

THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

POLICY NOTE

Gangs, violence and the role of women and girls: Emerging themes and policy and programme options drawn from interviews with female gang members in Cape Town

Mark Shaw and Luke Lee Skywalker
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Introduction

The focus of this Policy Note is specifically on the role of women and girls in gangs as an opportunity to examine whether a more “gendered” response to the phenomenon of gangsterism could have success. The case study for the research was the gangs of Cape Town, a city not only with a historical problem of gangs, but one where recent trends have showed a dramatic upswing in violence, both within and between gangs. Cape Town was chosen largely because it offered the possibility, through the network of the Global Initiative and its links to the University of Cape Town, for interviewing female gang members in a way that would have been difficult to achieve elsewhere.

Cape Town now displays violence - at a level of 60 homicides per 100,000 residents for 2015/16 – that is consistent with many cities in Latin and Central America that have had longstanding challenges with gangs. In Cape Town, violence is closely linked to changes within the city’s drug economy in marginalised areas, and the introduction of a flood of firearms (ironically many from police stores) from 2010. This has exacerbated conflict between gangs and increased the ability of smaller and new gangs – who have obtained access to weapons – to both enter and expand their drug operations. The result is a fluid and violent environment, although this is generally confined to previously marginalised so-called ‘coloured’ or mixed race areas of the city. It goes without saying, however, that the human cost and suffering has been enormous, with some parts of the city having homicide rates of over 100 deaths per 100,000 people with innocent bystanders, including children, often caught in the crossfire (see Shaw and Kriegler 2016).

While the nature of gangsterism in Cape Town has been analysed in a variety of academic studies (see most recently Pinnock 2016), a focus on women and girls within the gangs has largely been missing. Studies where female gang members are interviewed are also relatively rare. That is partly because of the difficulties of accessing female gang members, given that male members act as “gatekeepers” and that gang culture more generally prevents gang members from engaging easily and openly with outsiders.

The Policy Note briefly outlines the methodology used to approach and interview female gang members. It then summarises the core themes that emerged from the discussions with the girls and women. Finally, building on this analysis, it provides a framework for developing a policy response as well as ideas for programme interventions.

Talking to female gang members

Accessing people involved in illicit or socially unacceptable activities is challenging. Trust must be built, appropriate intermediaries found, and individuals identified that are willing to be interviewed. This is a time consuming process and one where not all interviews yield the same amount or quality of data.





Following this general approach, female gang members were accessed across Cape Town's multiple gangs. These contacts were initiated by an experienced researcher with excellent and neutral connections to the gangs. Nevertheless, there were numerous difficulties identifying and accessing female gang members, both to protect the security of those being interviewed, but also that of the interviewers. Work continued over a two-month period in March and April 2016. Individual women and wider sets of contacts in the gang world were used to identify women who were prepared to talk to outside researchers.

The anonymity of the interview subjects was guaranteed and the vast majority of women declined to have the interview recorded. The scope of the interviews was also limited by the ethical requirement not to directly discuss crimes in which the subjects had been engaged, but not convicted for. Children below eighteen years of age were not interviewed given statutory requirements in South Africa that parental consent is required in such cases. To fill this gap, women that were interviewed were asked to report on their childhoods.

The research eventually drew on interviews with over 30 individual female gang members, with several individuals being interviewed twice. The interviews were often difficult to organise – female gang members had to be separated out from their male counterparts and a place with comparative privacy being found – but also because of the difficulties of ensuring a frank discussion about their past and the nature of life within the gang. The interviews were conducted as free flowing discussions guided by a set of common questions.

Given that there is no clear idea of how many female gang members are active in Cape Town, these interviews do not necessarily constitute a representative sample. However, some effort was made to ensure that women from multiple different gangs were interviewed. The results thus provide a unique qualitative insight into the backgrounds, life stories, lifestyles and life chances of women in Cape Town's gang milieu. An appendix to this Policy Note provides sketches of ten of the interviews to provide some insight into the nature of the history and background of individual women and girls.

The purpose of the Policy Note is to stimulate more discussion around policy options targeted at female gang members. That is not to deny that many of these may equally apply to male gangsters. Nevertheless, a study of the life stories of female gang members suggests several focussed interventions that may have applicability to the specific realities faced by women enmeshed in gangs and gang culture, and highlight a vulnerable group that has largely been overlooked.



Seven themes emerging from the interviews

While the interviews covered a wide array of topics, including some more general discussion as a way to build trust, a number of themes emerged from all of the interviews. The most important of these are as follows:

1. Women and girls seek “belonging” within gangs

Interviews highlighted again and again that girls and young women enter the milieu of gangs because it provides a place of “belonging” in otherwise fractured and violent communities. The gang in this sense, in the words of several interviewees, “became family”, even if internal gang politics and actions were often themselves violent and unpredictable.

“Becoming family” in contexts where gangs are powerful forms of social and community organisation brings two other benefits: resources and security. Impressionable young women who join gangs can access new clothes, jewellery, the cars of their boyfriends and gang bosses, and much that they could not afford they remained unconnected and at home. Critically too, in places where gangs hold so much sway and violent power and capacity, not joining a gang “makes you far more vulnerable, than joining one”. Gangs provide protection and, at least in the short-term, some have few options but to join.

The critical point here is that female gang members are not coerced to join gangs. They do so, for the most part willingly, in a similar fashion to their male counterparts. One big difference however is that the route to gang membership for girls and young women is often the result of developing a romantic relationship with a gang member.

2. Sex is a common currency in gang interactions involving women

The common currency of the engagement between female gang members and other members of the gang is “sexual”. While it could perhaps be too crude to argue that “sex is exchanged” for membership and belonging, sex provides a direct utility for female gang members to offer – or to be forced to provide. Tales of rape and sexual abuse within the gangs were depressingly common across all the interviews. This is not to suggest that women and girls in gang environments are only victims – many concede that they joined gangs for the benefits that could be obtained and also that they offered sexual favours in part to obtain these – but that girls and young women were particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse in gang environments.

Relationships with mid-level and more senior gang members provide a point of access to the gang milieu. Initial sexual encounters, many of which constitute forms of coerced sexual activity, are critical rights of passage for many young women making their way into gang networks. Some male gang members provide long-term protection and coverage for their female partners, even though these relationships are seldom if ever monogamous and in most cases are often abusive and violent. Several women reported that they were initially prostituted by the gang.

Alcohol and drug use are all too frequent a reference point when discussing sexual engagements with multiple gang members and with the resulting pregnancies. Women barter their bodies to secure wider membership and/or acceptance in the gang, but at the same time are also targeted for sexual violence. In a limited number of cases, however, male partners protect “their women” from the wider abuse possible from other gang members. In such a scenario, vulnerable young women who are members of gangs, but do not have “good protection” are highly likely to suffer extended abuse.

3. Female gang members have a history of abuse (and are quite literally giving birth to a new generation of gang members)

As outlined above, sexual abuse, rape and gender-based violence are common within the Cape gangs. But, many of the women interviewed indicated that this was not something new. Given that the interviews sought to determine the details of their early lives, most interviewees reported sexual abuse within the



family, “by uncles” (a generic term for people associated to the family), or others. The experience of sexual abuse within the gang was often a continuation of sexual abuse in the family.

Ironically, joining the gang, as stated above, offered opportunities to “belong” that were not available from dysfunctional families. What seems clear is that young women were often attracted to the same violent, abusive and unreliable men that had shaped their own child and young adulthoods. Sexual violence appears to be the norm and even in some cases where women reported to the police, they were turned away or verbally abused by the very authorities from whom they sought recourse.

Sadly, numerous interviews reported that unwanted children, often from different fathers, were the result of multiple sexual liaisons. These youngsters themselves were either exposed to the milieu of the gang from early on, or were removed from their mothers by the authorities, their overall future uncertain. In both cases, their development was unlikely to take place within a loving and protective family environment.

4. Female gang participants become enmeshed in gangs and are often under considerable control and surveillance

Female gang members are easily drawn into the world of gangsterism. How girls join gangs varies from a conscious decision in order to acquire greater status or belonging, to one where individuals literally drift into gang life, in part because of where and how they grew up. In some neighbourhoods, young women report, it may in fact be easier to join a gang than to resist doing so. Young women are not naive as to the activities of gangs; in part it is the excitement and (illegal) resources that attract them. Equally however, since gangs are such a strong presence in some communities, joining may also be the path of least resistance, and one with immediate rewards.

Scarring and gang identification tattoos in visible places – sometimes the face, neck or upper chest – ensures that gang membership is literally “carried with you”. That makes getting a job in the formal sector or easy acceptance back into mainstream community life outside of gang areas difficult to achieve. As the interviews suggest, the “marking” of female members with tattoos and cuts often takes place when they are drunk or “drugged up” and not fully aware of the consequences, including the health dangers of doing so. While this applies also to men, women appear more vulnerable to being “marked” without their consent.

