and consider other factors that may influence perceptions of gang memberships, such as cultural background, personal experiences, and socio-economic status.

**Awareness on Gang Activities**

**Table 6:** Responses of the students on the question, “are you aware of any active gangs present in your school or community?”

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Yes	166	86.9 %	86.9 %
No	25	13.1 %	100.0 %

The data regarding respondents' awareness of active gangs present in their school or community provides valuable insights into the perceived prevalence of gang activity among students. With 166 respondents, comprising 86.9% of the total sample, indicating awareness of active gangs, it suggests a substantial level of recognition or acknowledgment of gang presence within the school or community environment. This high percentage underscores the significance of the issue and suggests that gang activity may be a notable concern or topic of awareness among the student population.

Conversely, the 13.1% of respondents (25 individuals) who reported not being aware of any active gangs in their school or community represent a minority within the sample. While this proportion is relatively small compared to those who are aware, it still warrants attention as it indicates a subset of individuals who may perceive gang activity to be less prevalent or relevant in their immediate surroundings.

The majority of respondents indicated some level of awareness of this issue, highlighting a considerable level of awareness among the student population regarding active gangs in their school or town. This awareness may act as a springboard for more research and intervention techniques meant to address gang-related issues in the context of the community or school.

**Table 7:** Responses of the students on the question, “How do you believe gang activity is in your school/community?”

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Not at all Common	20	14.7 %	14.7 %
Somewhat Common	68	39.8 %	54.5 %
Very Common	79	45.5 %	100.0 %

The responses regarding the perceived prevalence of gang activity in the school or community provide valuable insights into the perceived extent of this issue among the respondents. The distribution of responses indicates a spectrum of perceptions ranging from "Not at all Common" to "Very Common."

The 14.7% of respondents who indicated that gang activity is "Not at all Common" likely perceive gang presence to be minimal or negligible within their school or community environment. This minority perspective suggests a perception of safety and security, with limited or no observable signs of gang-related behavior or influence.

Conversely, the majority of respondents, comprising 85.3% of the total sample, perceive gang activity to be present to some extent in their school or community. Specifically, 39.8% of respondents described gang activity as "Somewhat Common," indicating a perception that while gangs may exist, their influence or presence is not overwhelmingly prevalent.

Furthermore, 45.5% of respondents characterized gang activity as "Very Common," suggesting a heightened perception of the prevalence and impact of gangs within their school or community environment. This perspective may indicate first hand experiences or observations of gang-related behavior, such as graffiti, violence, or recruitment activities, contributing to a sense of heightened concern or awareness.

Although most respondents acknowledged the existence of gang activity to some extent, the data overall shows a variety of opinions regarding its prevalence. The impact of gang activity on schools and communities can be addressed and lessened by taking into account these beliefs. This can help by highlighting the significance of focused interventions and teamwork across stakeholders, including educators, law enforcement, and community organizations.

**Table 8:** Responses of the students on the question, “have you ever personally witnessed or been directly affected by gang activity?”

	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Yes	82	42.9 %	42.9 %
No	109	57.1 %	100.0 %

The table displays personal experiences with gang activity among the respondents sheds light on the prevalence of direct encounters or effects related to gangs within the school or community.

The 42.9% of respondents who indicated that they have personally witnessed or been directly affected by gang activity represent a significant portion of the sample. This suggests that a substantial number of individuals within the student population have had firsthand experiences with gang-related behavior or incidents. Such experiences could range from witnessing gang-related violence or criminal activities to being targeted or victimized by gang members.

Conversely, 57.1% of respondents reported that they have not personally witnessed or been directly affected by gang activity. While this majority perspective indicates that a significant portion of the sample has not encountered gang-related incidents firsthand, it does not necessarily imply that gang activity is absent or insignificant in their surroundings. It may simply suggest that these individuals have not directly encountered such behavior or incidents.

