



Special points of interest:

- Gangs are growing concern for law enforcement officials in Saskatchewan
- Aboriginal-based gangs continue to threaten the economic viability and public safety of the communities in which they reside and operate.



2005 Intelligence Trends: Aboriginal-based Gangs in Saskatchewan

Law enforcement officials in Saskatchewan are concerned about the growth and impact of Aboriginal-based gangs. In 2002, the results of the Canadian Police Survey on Youth Gangs, estimated the number of youth gangs in Canada at 434 with an estimated membership of 7,071. The largest concentration of youth gang members was reported in Ontario, followed by Saskatchewan. However, on a per capita basis, Saskatchewan reported the highest concentration of youth gang members (1.34 per 1,000 population) or approximately 1,315. (CPS, 2002, p.13-14)

It is believed that the gangs established a presence in Saskatchewan through the federal and provincial correctional centres in the mid to late 1990s. According to police and Crown prosecutors, following a riot at a Manitoba prison in 1997, some of Manitoba's established gang leaders were moved to secure custody in Saskatchewan. As a result, these gang leaders began to recruit new members in the correctional institutions and in the community upon their release.

Over the past 10 years, gangs have been consuming a tremendous amount of police and criminal justice resources. In recent years, anecdotal reports of violence, drug dealing, and recruitment of people into gangs have been heard frequently at several courthouses throughout the province.

It is anticipated that gang-related crimes and recruitment will continue to escalate throughout the Province given our demographic trends. While law enforcement officials are aware of the criminal activities and capabilities of the gangs, we are not aware of the full depth or impact gangs have on our community. Obviously, the direct costs and impact of gang-related crime in a community are primarily financial in nature in terms of higher insurance premiums, health care costs, decreasing property values, and legal expenses. However, the indirect costs in terms of fear, violence, lost lives, and unmet potential are far more insidious to a community.

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“Gangster Lifestyle”

In Saskatchewan, the “gangster” lifestyle is an attractive alternative for many aboriginal youth. The implications of extreme concentrations of poverty, violence, absent parenting and urban migration, combined with blocked opportunities and substance abuse have created an environment that is conducive for the recruitment of youth into gangs:

“Besides poverty, social disorganization, particularly in the case of mobile changing populations, provides an ideal breeding ground for the development of a gang subculture.” (Soulliere, N; Canadian Police College, 1998)

Researchers from the United States have found that the median age at which youth begin associating or “hanging out” with gang members is 13 years old. (NIJ, 1998, p.2) According to Saskatchewan law enforcement databases, there are approximately 500 confirmed gang members and associates operating out of the cities of Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert alone. The age range is expanding because gang members are remaining in the gangs longer. Interestingly, approximately 70% of the gang members in Saskatoon are 18 years of age or older and in Regina the average age of a representative sample of gang members is 24 years old.

The established gangs have adopted specific membership procedures, including recruitment, initiation, and disciplinary rituals to enforce rules and evade detection. Gangs will continue to evolve into a serious organized crime threat in our Province.



Gang Graffiti

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Active Gangs in Saskatchewan

Currently, there are at least 12 known adult and youth gangs operating in Saskatchewan. Some of the adult-based gangs include the following: Native Syndicate, Indian Posse, Redd Alert, Saskatchewan Warriors, Crazy Cree, Mixed Blood, Tribal Brotherz, and West Side Soldiers. A few of the youth gangs identified in Saskatchewan are the Crips, Junior Mixed Blood, Indian Mafia Crips, and North Central Rough Riderz. While some of the youth gangs disappear quickly and are of limited concern, many of the adult gangs have persisted over the past decade and are of considerable and immediate concern. These fully entrenched Aboriginal-based gangs have spread throughout various northern and southern communities in Saskatchewan and have established a permanent presence.

Many urban and rural communities have experienced steady growth in terms of gang recruitment and gang-related crimes. In particular, over the past year, residents in Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert have experienced an increase in extreme violence involving aggravated assaults, shootings, and murders as gangs compete for territory. In Saskatchewan, the organizational structure of gangs range from very loosely organized neighbourhood-level youth groups to more sophisticated and highly organized crime groups. Most gangs have adopted a leadership structure to discipline and enforce rules among the membership, establish initiation rituals, provide direction in regards to criminal activity, and establish communication patterns.

Criminal History

While official police statistics may point to an increase in violent or gang-related crimes it is difficult to interpret because of varying definitions of what constitutes a gang member and non-standardized reporting of gang-related crimes. Official crime rates and gang-related criminal activities, in particular, are based on quantitative data from incident-based systems. To properly understand and gauge the impact of gang-related activities in a community, it is equally important that qualitative data from neighbourhood surveys, interviews, and criminal intelligence be considered as well.