Assuming that many female gang members are actively looking for alternatives to leave the gang is not borne out by the interviews – this is the exception rather than the rule. Being drawn into gang life, and being marked by it physically, psychologically and from substance abuse, means few other opportunities are available. When they are, young women report that they found ordinary jobs, in the retail sector for example, boring and poorly paid. Such jobs seemed only useful on the instruction of the gang for purposes of shoplifting or fraud.

Finally, as the difficulty of obtaining interviews attested, female gang members are seldom alone. They accompany their male partners and counterparts, are confined to houses in some cases, and have surprisingly little independence of movement. That reduces the chances of providing alternatives spaces and opportunities to counter gang culture. In interviews many expressed fear that “their boyfriends” would not like what they were saying, and in several cases male gangsters hung around close to the interviews to “protect their women”.

5. Female gang members participate in criminal and violent acts

The notion, common in some of the descriptions of female gang members, that they are only vulnerable and exploited members of gangs, and not themselves active participants in violent gang crime, is contradicted by the interviews. Amongst other crimes, women reported involvement in robberies, drug dealing and murder. In the case of the latter, women sometimes acted as “lures” to draw individual members of opposing gangs so that they could be killed. In a number of cases women themselves did the killing.



Although closely watched themselves, women report being used to collect “intelligence” not only on other gangs, but on wider income generating activities, such as extortion, robbery and fraud. In some cases women commit crimes because it is reported that the police are unlikely to believe that a “women would have done that”. In some cases women provide sexual services to the police to prevent their own arrest or that of other gang members.

While women may not always be on the front end of “gang wars”, they generally suffer the consequences. Gang wars result in a fluidity in gang organisation with serious implications for individual women reliant on one or a few key gang members for ensuring that they are not subjected to violence. When boyfriends and protectors are killed the result may be that women who are linked to them are vulnerable to wider sexual abuse and violence within the gang – as well as potentially outside of it.

6. Women and girls while being members and confidants of male gangsters are largely excluded from leadership positions

Many gang leaders in Cape Town have either a community or wider public profile. None of them are women. Despite a concerted effort to identify gang leaders who were female, there is no evidence that in any of the most prominent gangs women occupy senior leadership roles. In a few instances in smaller and lower level all-women gangs, this is the case, but such structures are often relatively temporary and do not compete, for example, in the violent contestations around drug turf.

Interestingly, however, two interviewees (both included in the Appendix) reported that they were responsible for maintaining the gang’s finances, clearly a role that demands a level of trust with the bosses. One woman in particular who performed this role seemed to have risen to a position of some prominence. For the moment, however, at least in the Cape gangs, this appears to be the exception rather than rule.

Interviews with women gang leaders suggest that the system remains structured around, and controlled by, male gangsters. While women perform the various roles that are outlined above, the system remains patriarchal, and women are largely unable to enter the leadership hierarchy. That does not mean that individual women are unable to influence the decision-making of gang bosses, but it seems clear from those we interviewed that they are excluded from the most important decisions taken by gangs. There may of course be exceptions to this general rule but our interviews provided no evidence that young women were systematically called upon for their advice or could influence important decisions such as when to engage in violence.

For women participants then, the gangs in Cape Town provide “places of belonging”, but those resemble the reality of life of most women living on the Cape Flats outside of the influence of gangs: an environment where males make the most important decisions and retain the greatest influence. This does not mean that individual women in the system lack agency, only that the system of gangs remains a male dominated hierarchy and that their influence is constrained.

7. Female gang members often suffer (sexual) abuse by the criminal justice system

While it is not possible to ascertain the exact extent of this phenomenon, female gang members in interviews point to consistent patterns of abuse when they come into contact with the criminal justice system. This often includes the provision of sexual services for favours. In several cases when women gang members approached police to report cases of rape, they were turned away, or further abused.



Female gang members appear particularly vulnerable within the justice system. Removed from the gang milieu, girl and women gang members are seldom dealt respectfully by the police and justice officials more widely. It appears difficult for them to report cases of crimes of sexual abuse against gang members and male justice officials often appear to act in sexually predatory ways. This may in part be an established behaviour given that gangs, as was reported earlier, sometimes themselves offer up female members to provide sexual services to placate police. In prison, female gang members report that they are asked to provide sexual services to correctional officials.

Female gang members therefore are seen as available, marginalised (thus unlikely to be believed) and therefore easy to abuse, with few consequences for the officials involved.

Several of the female gangsters interviewed served prison sentences. Prison provided both an escape from the street culture of gangs, but also a deeper step into the world of the gangs on release. A prison sentence means that the chances of obtaining a job become negligible and in some cases removes the wider social and community scaffolding (families and children in particular) that prompt women to leave gangs.

These seven themes provide some insight into the recruitment, life and abuse faced by female gang members. It should be emphasised here that many of the women that were interviewed are extremely difficult to talk with, often angry at “the system” and the inequality they strongly perceive, or are regular abusers of drugs and alcohol. Programming in the area is highly challenging and the notion that the women concerned are only innocent victims eager and willing to participate in gang prevention and reintegration programmes should be quickly dispensed with. That does not of course mean that programming is not possible, only that after the process of interviews, it is clear how difficult this is, and that it must be clearly thought through. The following section provides an overview of some of the alternatives in this regard.

Towards a policy framework for programming

The interviews did not specifically question the girls and women about what external interventions might assist them to exit gangs and gang culture. Indeed, many of the interviewees showed a deep scepticism to outside attempts to solve the problems of the gangs, including the specific challenges faced by women. A few women suggested by implication that “do-gooder” attempts to try and resolve problems that were built on deep levels of inequality and marginalisation were doomed to fail. At the same time, in every interview, participants expressed a regret for some of their behaviour and had a clear sense that their lives could have been something else – and perhaps something better. In most cases though, particularly younger women, could not see how they could extract themselves from the gangs, and in any event many did not express a need for doing so.

It was older women who on reaching their thirties became more conscious that the period that they had spent within the gangs had been “wasted time”. One of these women, who had broken away from the gang in which she had been a member, allowed us to film her as she recounted her story. This video (provided with the report), indicates a dawning realisation on her part that she needed to extricate herself from her gang. She did so with the assistance and support of local church leaders but the prerequisite seemed to be her own recognition that the gangs offered her no future. She also expressed a strong desire to reconnect to her children who had been taken from her. Her own health had been ruined by excessive alcohol and drug consumption and unsafe sexual practices: she died of HIV/AIDS a few months after the interview was filmed.

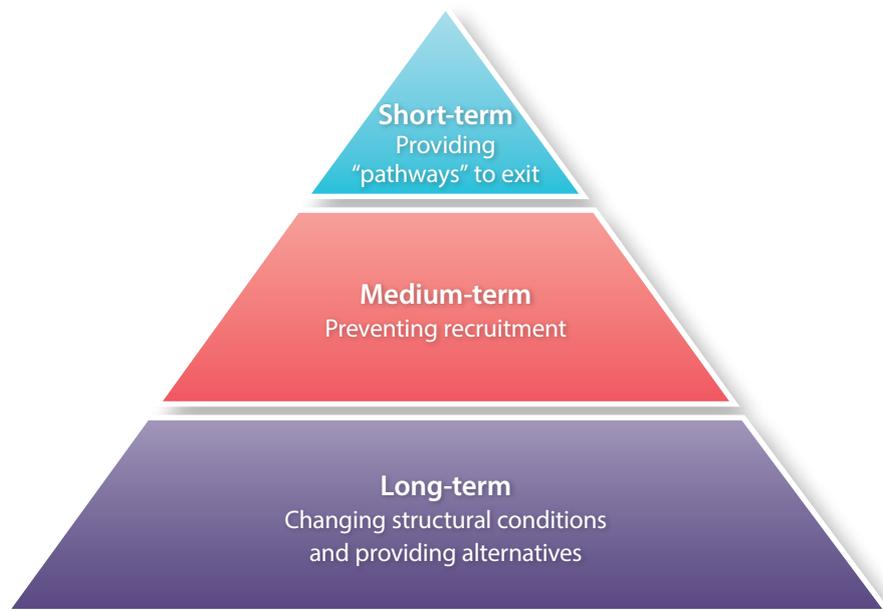
Drawing on the interview material and discussions with a range of community and other stakeholders present in gang areas, a range of possible areas of programmatic action are suggested below. It should be noted that these are focussed specifically at the issue of curbing the involvement of girls and women in gangs and gang culture, although some of the suggestions have wider applicability for all participants in gang activities. Clearly, a comprehensive package of responses are required, and so focussing on only one or two of the suggestions below would not be sufficient. These would be required to be part of a broader package of responses.



Given this, the recommended sets of actions are divided into three categories:

- More immediate and specific actions that seek to provide channels, opportunities and points of contact for women seeking to exit gangs;
- Medium-term interventions to prevent recruitment into gangs in the first place; and,
- Longer-term programmes that concentrate on changing structural conditions that push girls and young women into gangsterism.

The relationship between the three response levels is illustrated in the figure below.



