
This article is based on the Campbell Review:

Fisher H, Montgomery P, Gardner FEM: *Cognitive-behavioural interventions for preventing youth gang involvement for children and young people (7-16)* and: *Opportunities provision for preventing youth gang involvement for children and young people (7-16)*. Campbell Collaboration 2007.

*This article is written by the Nordic Campbell Centre. The article has been approved by the authors of the review.
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Lack of research in preventing youth gang involvement

Gang-related crime is a major problem in cities worldwide. Nonetheless, research is lacking on how best to prevent young people from becoming involved in gang-related activities. Two systematic reviews supported by SFI Campbell have reviewed the research concerning two specific preventive interventions for children and young people. However, the researchers found no studies of sufficient solidity to draw any conclusions as to the effect of these interventions.

Gangs are a serious problem

It is well-documented that young people recruited to gangs are responsible for more crime than their non-gang-member peers. Moreover, gang members do not only commit more crimes than their peers, they are also responsible for more serious offences such as assault and selling drugs.

The majority of gang members are recruited among children and adolescents. One way of taking action on gang-related crime is thus to prevent children and young people from joining gangs in the first place. There are several types of such preventive interventions, but there is no general overview of their success rate. Accordingly, a group of researchers tasked itself with gathering and quality-assessing the available knowledge of the effects of two specific preventive interventions in two Campbell systematic reviews. The object was to investigate whether, based on the best knowledge available, it is possible to draw any conclusions concerning the effect of the interventions.

Cognitive behavioural therapy or educational opportunities

One of the two systematic reviews examined research concerning cognitive behavioural therapy to prevent gang membership among children and adolescents. In a number of other contexts, cognitive behavioural therapy has proved an effective means of reducing criminal behaviour among groups such as anti-social youth.

The other systematic review looked for research into initiatives for opportunities provision, such as youth counselling, education or job training. The idea behind the initiatives is that education and work are held to deter young people from becoming members of gangs.

The need for qualified outcomes research

Unfortunately, none of the systematic reviews found any studies of sufficiently high quality to permit any conclusion concerning the effect of the two interventions. The researchers are therefore calling for well-managed randomised controlled trials or other trials involving comparison of an intervention group with a control group. Only via such studies will it be possible to make a qualified assessment of the effect of interventions against gang formation.