The data highlights the prevalence of personal experiences with gang activity among a considerable portion of the student population. These firsthand accounts can provide valuable insights into the nature and impact of gang-related issues within the school or community, informing efforts to address and mitigate the effects of gang activity on student well-being and safety.

The study of Murphy (2014) [4] results showed that students have varying perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of joining gangs. The impact of a gang prevention program differs for each students.

The study of Estrada, et.al (2014) revealed that schools are a good place to focus on gang prevention and intervention, and

educators need to be aware of the possible gang activity in their schools to provide the appropriate resources, programs, and support for these students.

### Activity Design for students

**Name of activity:** Gang Prevention Program

#### Objectives

At the end of the seminar, Students must able to:

1. Increase awareness among students about the prevalence and impact of gang memberships in the school and community.
2. Educate students about the potential risks and consequences associated with gang involvement.
3. Equip students with skills and strategies to resist peer pressure and make positive choices.
4. Foster a supportive and inclusive school environment that promotes safety and well-being.

#### Time Frame

The intervention program will be implemented over the course of one academic year, with sessions conducted periodically throughout the school year. Each session will last approximately 1-2 hours, depending on the specific content and activities.

#### Materials Needed

1. Educational materials on gang awareness, including posters, handouts, and multimedia resources.
2. Guest speakers, such as law enforcement officers, community leaders, and former gang members, to share insights and personal experiences.
3. Interactive activities and workshops, such as role-playing scenarios, group discussions, and skill-building exercises.
4. Supportive resources and referrals for students in need of additional assistance, such as counseling services or community support programs.

#### Persons involved

1. School administrators and staff members responsible for program coordination and oversight.
2. Teachers and educators who will facilitate sessions and activities as part of the intervention program.
3. Guest speakers and resource persons invited to share expertise and perspectives on gang awareness and prevention.
4. Student volunteers or peer mentors who may assist with organizing and promoting the program, as well as providing peer support to their classmates.

#### Discussion

This study provided valuable insights into the prevalence of gang memberships and student perceptions among high school students in the Philippines. It revealed a varied perspective on different aspects of gang involvement, with students generally expressing skepticism towards positive attributes associated with gangs, such as offering a sense of belonging and protection. Additionally, students displayed apprehension regarding the negative consequences of joining or leaving gangs. However, the high standard deviations observed in the data suggest considerable variability in perceptions, indicating that students' views on gangs are

diverse and multifaceted.

It is essential to note that the sample predominantly consisted of Grade 12 students, with a higher representation of female respondents. This demographic profile may have influenced the perceptions and attitudes reflected in the data, as factors such as age and gender can shape individuals' perspectives on gang memberships. Furthermore, the sample may not be fully representative of all high school students in the Philippines, warranting caution in generalizing the findings.

The analysis using Welch's One-Way ANOVA and Independent Samples T-Test revealed no significant differences in students' perceptions of gang memberships across different demographic profiles, including grade level, age, and sex. This suggests relative consistency in perceptions regardless of demographic characteristics. However, it is crucial to consider other influencing factors, such as cultural background and personal experiences, which may impact students' perceptions of gangs.

Generally, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of gang dynamics among Filipino high school students. It underscores the complexity and diversity of perceptions surrounding gang involvement and highlights the need for targeted interventions and policies aimed at addressing gang-related issues within the Philippine high school system. Further research is recommended to explore additional factors influencing students' perceptions and experiences with gangs, facilitating the development of more comprehensive strategies for promoting student safety and well-being.

Looking at the tables presented in the results, the following interpretations were drawn:

#### A. Awareness and Perception Gap

While Table 5 shows high awareness of active gangs, Table 3 suggests students generally disagree with positive aspects of gangs and negative consequences of joining/leaving. This highlights a potential gap between awareness and accurate perception of gang realities. Future research could investigate the reason for this gap and its implications for prevention strategies.

#### B. Demographic Neutrality

The lack of significant differences in perception across grade level, age, and sex (Table 4) implies these factors might not be primary drivers of students' views on gangs. However, considering potential interactions between these factors and others like socioeconomic status or cultural background is crucial for a more nuanced understanding.