Short-term: Providing "pathways" to exit

The initial step to leave the gang is fraught with danger for individual women. They may be threatened or suffer physical violence. Developing such "pathways" requires a neutral space where women can be engaged and the first steps taken to begin to extricate them from the gang milieu. "Pathways" are therefore about opportunity and the identification of young girls and women, both as gang members, but also as individuals who wish to exit the gang environment. "Pathways" by their nature are short-term, an initial step, that must be followed by other interventions.

1. Reduce surveillance that male gang members have of female gang members

As indicated, one of the challenges of interviewing female gang members is that there is a high degree of surveillance of their lives. This greatly reduces the possibility for girls and young women to make contact with outsiders who could provide a "bridge" to another life. The same of course also applies to young men (see Pinnock 2016, pp. 282-296), although the experience of conducting interviews with both men and woman gang members does suggest that the latter find it more difficult to operate independently of the gang once they are clearly affiliated. One of the reasons for this (ironically given that this is also a form of internal protection) is that boyfriends in the gang are highly controlling of their girlfriends or of girls in the gang more generally.

Young girls are therefore often "trapped" in gang areas that are marginalised and disconnected from the wider city. Young women are acutely aware of the isolation that living in gang areas brings and few venture outside. Planning and economic development alternatives must in the longer-term seek to break down such divisions introducing flows of positive traffic into previously isolated areas.

In the short term however, identifying activities that might provide such a “bridge” to exit gangsterism must be context specific. This might include a range of activities from community style events that are specific for women-only to girls-only sport fixtures, but targeted at gang areas. It has been suggested that programmes by outside bodies (local government, churches or non-government organisations) that are unthreatening to male gangsters and which are seen as “feminine” would provide a useful way to ensure “privacy”. Thus, despite the stereotypical and gender reinforcing nature of projects that focus on make-up or beauty treatments, they might provide a possibility to bring women together in ways that would exclude men.

2. Identify girls/young women that are abused and/or looking for a pathway out of gangsterism

While general awareness raising through art, theatre, lectures and associated activities may play a role in promoting alternatives, the identification of individual girls and women to target and provide more specific options may in fact be a more productive approach. In the course of the “bridge” activities outlined above, and in context where male gang surveillance is reduced, women who are ready or willing to seek a life outside of the gang environment. Discussions with women involved with gangs suggest that one place where (if they are ready to exit) effective contacts and onwards referrals may be made, and where there is some privacy, is in hospital casualty stations.

Sadly, given that they have already lived much of their productive life within a gang environment, those seeking to exit gangs may often be older women. They may be looking to leave for a number of reasons, including that they are facing competition from younger women entering the gang, that they are eager to connect with their children, and that they are no longer attracted, and indeed may be highly disgusted by the context in which they live; recognising that they have missed out on developing more productive lives. In several interviews this was mentioned as “the lost years”.

One response in this regard may also be to build a more effective picture of the girls and women involved in gangs. Currently, even their overall number is uncertain, and there has been no attempt to, for example, build a database of female gang members and their backgrounds. This should not be for purposes of law enforcement but to identify patterns as well as individuals who can be assisted.

3. Work with the police and justice system to end abuse when female gang members report crime (particularly sexual abuse) and immediately provide alternative “pathways”

Female gang members who have suffered violence at the hands of male gangsters, including their boyfriends, may be eager to exit or to report these crimes to the police. Yet, as indicated, the interviews suggested multiple occasions when female gang members had reported cases of rape or sexual abuse to the police, but were either turned away and/or verbally and physically abused.

It is imperative to develop viable “pathways” for female gang members who report abuse or rape to the police. This includes ensuring sympathetic and fair treatment and providing appropriate levels of protection. Just as the symbolic act of being abused by the police when trying to report a crime hardens women to the belief that the system as a whole is stacked against them, and that they have no alternatives to life in the gang, so a professional and caring response may provide the motivation for exiting gangsterism. The police for their part should avoid using the reporting of crime by female gang members as a way to recruit informants within the gangs.

Female gang members are often damaged individuals who show little trust for outsiders. They often look and act aggressively and police officers may stereotype them as troublemakers almost immediately when they report crime. It is worthwhile therefore attempting to ensure a single point of contact for female gang members attempting to report to the police. If only a few cases are successful, in protecting the women involved, word will spread that the system (or at least parts of it) does care.



4. The isolation that prison provides should be used to provide exit routes

The interviews suggest that prison does bring a degree of isolation to female gangsters. Prison gangs, and their culture, while powerful systems of organisation in male prisons, are less strong in female facilities. Several women who had been imprisoned spoke of the time that prison provided for them to reflect. At the same time, however, female gangsters were also subject to abuse in prison from staff, including sexual abuse. (This of course applies to other women too.) It should be an absolute priority to end violence, including rape, from staff against female prisoners. Unless this is done, this system will not be viewed as an alternative to a life in the gang. As the interviews attest, female gang members do not make a distinction between the government system and the gang system: both are abusive and the gang system at least provides resources and a degree of protection.

While prison must and cannot be seen as an alternative to gangsterism, it may however be a place – given that many female gang members spend time in prison – where more effective approaches can be made to women gang members and alternative “pathways” provided. Yet, there are few if any programmes targeting female gang members in prison. This is an opportunity for developing viable programming responses.

Medium term: Preventing recruitment

If providing “pathways” outside of gangsterism is a step to reaching out to women already enmeshed in its networks, preventing recruitment of young women in the first place must be a priority. Interventions in this area are partly aimed at replacing the sense of belonging that gangs provide, but also at raising the awareness of the dangers of substance abuse and unsafe sexual practices. Critically too it must focus on positive female role models and building better relations with the police – more specifically female police officers.



1. Provide “systems of belonging” for girls at school in gang areas

As suggested by female gang members, gangs are able to recruit and retain membership because they replace families and other systems of belonging in fractured communities. Programme responses that seek to provide a sense of belonging to girls and young women would reduce one of the key motivations for joining gangs.

Creating such systems of “belonging” would require investment in a variety of programmes and activities in marginalised areas, including sports, youth groups, crafts and educational projects. Such activities need to begin to include girls as early as possible, ensuring that positive social circles and networks are built.

As far as possible they must target young women vulnerable to developing relationships with gangs. Such vulnerabilities may be a feature of geography (living in a gang dominated area), family (the presence of abuse or links to gangs), or behaviour (having a gang member as a boyfriend).

2. Focus on drug demand reduction and sexual awareness education

Drugs, alcohol and sex are constant themes that emerge from the interviews as being a closely connected triangle that enmeshes girls and young women into the gang milieu. A significant proportion of sexual abuse takes place when both victims and perpetrators are under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. Older women in particular were acutely aware of the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse. In contrast, young women in the interviews were largely oblivious to the dangers, and if they were aware of them they did not register it as a great concern. Doing drugs, drinking heavily and engaging in unsafe sexual practices were considered normal parts of everyday life within the gang.



What is required is a concerted effort to reach young girls in particular to highlight the dangers of substance abuse and unsafe sexual practices. The use of social media, and more targeted ways of reaching girls vulnerable to recruitment into gangs is required.

3. Promote positive female role models drawn from communities where gangs are present, including ex-gang members

As the summary of the interviews suggests, the social frame of reference for young girls who are vulnerable to recruitment into gangs largely excludes any positive female role models. It is critically important for girls to see success stories of women from gang areas. The constant narrative in the interviews is of a system stacked against individual girls – there are no options but to join the gangs and the “system” (the police and the authorities in general) is often seen as worse than the gangs themselves.

One of the challenges here, interviews with community leaders suggest, is that those who succeed quickly leave gang areas, further alienating those who remain from wider society. Establishing a system of mentors for girls and young women is one possibility here, as is the use of specially trained female police officers who act as both contact points and mentors for girls vulnerable to gang recruitment, or already within the gangs themselves.

4. Build positive relations with the police – including female police officers – at schools

The various interview summaries suggest the wide divide that exists between the police and gangsters. The police are seen as exploitative, corrupt and abusive. For girl gangsters the police appear to be a source of significant levels of sexual violence. Levels of trust are low and most interviewees viewed the police as part of the problem and not the solution. One immediate way to improve these relations is to build better ways in which girls can engage with the police. This includes better oversight and training of the police generally, but could also include more specific interventions such as trained female police officers tasked with seeking out and engaging with girls in gangs (or those vulnerable to recruitment).

It should also be noted that the police may sometimes target female gang members to act as informers, precisely because they are also vulnerable to police action themselves. While this may be a necessary evil, our experience is that the recruitment of informers by the police is seldom a process where the individual welfare of girls is carefully considered. While beyond the scope of this paper, this is an area that requires review.

Providing more positive relations with the police will greatly outweigh any benefits that are achieved by arresting and imprisoning young women in a context where further abuse is likely. In that sense the young women interviewed are entirely right: the police are part of the problem. Breaking the cycle of violence and reducing vulnerability of girls to recruitment in gangs must begin with a change in the way policing is conducted with the focus, no matter how difficult, of developing relationships of trust with vulnerable young girls in gang afflicted communities.

Long term: Changing structural conditions and providing alternatives

Gangs, gang culture and the role of women within them, cannot be confronted without a broader response that addresses the structural and other inequalities that give rise to them. In this sense, the “system” as described by women in the interviews must be changed, both from the perspective of criminal justice responses, but also from the very earliest interventions related to early childhood development, and breaking the cycles of violence within the family (for a more detailed discussion see Adams 2011).