Although gangs are generally involved in opportunistic and spontaneous street-level criminal activities including robberies, assaults, and property theft, they are also involved in more sophisticated crimes including drug trafficking, prostitution, firearms offences, and witness intimidation. Research data obtained from a study in the United States revealed that the criminal career of gang members generally begins with property offences (e.g., auto theft, burglary, etc.) and progress towards drug-related and violent crimes within 1.5 to 2 years. (NIJ, 1998, p.2) These statistical trends are also evident with the gang members in Saskatchewan. Based on the criminal history of a sample of known gang members (n=56) a large percentage (87.5%) had previous youth court convictions, multiple property-related offences, and the severity of their offences escalated with age.

In southern Saskatchewan, the impact of gang activity is most pronounced in the following areas: Regina, Fort Qu'Appelle, Broadview, Indian Head, Yorkton, Carlyle, Moose Jaw, and Kamsack. At this point, it is unclear as to the degree of cooperation or control that gang members from urban communities have over other gang associates in the rural communities. Although gang alliances and networks are formed from time to time, it appears as if there is a certain degree of autonomy between gang members in the cities and those operating out of the rural areas. In northern Saskatchewan, gang-related activity and crimes have affected the following communities: Saskatoon, Prince Albert, North Battleford, Pelican Narrows, Stanley Mission, Pierceland, Meadow Lake, and La Ronge.

Despite the predominate localization of gang activity, the impact of gang-related crime is spreading throughout regional areas as they become more mobile. What is important to remember from various research on gang activity is that gang involvement significantly increases an individual's chances of being arrested, incarcerated, and severely injured.

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Gang Recruitment

Aboriginal-based gangs regularly recruit youth from the Aboriginal population in urban and rural communities and correctional institutions. As a result, Aboriginal youth will continue to be at greater risk of coming into conflict with the law and being involved in gang violence, thereby posing harm to themselves and their communities. (CISC, 2004, p.20)

Most of the gangs require prospective “recruits” to meet certain criteria and perform criminal acts before they are allowed membership into the gang. To gain entry, a “recruit” generally requires a sponsor. A sponsor is a confirmed gang member who supports the “recruit” and vouches for his loyalty. Before a “recruit” is allowed entry into the gang the person must generally complete 3 requirements:

1. The “recruit” must perform a series of criminal acts called “strikes” at the direction of his superiors in the gang to prove his loyalty. Many of the gang-related crimes in Saskatchewan are “strikes” committed by new gang members trying to increase their status in the gang.
2. A “recruit” must also produce “paperwork” or a copy of their criminal record to members of the gang. Generally, the greater the number of convictions equates to more respect and higher status within the gang.
3. The last phase of the initiation ritual is the “beating in” or “jumping in” process. The “recruit” must endure a beating from the other gang members where they punch, kick, and assault the recruit for several seconds or minutes to prove their strength and loyalty.

Interviews with gang members have confirmed that “recruits” have committed vehicle thefts, assaults, and armed robberies as part of their initiation into the gang membership. The gangs are also very active throughout the adult correctional facilities representing approximately 25% of the inmate population at any given time. It is not uncommon to have gang members posturing for control within the correctional institution by “checking in” rival gang members. Gang members have been known to threaten, stab, and assault rival gang members that are placed within their range at the jail. The rival gang members are told to “check in” by returning to their cells and avoiding further conflict.

While gang membership is very strong within the correctional setting in the prairie Provinces, gang membership fluctuates in the community due to the high incarceration rates of gang members. Despite the volatility and fluid nature of gang membership, gang leaders have developed effective communication techniques that enable gang members to continue their criminal activity whether in jail or released to the community.



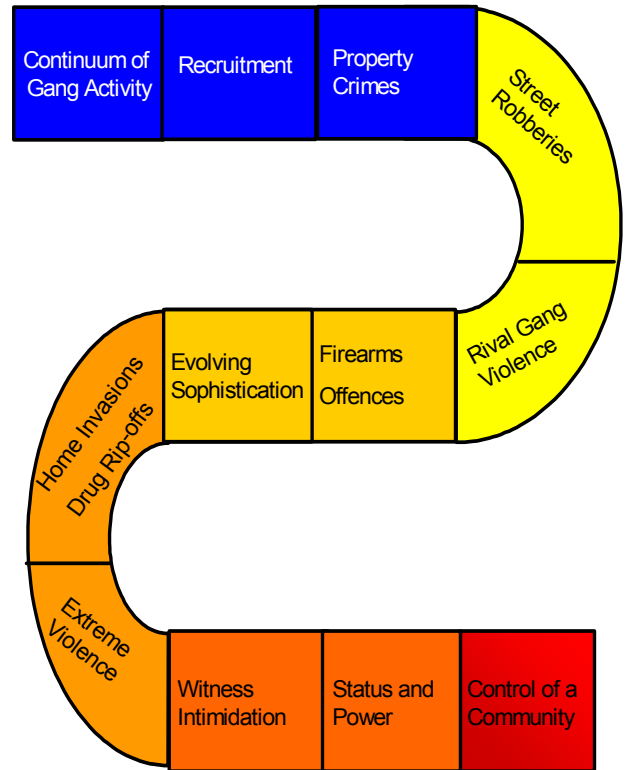
Indian Posse Tattoo

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Key Indicators and Developmental Stages