#### C. Prevalence Spectrum

Table 6 reveals diverse perceptions of prevalence, with a considerable portion acknowledging some presence. This suggests tailored interventions catering to different perception levels might be more effective than a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

#### D. Personal Experiences and Impact

The high prevalence of personal experiences (Table 7) underscores the potential impact of gang activity on student well-being and safety. Further research could explore the nature and severity of these experiences to inform support and intervention strategies.

#### E. Limitations and Future Directions

While this study provides valuable insights, consider its limitations like sample size and potential self-reporting bias. Future research could involve larger, diverse samples, qualitative methods for deeper understanding, and longitudinal studies to track perception changes.

### F. Policy and Intervention Implications

The study's findings can inform policy and intervention strategies. The perceived prevalence calls for proactive measures, while the diverse perceptions suggest the need for targeted approaches. Addressing the awareness-perception gap and focusing on personal experiences can also guide intervention efforts.

### G. Collaboration and Community Engagement

Collaboration between educators, law enforcement, and community organizations is crucial for effective interventions. Addressing the root causes of gang involvement requires community-wide efforts, and your study's findings can inform these collaborative approaches.

### Conclusion

This study investigated students' perceptions of gang memberships and their awareness of gang activity within their school or community. While the findings offer valuable insights, further research is encouraged to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

### Key findings

- High awareness of active gangs existed among students, indicating the issue's salience.
- Students generally disagreed with positive aspects of gangs and potential consequences of joining/leaving, suggesting a potential gap between awareness and accurate perception.
- No significant differences in perception were found based on grade level, age, or sex, highlighting the need to consider other influencing factors.
- A spectrum of perceived prevalence existed, suggesting the need for tailored interventions.
- A considerable portion of students reported personal experiences with gang activity, underlining its potential impact.

### Implications

These findings can inform policy and intervention strategies:

- Proactive measures are needed to address the perceived prevalence of gang activity.
- Targeted approaches considering diverse perceptions are crucial for effectiveness.
- Bridging the awareness-perception gap and focusing on personal experiences can guide intervention efforts.
- Collaboration between educators, law enforcement, and community organizations is essential for addressing root causes and implementing effective interventions.

### Recommendations

Based on the discussed implications of this study, the following states the recommendations for policy and intervention strategies:

#### 1. Address the Awareness-Perception Gap

- Develop educational programs that dispel myths and inaccurate portrayals of gangs, focusing on the realities

of gang involvement and its consequences.

- Utilize various media channels and engage different community stakeholders to spread accurate information about gangs.
- Encourage open dialogue and critical thinking around gang-related issues within schools and communities.

#### 2. Implement Tailored Interventions

- Conduct further research to identify specific factors influencing different perception levels (e.g., socioeconomic status, cultural background).
- Develop targeted interventions catering to the diverse perceptions within the student population.
- Collaborate with community organizations and leaders who understand the specific needs and contexts of different groups.

#### 3. Focus on Personal Experiences

- Offer support services and resources to students who have had personal experiences with gang activity, addressing their needs and concerns.
- Implement peer-to-peer mentorship programs where students with positive experiences can support those who have encountered challenges.
- Create safe spaces for students to share their experiences and receive guidance without judgment.

#### 4. Foster Collaboration and Community Engagement

- Establish partnerships between schools, law enforcement, social service agencies, and community organizations to develop comprehensive intervention strategies.
- Organize community events and initiatives that promote positive youth development and reduce gang recruitment factors.
- Empower community members to participate in solutions and contribute to a safer environment for all.

#### 5. Conduct Further Research

- Expand research to larger and more diverse samples to ensure wider generalizability of findings.
- Employ qualitative methods like focus groups or interviews to gain deeper insights into students' motivations and experiences.
- Implement longitudinal studies to track changes in perceptions and the effectiveness of interventions over time.

### Disclosure

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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