1. Develop effective care for the children of female gang members

While the development of more effective measures to ensure childcare in gang afflicted communities has been highlighted most recently in the context of Cape Town by Don Pinnock (2016), this is critically important for the children of female gangsters themselves. Providing effective care outside of the influence



of the gang milieu is one important way in which the generational cycle of recruitment can be broken. As indicated above too, and while great care needs to be taken in this respect, linking up with “lost children” often appears to be the motivation for older women seeking to exit from the gangs.

2. Reduce gender-based violence within families and communities

The accounts of young women caught between the vortex of gang membership and the police suggest the degree to which levels of gender-based violence is self-reinforcing. Young women who are involved in gangs have invariably been seriously and serially abused by the men they have grown up with. As they grow older, paradoxically, they seek security in environments and with other men who have many of the same characteristics. Reducing violence in the home in marginalised areas is thus an important outcome if women’s vulnerability to recruitment into gangs, and resulting violence, is to be reduced. Without effective interventions in this regard the cycle of violence and gang recruitment is unlikely to be broken.

While the results may not be immediate, programmatic responses include a combination of, amongst others, awareness raising, education, effective referrals and protection of victims and witnesses, and the prosecution of suspected offenders.

3. Introduce accessible and effective drug treatment facilities in gang areas

As is illustrated by the interviews, substance abuse remains a defining feature of gang existence. Providing for systems of drug treatment is an important way of focussing on reducing the harm of drug use. It also provides a useful way in which young women can be provided with “pathways” out of gang affiliation. Yet, drug treatment remains underfunded and not easily accessible for many in marginalised communities.

4. Provide employment alternatives for young female gangsters

While the interviews do suggest that young female gang members find the jobs that they are likely to get as “boring”, and leave them soon after, the argument for ensuring employment remains a powerful one. Holding down a job can provide focus and direction and importantly too, provides a way to remove women from gang areas for much of the day. In addition, it also allows young women to see and experience a wider world outside of the marginalised gang afflicted areas in which they might otherwise be confined.

One of the challenges of employment is that for women who have been active gang members for some years, problems of substance abuse and tattoos and scarring, particularly on the face, greatly reduce their chances of employment. (For that reason the removal of tattoos might also be a useful programmatic intervention.) The lesson for effective responses is that for employment to be successful as an alternative to gangsterism it must be a possibility as early as possible. Five or ten years within a gang environment, as some interviewees dolefully reported, are likely to make all but the most resilient young women unemployable.





Conclusion

The gangs of Cape Town, and the violence associated with them, are a product of deep-rooted structural inequalities and a criminal justice system – as reported by the very victims and perpetrators who come into contact with it – that damages and creates conflict perhaps more than it resolves it. Girls and young women are pulled into gangs through their lives and exposure in areas where gangs provide the principal forms of social organisation for young people. Other alternatives are few and where they exist they are either not sustained or lack the “glamour” and resources that gangs provide.

Yet the consequences for women who become trapped within gangs and gang culture are severe. They are often unable to adapt to ordinary patterns of life and are increasingly unemployable, even if they were eager to seek a job in the formal economy. The result is a litany of lost lives and a reinforcing of a “cycle of gangsterism and violence” as the young children they bear are themselves vulnerable to being drawn into gang life. Violence in the home is strongly reinforcing, creating patterns of abuse that for many women last a lifetime. In this scenario women often seek out and form relationships with the very men who subject them to violence.

While such relations of violence and abuse also applies of course to women outside of gangs, the gang environment provides a “hothouse” where multiple men with histories of violence and abuse are present, and so women gang members are arguably more vulnerable than if they were living outside of gang structures and allegiances.

The pyramid of suggested interventions highlights the degree to which responding to gangs from a gender perspective remains challenging. It also suggests that any strategy must be long-term in nature and must confront the driving factors, and cycle of violence and exclusion, that ensure gang recruitment. Nevertheless, and as a primary objective, in the short term any programmatic response must offer “pathways” for women to exit gangs. That requires, as in the case of male counterparts, breaking the surveillance and network that women become embedded in and coaxing them into a new life. The formal systems of the criminal justice process have been notorious, in the words of the women themselves, of being not a source of resolution but a source of abuse and further violence. This is a cycle too that must be broken.



In the medium term it is essential to make girls less vulnerable to recruitment both by removing them from gang networks, reducing relationships with known gang members, and increasing their own knowledge of the damage caused and the alternatives. In the longer-term the prerequisite is to shift the structural conditions that give rise to gangsterism and to put in place responses, such as drug dependence treatment, that shift the balance in favour of those seeking to exit. Women see the “the system” as stacked against them. Changing that balance must be the ultimate aim of all policy and programme interventions.

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Appendix: Selected Interviews with Female Gang Members

1. "TINA TURNER": 21 March 2016 and 24 March 2016

"TINA TURNER" is a 23 year old 'white' female originally from Brooklyn now residing in Melkbos Strand. The interview was conducted in Paarden Island. TINA TURNER refused to be recorded as she feared a response from her partner, who is linked to the 28s gang. The interview was conducted in a car whilst her boyfriend (Ishmael – who spent 13 years in prison for murder and is a ranking 28s gang member) and his cohort (bodyguard) stood waiting outside. The interview was conducted in the parking lot at Eden on the Bay in Bloubergstrand. Three days later another interview with TINA TURNER was conducted, this time in Brooklyn, and without her entourage. She has a son that is 5 years old who lives with her mother in Brooklyn. Since the inception of her relationship with Ishmael, she has been steadily and constantly groomed or rather indoctrinated in the way of the Number gangs.

TINA TURNER asserts that her addiction to drugs, among other things, led her to become involved with gangs and gang operations. She claims to have had a fallout at home and subsequently lost her job. Her mother, frustrated with her not working, told her to leave and not come back until she "could pay for rent and be more responsible". She further argues that job opportunities for her kind is "hard to come by these days as the jobs only go to the blacks and foreigners". She explains that due to lack of job opportunity and a looming depression due to her dependency on others, she started hanging out with the wrong crowd. Her new friends were part of the 28's gang and they operated predominantly in the Maitland and Brooklyn areas.

TINA TURNER asserts that many females become gang members. She explains that females are often addicted to drugs and are thus used by the gang leaders as drug mules, or they are coerced into stowing contraband or they could be trained into becoming bandits, i.e. they are groomed into becoming shoplifters. TINA TURNER further explains that many of the females involved with gangs are sexually exploited, not only by the gang leader, but sometimes by other male members of the gang. She gives an account of how female gang members can also be trained to take up arms for the gang. To this regard, they are given guns or knives and they are asked to "fight for the gangs". TINA TURNER asserts that it is not easy to break free from the influence of the gangs, especially if a female is hooked on drugs. The gang leader serves an employer function in their lives in that he pays them either in money or drugs or both. As earlier mentioned, sexual relations are often socialized as going hand in hand with gang protocols.

TINA TURNER has a gang tattoo that was carved into her skin by her boyfriend whilst on a drug binge. Her initiation into the gang was due to her constantly hanging out with the gang and because her boyfriend is co-leader of the gang. She insists that it "depends upon who you are and what you can do in the gang.... That's where they put you. It doesn't matter if you are a man or a woman. You can kill or do whatever just as long as you are good at what you do." TINA TURNER asserts that most positions within the gang can be filled by any sex, but she does agree leadership is often time male orientated. She explains that gang structures nowadays are quite integrated with their mixture of different races and sexes. "Anyone can be part of gang... any colour male or female. Back in the day it was mainly only considered a coloured thing but today anyone is a gangster." She insists that she has only done a few shoplifting stunts for the gang.

TINA TURNER claims that she has never been coerced into any sexual relations with any other gang member other than her boyfriend, but she verifies that many female gang members "in their drug addicted haze" are forced into sexual congress with fellow male gang members. She claims to have witnessed much violence as part of the gangs every day operations and she feels that her association with the gang has in some way numbed her emotionally. She claims to have "passed the point of no return" and cannot go back to her old life. She wishes that



everything was different and that she could have her son back. She explains that there is no place to raise a child in a gang, but also claims that there are many wayward children that are taken off the street and then assimilated into the gangs. These children are trained to become thieves and killers and they look up to gang leaders as the gang bosses have new clothes and fancy cars and lots of money. She expresses regret, but at the same time is realistic about her options.

2. "BEYONCE": 22 March 2016

"BEYONCE" is a 29 year old 'coloured' female from Grassy Park. BEYONCE refused to be recorded during the interview as she fears that sensitive information may compromise her with her gang, but more with her boyfriend who is one of the gang leaders. The interview was conducted in Salt River, in the researcher's car whilst parking close to the station. She currently resides in Woodstock. She has a 13 year old daughter who lives with her aunt and she professes to have had experienced at least 4 miscarriages and 3 "back door" abortions.

BEYONCE claims to have fallen pregnant at 15 years old. The father of her baby was a taxi boss and leader of the YGSB gang (Young Gifted Six Bob). She left school after her mother asked her to leave home upon hearing about her pregnancy. She had complications giving birth due to being addicted to drugs during her pregnancy. BEYONCE claims that her "gangster boyfriend" physically abused her during pregnancy. Her 13 year old daughter was born with brain damage and was placed in foster care. She is exceptionally emotional as she relays the account of her 13 year old daughter, often breaking down crying during the interview.

BEYONCE claims that there are various factors that influenced her association with gangs and gang operations. Among others, BEYONCE cites that her lack of good guidance from any family members played a big role in the decisions that she made in her life. She asserts that she yearns for support and understanding when she fell pregnant. She claims that she was a stupid child herself at 15 and she regrets her choices. She reminisces upon how fearful she was about telling her mom that she was pregnant. She explains that she knew nothing about raising a child, nor about having a child. She explains that she fell pregnant after her first sexual experience and that it was a defining point in her life. Thus, being out on the streets, pregnant and 15 years old, she turned to her boyfriend for support. Apparently all she received from him was scorn and abuse, she claims to have never received any warmth or love from her relationship from him, instead he treated her like one of his soldiers and she groomed in the way of gangsters from the time that she was pregnant.

According to BEYONCE all the females associated with her gang were "slaves to drugs and many of them were forced to have sex with the guys. That was when we were all high. But even though they had their stukkies (other girlfriends), the men in the gang would always protect the women."

BEYONCE recalls being identified to steal and shoplift in the Golden Acre district. The gang provided ample training regarding pickpocketing and stealing from individuals and shops. She has three gang affiliated tattoos on her body. BEYONCE asserts that she was paid in drugs and "small money". She defines "small money" as being wages only enough to buy toiletries. She explains that the gang would have its base at a house in Woodstock. There were about eight other females linked to that particular gang. The females would predominantly be responsible for hiding contraband and firearms and also for shop theft. She claims at least two of the females associated with the YGSB gang were violent in terms of being able to skilfully handle weapons, viz. guns and knives.

BEYONCE explains that she spent two years in prison for jewellery theft. Her accomplices got the same sentence. Furthermore, she explains that she learned hairstyling skills in prison and that her boyfriend rarely visited her. According to BEYONCE, her boyfriend had many other girlfriends outside while she was incarcerated. Thus she feels that the gang abandoned her during her prison stretch. She affiliated with a different gang while in prison. BEYONCE posits that the prison administration abuse female prisoners sexually in exchange for simple privileges such as visitation rights or skills development participation (leadership opportunity) etc. She also explains are easily obtainable in prison and that her prison stretch did nothing to rehabilitate her drug habit.



When BEYONCE left prison she had nowhere else to go but back to her old ways. She explains that it is difficult to find employment in the real world and that “living with the gangs and their ways makes life easy ... everything is faster and you can get that rush quickly. I don’t have family so who gives a fuck what I do.” She understands that individuals involved in gangs, especially drug addicted gang members can be coerced into doing almost anything – including murder. She claims to have stabbed a woman who she found having sex with her boyfriend. “I stabbed both of them ... the next day he hit me through my face”. She shows me two missing teeth in her mouth as evidence of the violence in her relationship.

BEYONCE claims that she is unable to leave the gangs as she knows no other way to live. She explains that to leave the gangs she would have to leave drugs, and that this appears to be “mission impossible” as she has tried in vain to rid herself of drugs.

3. “MADONNA”: 29 March 2016

“MADONNA” is a 17 year old ‘coloured’ female. She resides in a small wooden house in the back of her uncle’s house in Lavender Hill. The interview was conducted in the researcher’s car in Lavender Hill.

MADONNA claims to have a 3 year old son who is being raised by her sister. MADONNA is linked to the 28’s gang and explains that she is “mildly addicted to drugs”. She explains that due to financial struggles within her family, she was forced to leave school in Grade 8. She worked temporarily as a packer in a supermarket until she was fired for theft. MADONNA explains that she lost her job because she stole three chocolate slabs. She worked for a businessman temporarily until she was raped by him. She claims to have gone to the police station to report the matter, but that they laughed at her and no charges were subsequently reported. She explains that the police in the area know of her gang affiliation.



MADONNA joined the gang after being asked to hide a “warm yster” (firearm that police are looking for as part of a criminal investigation). In exchange for her helping the gang hide the firearm she was paid by the gang boss. Many other subsequent “jobs” followed to aide the gang and this is how she became a gang member.

MADONNA explains that she has “marched as a soldier for the 28’s” many times in that she and her fellow gang members had many battles with fellow gangs. She claims to have being part of many “drive-by” shooting incidents. According to MADONNA, the shooters or sometimes the ‘hammermen’ (gang assassins) will train incumbent gang members in how to use weapons. She elaborates that the gang seniors will supply gang members with weapons and ammunition “or whatever else we need to fuck up whomever we must fuck up... the police, other gangs... we shoot them in their poes if they mess with us or with our business.”

MADONNA explains that she has the respect of the peers within the gang. She claims that she has never being sexually violated or compromised by anyone in the gang. “Honestly, they are my family. I live for them and I will die for them because I have received more love from them in this life than I ever did from any fucking member of my blood family.” MADONNA posits that there are many other female gang members but many of them are “drugged up zombies”. “I feel sorry for them but they serve a purpose in our gang. We call them the ‘expendables’ because you can use them for anything. They are like shit on toilet-paper. Sies! Now this is why I don’t do drugs that much. I only tik (use methamphetamine) when I feel sad... sometimes I use unгах (crystal meth). These tik-koppe (drug addicts) can be used as bait for the police when they put too much heat on the gang or to do easy stupid hits (violent acts) against a poes that needs to be stabbed for talking kak (shit)”.

MADONNA explains that she is good at what she does because she is devoted to the 28’s. She has been versed in the prison gang mythology of Nongoloza and is articulate in the prison gang hybrid language called Sabela.



MADONNA explains that she is out on bail for two separate cases. The one case involves her allegedly stabbing a rival taxi boss in the neck and the other criminal case involves her pouring boiling hot water on her ex-boyfriend.

MADONNA explains that she feels empowered as a woman within the gang. She claims to have unwavering respect in her community. “We always give back to the people in the community. We help the old aunties who struggle with their pension. We do much more than this fucking government do for people. We have more respect than the Mapuza (police) in this community. Even when I went to jail my gang was with me. I am protected wherever I go. Why would I want to leave them? I maybe young, but I am not stupid. I see many people rise and fall in the gang – I learn from them and their mistakes. I will lead this gang one day soon. I am gonna have a big taxi business and no one will fuck with me. You see the way we run drugs here? There is no stopping us. The police help us bring the drugs in. So you tell me who is the real criminal?”

MADONNA elaborates that youth are recruited into the gangs from as early as eight years old. “It is difficult in the townships when these youngsters have to go to school with no food. It’s a kak life for them. They find more love with the gangs as they can earn money and respect with the 28’s.” MADONNA has the name of her dead mother tattooed on her chest and she has the 28’s crest tattooed on her left arm.

4. “DOLLY PARTON”: 30 March 2016

“DOLLY PARTON” is a 39 year old ‘coloured’ female living in Bonteheuwel. DOLLY asserts that she also has a property that she “makes use of” at Century City. The interview was conducted in Cape Town CBD in a restaurant. She refused to be recorded in any way – “no writing either”. She claims to have three children who are “all grown up already and live their own lives”.

DOLLY PARTON is a member the Americans gang and professes to be a “Banker” (she claims to handle much of the gang’s logistics regarding drugs and the sale of drugs). DOLLY PARTON explains that she used to have an important job with the city council but lost her job due to “a stupid matter regarding monies being misappropriated.” She spent two years in prison for fraud and is currently under suspended sentence. She claims that whilst working for the city council she was introduced to many gang bosses who “were filtering their money via the city through many government tenders”. She became great friends with a gang boss who saw business potential with her. After her prison term she joined the gang boss’s legitimate business entity and is paid by him to keep his business profile “clean”.

DOLLY PARTON explains that “politicians are the biggest thieves... they are devils in disguise, actually the biggest murderers are the politicians who steal from the people all the time. Am I ashamed to be affiliated with a criminal cartel? No! At least here I have an earning potential and I am not limited because I am a female.” She asserts that she is afforded utmost respect by gang members, but elaborates that she only interacts with certain high-ranking members of the gang.

DOLLY PARTON explains that she’s aware of the trend by many legitimate business people now using gang bosses as hired muscle to facilitate a forced business transaction. Furthermore, she explains that business entrepreneurs offer gang bosses the ability to reform their gang fraternities into successful and pseudo legitimate business identities. She elaborates that “in this day and age it is very important to be linked to powerful people. If you know the right person they can help push you all the way to the top. It’s a matter of one hand wiping the other hand. I have yet to meet someone that cannot be bought. Money can buy lots of power... anything from police officials, to taxi tenders, to a murder docket going missing from a police-station or courtroom archive...”

DOLLY PARTON explains that the gang boss pays her a legitimate salary and that much of his income is generated from the sale of drugs in Cape Town. She reports that she’s not directly involved in the sale of drugs but that she has been exposed to the inner workings of the gang, that is, she knows where and how the gangs access the drugs, where it is stored and how it is distributed. She claims to know many of the gang members responsible for distribution. DOLLY PARTON explains that competition between rival gangs or “up-and-coming” new gangs is fierce



and that she has been privy to many drug related disputes where “heavy hitters were taken out by gang assassins in order to keep this drug engine going the right way.” Furthermore DOLLY PARTON posits that her relationship with the gangs and their leaders has made her fearless as a woman – she feels that her experience with gangs has exposed her to new tolerances and that she has accompanying credibility in this “man’s world, where men are the boss and women are expected to know their place – but not me, I am respected as a peer and a partner”.

DOLLY PARTON elaborates that her children know of her criminal associations, but that they have a mutual understanding and love her unconditionally. She has had opposition from her parents who are “church people and old school so they don’t know how to move and shake these days. If you do not know how the streets operate, then these streets will eat you...” She claims to be happy with her criminal associates and has no intention of changing her career path “I’ve been in a nine to five and there were more sharks in that job than what I meet up with here where society call these guys gangsters when they are really businessmen hustling to beat the system that honestly fucks everyone. The rich gets richer and they don’t give a shit about the poor people. So know you have these guys using the initiative and smarts to come up and make money. They come out of dirt poor places and can rise to become millionaires. I look up to that type of shit.”

5. “BARBARA STREISAND”: 31 March 2016 and 3 April 2016

“BARBARA STREISLAND” is a 33 year old Chinese/‘coloured’ female linked to the JFKs gang (Junky Funky Kids) in Parkwood. She refused to be recorded as she is an active gang member and did not trust that her interview would not compromise her with the gang. She agrees to the taking of notes.

BARBARA STREISAND claims to have 4 children having fallen pregnant at the age of 14 years old. The father of her first child was linked to the 26s gang and was notoriously violent in the Parkwood area. All four her children have different fathers. All the fathers of the children have gang associations and have been in prison for most of their lives. She is affiliated with the Junky Funky Kids through the father of her second child whom she later married and divorced.

BARBARA STREISAND asserts that all four of the men that fathered children with her were exceptionally violent men. Furthermore she claims that they were violent in the presence of their children and others. BARBARA STREISAND recounts that drugs and alcohol were often the underlining feature of the violence in her life. “Kyk hier (look here) they were all fokken in their poes (cunt) ge-eart (completely deluded due to drug abuse) and so they take their kak (shit) out on a woman. They are poes (cunt) cowards. But I...I was too stupid and too much in need of their company and what they could give me to see that they were devils in my life. I started taking drugs myself. It would help me escape all the kak (shit) in my life. My one child (her 18 year old daughter) was burnt with boiling hot water while I left her with him. I just went to the shop to get some food for us. When I got back to the house my child was burnt and he was still asleep – drugged up.” She claims that social services took her daughter and two other children from her while her aunt raises her 4 year old son. She joined the gangs as she had left school at an early age and couldn’t find a meaningful job.

BARBARA STREISAND claims that there are little or no job opportunities for young women on the Cape Flats. She explains that most people in the townships live in poverty and that drugs play an integral part of everyone’s lives in those communities. “Everyone tiks (uses methamphetamine)...the laaities (youth) and the ou toppies (old folk)... everyone is in their poes (cunt) getik (completely drugged up).”

BARBARA STREISAND started working for the gangs when she was given a commission to collect money on a taxi for a gang boss. She claims that he had about ten taxis and that he commanded substantial influence in the Parkwood area. She explains that to her, her life became more meaningful when she joined the gangs as they took



care of her. To this end she explains that she was given money and drugs and protection as a form of payment. “I still ride for free on all these taxis...I never pay because they are all too poes bang for me (too scared of me)”. When asked to elaborate that her association with the Junky Funky Kids has provided her with a reputation so much so that grown men are scared to mess with her. She claims that her gang boss is influential in prison too. “When he was imprisoned he still had a lot of power here on the outside. We would get messages from the inside and he would continue to run his business from prison.”

BARBARA STREISAND explains that working with the taxis for the gang entailed a certain degree of training: she “trained with the eye” in that her training was not formal but she would learn from how the other gang members operated. She was given a knife and shown how to stab people in a way that they could either hurt or kill. She was later given many guns to hide for the gang. In later years some gang members taught her how to shoot and even how to disassemble and clean guns.

BARBARA STREISAND asserts that she was never made to feel any less because she was a female gang member – she claims that she only felt disempowered when she was beaten by the fathers of her children. “But they would never do that kak (shit) to me ever again. They know not to fok (fuck) with me.” BARBARA STREISAND maintains that she spent three years in prison for killing someone. She claims that she stabbed a woman at the taxi rank in self-defence.

BARBARA STREISAND asserts that she knows of prison Number gangs in the female section of Pollsmoor prison, but that “they are pap (weak) because they cannot mos (just) be Ndotas (bonafide Number gang members) because they are females.”

BARBARA STREISAND claims that prison life was not that difficult as she made great friendships and she learnt to sew. Furthermore, she asserts that she “almost stopped taking tik in the mang (jail), but you can get the tik there so easily it was difficult to quit”. BARBARA STREISAND returned to the Junky Funky Kids gang when she left prison. This time however, she involved herself more with drug distribution.

BARBARA STREISAND can sabela (speak the bastardized prison language). She explains that she learnt to sabela in order to “know what they are saying...plus it is good for a woman to be able to wys (show) a poes (cunt) that is trying to kyk’n ding (trying to pick a fight with her). BARBARA STREISAND explains that being able to speak the language of the gangs is very important especially for a woman “in the bendes” (gang).

BARBARA STREISAND believes that the police are of little use in the Cape Flats communities. She claims that many police are paid by the gang bosses in order to facilitate gang operations. BARBARA STREISAND claims to have stabbed a policeman when he second-guessed her at the gang boss’s house. “The Mapuza (police) are kak (shit) scared of us. We pay them so I don’t give a fok (fuck) about them, no respect for them.” BARBARA STREISAND admits that she still uses drugs and that she is sometimes forgetful as a result.

6. “GRACE JONES”: 1 April 2016

GRACE JONES is a 42 year old ‘coloured’ woman from Hanover Park linked to the Mongrels gang. She refused to have her interview recorded. GRACE JONES is a beautiful woman marred by the apparent damaging effects of continued drug use. She has piercing green eyes and speaks with a soft voice. GRACE JONES claims to have been an A-level scholar until she started experimenting with drugs when she was 12 years old. She claims to have grown up in Bo-Kaap but was expelled from school for her drug addiction. She started hanging out with the Mongrels gang in Hanover Park when she was forced to move there. She lived with her aunt in Hanover Park as her mother “wants nothing to do” with her.

GRACE JONES explains that being on drugs, she lost interest in her schooling and found hanging out with the street corner gangs much more exciting. As she was hooked on drugs she asserts that the then Mongrels gang boss raped her and subsequently prostituted her as an asset for the gang. That gang boss was later killed in prison. GRACE JONES claims that she bore a child out of the rape experience. The child was given up for adoption. She



moved with the gang operations as they utilized her and many other females like her in the capacity of “winkel boewe” (shoplifters). She explains that they were programmed to target small jewellery stores and cellphone stores. She was also versed in how to use weapons. GRACE JONES had about ten short prison stints related to theft and aggravated assault. She claims that the longest she had to spend in prison was one year and nine months. GRACE JONES explains that although she has never murdered anyone, she has been in many gang fights. “kyk hier (look here)...as a soldier for the gang you see lots of blood...there’s lots of Ghazie (blood) everywhere...as ons moet trap dan trap ons (if we must throw down and get dirty then we will)”.

GRACE JONES explains that protection rackets are part and parcel of gang operations in Hanover Park. “Everyone must pay us...if the taxis wanna (want to) drive through our area then they must pay to do so...even the council, we can make life difficult for those council workers that come here and want to fix things without paying us. It is easy for the gang to hurt them and take their tools or whatever they have”. GRACE JONES explains that the police are also paid by the gang boss and that they therefore facilitate and enable many gang operations. According to her there is no limit to what money can buy. “Even if we kill someone we can tol (reverse) that case. The case file or court docket will just go missing. It is easy to get to people if you have money.”

GRACE JONES explains that drug distribution plays a big part in the economic success of gangs. She warns that drug distribution points are fiercely contested and that many people die for trying to invade certain drug hotspots. She shows a scar on her arm where she was shot in a drug related turf war against the rival Young Americans gang. She further explains that as a gang member she’s not necessarily “considered as a female, more just a gang member”. GRACE JONES has a Mongrels tattoo on her chest and the name of her son on her leg. She explains that her involvement with the gangs has made her much more tolerant of violent behaviour. “When I was a child I was scared of these things...guns and knives and blood. But now, I’ve been living in this life for so long this is all that I know...this is all that we see in Hanover Park. What else must we do?” GRACE JONES confirms that the gang provides for her in a way that any other employer would for an employee. She is paid by the gang boss and also has access to drugs and alcohol as they control a few shebeens and drug hotspots in Hanover Park.

GRACE JONES asserts that even though she was forced into prostitution at a young age, she is no longer in that business. She claims that she was young and naïve at the time and did not have the courage to stand up for herself. She tells that her early prostitution experiences have denatured her sexual appetite. GRACE JONES asserts that being raped made her hate men for a very long time. She says that the experience has hardened her and that she more easily was able to become violent as a result. She explains that she has chosen to be lesbian as she is more attracted to women nowadays. GRACE JONES posits that she is happy being a gang member and that she will do anything for her gang; the gang boss takes good care of her and any other females in their gang. Although she expresses a few regrets regarding her choices in life, she “is at a point of no return and will always be a Mongrel”.

7. “MARIAH CAREY”: 5 April 2016

MARIAH CAREY is a 28 year old ‘coloured’ woman linked to the HLs gang (Hard Livings) in Manenberg. MARIAH CAREY claims to have two children that were taken away from her by people representing the Department of Social Development. Her children are 13 and 8 years old respectively. MARIAH CAREY was raised in Manenberg and recalls that her mother was often violently abused by her father. She also recalls that one of her father’s closest friends whom she called “Uncle Boeta” (Uncle Brother) frequently raped her as a child. Her parents were alcoholics and she would be abused while they (her parents) were “so drunk that they had a five day babelas” (so inebriated that they were hungover for five days at a time). “He would come into my room while my brother and sisters were asleep and lie on top of me”. She explains that she had told her parents of the rape incidents but that it was all “swept under the carpet.” MARIAH CAREY recalls that Uncle Boeta would be the source of income in their home for a very long time. To this end her parents, being alcoholics, were reluctant to believe her “rape stories” as they feared that they would be cut off from their alcohol supply.



MARIAH CAREY recalls that her father was imprisoned at Polsmoor for three years. He had defrauded some church folk out of monies. During her father's prison term her mother fell pregnant and had a child from Uncle Boeta. Significantly, both MARIA CAREY and her mother were pregnant at the same time and thus, she claims, her daughter and her brother – "n laatlammetjie" (a child born to a woman considered to be older in years) – were raised as being brother and sister. This dysfunctional family scenario fraught with violence and alcoholism drove MARIAH CAREY to the streets where she found corner-side gang members to be more appealing than both school and the poisonous environment that she experienced at home. "The ouens (the guys) were always cool man...they were dressed befok (they were stylishly dressed) and they had the fastest cars." MARIA CAREY explains that her attraction to gang life and her gang membership was catalysed by their care-free life. According to her, they (the gang members) had access to everything – drugs, money, fast cars, stylish clothing. To a young girl trapped in a dysfunctional family this life appealed to her much more as she sought to escape the adversity within her family life.

At first, MARIA CAREY, explains she just hung out with the boys from the gang at the street corners where after she would "drive in their cars with them while they were woelig (active with gang operations)". MARIA CAREY posits that she moved out of home and had her mother raise the two children alone. She started experimenting with drugs whilst with the gang and she was initiated into the gang core. She has a large "Hard Livings" tattoo on her upper thigh. MARIAH CAREY claims that one of the gang lieutenants was "busy with Ghazie (blood) only (he was an assassin)." She explains that this man taught her how to become skilled in working with various weapons. She was taught how to stab and how to shoot targets. Although MARIA CAREY does not openly say it, she hints that she has been involved in violence. She explains in a matter of fact way the many instances when rival gang members were either maimed or killed by her gang and in some cases gang members were mutilated or dismembered. She is passionate about her gang credo and is completely immersed in prison hybrid language called sabela.

MARIAH CAREY claims to have been jailed for six years for matters relating to attempted murder and aggravated assault. She admits to have killed other people and that "the police were too stupid" to place her at any of those crimes. MARIAH CAREY explains that she feels empowered as a gang member. She does not feel belittled in any way by her gang peers and explains that she is respected in both the gang and community. MARIAH CAREY is paid by the gang and she has access to drugs as they also distribute and sell drugs within the communities. She explains that she has nothing to do with the drug distribution (although she is a user). She asserts that her position within the gang is related to "bloedwerk" (blood work, more especially violent acts commissioned by the gang). MARIAH CAREY claims to have an "on – again – off – again" relationship with one of the high-ranking members of the HLLs, but that he has now been in prison for the past four years. She says they have a child together that has been placed in foster care.

MARIAH CAREY was interviewed in Mitchell's Plain. She refused to be recorded and her friend tried to steal some of the researcher's belongings whilst the interview was underway.



8. "RIHANNA": 7 April 2016 and 9 April 2016

"RIHANNA" is a 25 year old 'coloured' woman from Mitchell's Plain affiliated to the Fancy Boys gang. RIHANNA was interviewed in Gatesville, Athlone, and refused to be recorded but is okay with note taking. She claims to be a Fancy Girl, a female derivative of the Fancy Boys gang in Mitchell's Plain. She explains that the male and female components of the Fancy Boys "trap saam" (are one consolidated gang). RIHANNA claims to have three children that are cared for by her aunt and uncle. She explains that her three children all have different fathers. RIHANNA has been in and out of prison throughout her life. She describes juvenile detention and prison life itself as having no difference. "It's all the same, the juvenile section and prison is the same, anyone that tells you that it's different things is talking kak (shit) to you."



RIHANNA posits that female gangs are prevalent in prison at that the Number gangs have some influence in the female section as many females learnt to sabela in prison. RIHANNA explains that even though it hasn't happened to her she can confirm that prison staff are corrupt and that the male staffers have sex with female prisoners in exchange for privileges. She explains these privileges to include access to contraband, special kitchen details, etc. RIHANNA recalls that prison life was "good and bad...kind of...how can I say...sweet and sour nuh? You see on the streets here in the Play (Mitchell's Plain) life is fast and quick. You got to know who you rolling with or you get into kak (shit) quickly. It doesn't matter if you are a Fancy Girl and living the high life with lots of money and a powerful gang to cover for you... 'cos once you get to prison it's a different story. All you have is poes time (tedious and never ending time)...and that time goes on forever. So you meet new people you maybe join a new gang just to finish your time and get out. Who wants to live like that where someone else gets to turn your light on or off? When you're in prison all you want to do is have your freedom and be outside. But it's difficult out there. It's difficult to be a woman out there alone with children. It's a dangerous world. No one knows how it is to live here in Mitchell's Plain. It's dangerous. Everyone is getik (drugged-up with methamphetamine). It's like a fokken zombie town. So for me it's actually safer with the gang. So when I leave prison I am back with the gang, I am back with my manskappe (gang fellowship)".

RIHANNA explains that living on the Cape Flats is a matter of survival. To her, being in the gang provides her an opportunity to uplift herself – to have money. She recalls trying to get a job once, but decided that it was insulting to "work for such a kak little money and take such kak from people. I have dignity and I deserve some respect. I much rather beweeg (move with and operate with) the gang. I get more respect this way as no one will dare to fuck with me. We take no prisoners. We will fucking shoot you in your face if you mess with us. Doesn't matter who you are, police, council worker, priest or imam, it doesn't matter. What we do within the gang is most important." RIHANNA explains that the police services are paid by the gangs. She claims that the police are in service of the gangs and that neither the police nor security companies have power in the communities within which they (the Fancy Boys and Fancy Girls) dominate. Her position on religious leaders is the same as she expresses contempt for them. "The imam and priest is just as evil because they want to come and tell us kak when they themselves steal from the people. We are here and we protect the people. We actually give back to these communities. At least we as coloureds are controlling what's happening here, 'cos even if we don't sell the drugs here, then the blacks will come and do it and there's a whole lot of new kak happening...see what they doing with this government? It was much better for us with the whities in charge"

RIHANNA intimates that protection and racketeering is an integral part of gang operations within the Cape Flats, more especially in Mitchell's Plain. She confirms that her gang charges a protection tax for almost every activity. "The taxis that run through here...we shake them down 'cos they must pay if they want to trap (pass through) through here. We charge even the scrap merchants if they make a lot of money. We must get money from businesses even if they skarrel (trade for money), because we protect these businesses from the Dixie Boys or the Americans that come here to try their luck".

RIHANNA explains that the gang sees themselves as protectors of the community in that they function (in at least one capacity) to deny other gangs access to business entrepreneurs within communities. She claims that the gang facilitates prosperity in the community and claims that the gangs are more responsive to community disputes than both the police and security companies.

RIHANNA assures that she is happy with her life as a Fancy Girl and that she sees her choices in life as having been limited due to certain circumstances. She says that she will die a Fancy Girl.



9. "SHIRLEY BASSEY": 9 April 2016

"SHIRLEY BASSEY" is a 32 year old 'coloured' woman from Salt River linked to the Nice Time Kids. She was interviewed in Woodstock and refused to be recorded due she said to "her gang allegiance". Not taking is permitted.

SHIRLEY BASSEY claims to have two children aged 14 and 16. Her children are being raised by her grandmother who lives in Ocean View. SHIRLEY BASSEY has been to Polsmoor prison twice: her first time in prison was a two year stint where she was sentenced in a court case related to drug trafficking (she lived in a house owned by the gang boss; her associates sold drugs from this very stronghold where she lived); her second time in prison was due to jewellery theft with aggravated assault. She explains that she was raised by her grandmother as her mother had abandoned her. Her mother was a drug addict. She recalls that they were very poor and that many times she would go to sleep without having eaten. Furthermore she claims to have hated school and that she found more of a sense of family with the Nice Time Kids who were hanging out on street corners. The gang embraced her and gave her a sense of identity that was not "the broken version" that she felt living at home with her grandmother in dirt poor conditions. As a Nice Time Kid she earned money and respect. She felt enriched by this experience as it gave her a lot confidence.

SHIRLEY BASSEY elaborates that she was addicted to tik (methamphetamine) for about eight years. She nearly lost her children due to drugs and she sees her grandmother as a saint for taking care of her children. If her grandmother did not agree to raise her children, "they would have been taken away into foster care by the courts". She admits that she nearly lost her life to drugs in that she nearly overdosed a few years ago. "I have been clean (off drugs) for about seven years. My one child was born while I was on drugs. He is lame in the one leg and is slow so he has to get special care. My eldest is also addicted to tik. I don't know what to do to get her off this tik." Even though SHIRLEY BASSEY understands the devastating effects that drugs have on members of her family, she is still completely in support of the gangs selling drugs within these communities. She explains that "whoever is selling drugs here...when they leave here, someone else will come here and then take over. It doesn't matter as you can see man...this is part of our life here. It has been a part of our life since I was a child. People here don't know any better. Everyone is so poor...they live kak lives...to get high takes you away from these battles. You feel great. I gave it up because I nearly died. I take a skyf (a drag on a cannabis cigarette) now and then but that's all."

SHIRLEY BASSEY claims to handle monies within the Nice Time Kids gang. According to her monies are accumulated through proceeds from protection and racketeering, drug sales and distribution, prostitution, and other illegal activities such as fencing stolen property. SHIRLEY BASSEY explains that the gang gets their drugs from Durban and that "many people are paid to get the drugs into Cape Town safely. Oh yes, we definitely pay the police. We have our contacts...high ranking cops that get paid and they make it so that we get the drugs here...it's not that difficult to smuggle the drugs in if you know the right people. Many of our customers are some famous people, even lanies (bosses from big companies). These lanies come to us for coke (cocaine) or acid or ecstasy...we give them and they pay our prices, they are regulars and they come here with their expensive cars and still the police do nothing because we pay them. Sometimes the police raid because another gang maybe piemped (squealed or told) on us and paid the police more money than we did so that the police raid us. Now the poes police will raid us and take our drugs and there's lots of kak to get those drugs back. So the cops work for who pays them the most... what a kak gedagte (what a bad way of thinking), don't you think?"

SHIRLEY BASSEY asserts that there is fierce rivalry between gangs for drug hotspots, that is, places where drugs are more commonly sold. "People die in the fight for who can sell drugs where and we are sterk (strong) here in Salt River so we don't take kak from anyone. They will know not to try their luck here otherwise we don't hesitate to tchaais (to punish them) them." Thus, as SHIRLEY BASSEY explains, the sale of drugs plays an integral part of gang operations. SHIRLEY BASSEY claims that the gang support her and offer her a platform of respect. According to her, she feels more fulfilled as a member of the Nice Time Kids because they are her



“true family”. She recalls that the gang supported her even when she went to prison. She recounts that the gang always saw to it that she always had money on her property in prison and that she was protected from both prisoners and prison administration alike. SHIRLEY BASSEY understands that she will never leave the gang as it is “tattooed” into her lifestyle. She has five gang related tattoos all over her body. She claims to not have any regrets in her life.

SHIRLEY BASSEY asserts that she has seen many acts of violence within her gang career and expects to see more as “taking blood is part of this way of life”.

10. “WHITNEY HOUSTON”: 13 April 2016

“WHITNEY HOUSTON” is a 30 year old ‘coloured’ woman from Kensington associated with the Wonder Kids gang. She agreed that notes could be taken during the interview but did not want it recorded. WHITNEY HOUSTON explains that she is a Wonder Girl, a female component of the Wonder Kids. She claims to have two children aged three and ten years old respectively; her two children are from two different fathers. Her children were taken away from her and put into foster care because of her gang related activities and drug abuse. She explains that the fact that her children are not with her makes her very sad, even “depressed...and thinking about that will make me do drugs...”

WHITNEY HOUSTON was adopted as a child as both her biological parents had died young. She asserts that she was never abused as child and that she hated school – she claims to have insubordination issues as she “hated being told what to do by the teachers... so I used to bunk (play truant) all the time...” She found the gangsters and gang life more attractive than “the difficult life in the township”. She explains that she was sent to juvenile detention when she was 15 years old. She spent approximately three years and five months in Pollsmoor Prison for charges related to vehicle theft; she has her daughter’s name tattooed on her face and various other gang and prison gang insignias tattooed over her body. She admits that she was drugged up when she had her tattoos and thus she “didn’t feel any pain”.

WHITNEY HOUSTON asserts that many Pollsmoor prison warders would have sexual relations with certain female prisoners. Apparently, such sexual exchange would come with a trade-off in that those prisoners would be afforded certain privileges such as smoking and extended recreational time etc. She further details that the sex with warders could happen in various venues such as in the hairdressing room (a facility for skills development within the prison facility) or in the administration offices. According to WHITNEY HOUSTON, many women become denatured to sexual love due to such prison experiences “in the same way that a prostitute cannot anymore feel love when she has so much sex with so much men...”

WHITNEY HOUSTON explains that her time spent in prison was both difficult and easy: “Being away from everyday stuff like...like having your own freedom ... your own right to do things, when you think about that then it is truly difficult... because you see... you just sit there and think about your life... you know I think... but am I a dog to be treated like this? Or am I a woman or a person... do you understand? That... for me was difficult... but then you meet some nice friends there in prison also... many of them help you to get through your time because... you see... they have been there for a long time so they can think about their time and they are more sure than you about what they think about in prison and how they will spend of their time in prison... do you understand...? Because without such a ... how can I say... support... then maybe you will maybe go mad in your head there... learning to work in the hairdresser and learning other things there in prison was... interesting you know... it made my time in that place a lot nicer...”

WHITNEY HOUSTON indicates that she is affiliated to both the Wonder Girls gang and the Americans gang in the Kensington and Facticeon areas. She elaborates that as a member of the gang, she could be asked to perform a violent act and she would willingly comply, for e.g. she was asked to stab a member of a rival gang and she “did it easily”. She claims to have been “paid well” to perform certain violent acts such as “drive by shootings or to



stab someone". WHITNEY HOUSTON explains that the gang will supply her and her fellow gang members with weapons and, if necessary, "someone in the gang will show you how the weapon works... they will give you guns and ammunition".

She considers herself to be a rehabilitated drug addict but admits to still doing drugs on the odd occasion, more especially when she "is stressed out". WHITNEY HOUSTON elucidates that she was paid in both money and drugs for her efforts within gang operations. She claims to have been "placed on a pedestal" within the gang and that she commands lots of respect. She does not feel that she is treated any less due to her being a female. She elaborates that it is easy to penetrate the gang if you have street smarts, "you must know the street... the language... the people also... if you don't then you die..." She explains that there are many females linked to gangs as it comes with various perks, such as acclaim, money, drugs, notoriety also provides a degree of celebrity.

WHITNEY HOUSTON posits that even though it is easy for her to walk away from gangs, many women "are trapped in that way of life and they can't get out because they traded something of themselves to get into that gangs... even if it was violence or them not being soft anymore... they are now addicted to drugs and that violent lifestyle... it's a fast life when you live like that... they say that you will most definitely die like that... I have seen too many die here with me on the streets..." She explains that many women lose themselves in the gangs because they have to give themselves sexually to some gang members. She claims to be independent and that she joined the gangs out of her own volition. For her, the gangs provided security and fellowship that the harsh township life failed to provide.

WHITNEY HOUSTON shows an apparent lack of fear when she explains her violent past. She easily explains how she killed an ex-boyfriend – she gunned him down with his own firearm and got a "one year suspended sentence for it because there was no evidence at the scene." She explains that "juvenile detention and prison are the same thing because you get treated like an animal in both places..." According to WHITNEY HOUSTON, she has witnessed and been part of many scenarios where people died in very violent ways, e.g. "someone gets burnt to death in front of you, or gets forced off the road with a car, or gets stabbed or shot right here next to you... that's real violence... not pulling hair and scratching someone like in prison..."





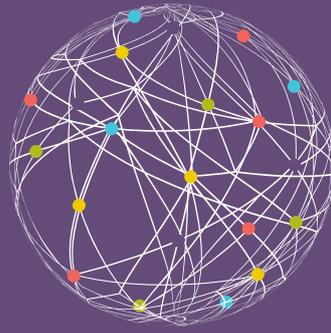
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