To properly understand the gang phenomena and accurately depict the situation in Saskatchewan it is important to remember that Aboriginal-based gangs range from very loosely structured neighbourhood-based youth groups to highly organized regional adult gangs. After reviewing historical and current intelligence reports, it is apparent that gang activity has evolved over time and adopted characteristics that resemble other “traditional” organized crime groups. The leadership structure of gangs generally includes the following positions: president, vice-president, higher up, enforcer, soldier, and striker. For comparative purposes, the developmental stages and key indicators of gang activity can best be described along a continuum of increasing sophistication and severe criminal activity (see diagram). In Saskatchewan, most of the adult gangs have evolved over time and become involved in more organized criminal activity, including drug trafficking networks, property theft rings, and prostitution-related offences. These key indicators provide the community and law enforcement officials with a visual tool to assess the relative threat and capabilities of local gangs in your neighbourhood.

*Impact on Saskatchewan Communities
Key Indicators*



While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact arrival date of gangs to a community, there are a number of early warning signs. One of the most common signs of gang activity in a community is graffiti and recruitment. During this stage of development, initiation crimes such as assaults, thefts and other property crime offences may provide early identification of a gang presence in a community.

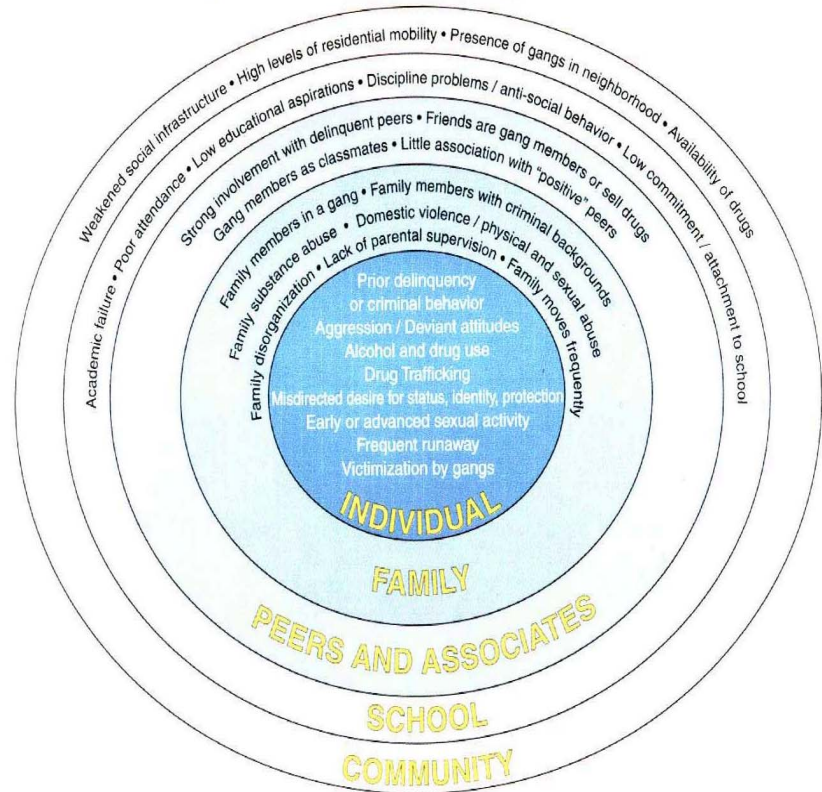
As street level robberies and rival gang violence increase, victims are made aware of the “turf war” as gangs establish their territory. Street gangs generally prey upon communities in which they reside through threats, violence, and intimidation to garner respect and fear in a community. As gang members learn and adapt to their environment, their level of sophistication increases. At this stage of development, gangs have learned to acquire a steady supply of drugs to traffick and firearms to protect their criminal proceeds.

Drug trafficking, aggravated assaults, and drug rip-off crimes become more common as gangs use extreme violence to eliminate their competition. Due to their extreme use of violence, gang members achieve a notorious status within the community. The reputation and status of gang members is further enhanced through witness intimidation. As a result of witness intimidation, gang members achieve status and power and effectively take control of a community. In Saskatchewan, one of the most significant trends facing law enforcement officials is the recurring problem of witness intimidation.

10 Signs of Pre-gang Behaviour

1. Live in high-risk neighborhood.
 - o unemployment
 - o high homeless rate
 - o few recreational facilities
2. Sudden change in friends.
3. Change of appearance.
 - o wearing gang clothing
 - o tattoos
4. Showing no interest in school.
 - o decline in grades
 - o no longer active in school-related activities
 - o disinterest in school
5. Skipping school.
6. Disrespectful for authority, family, and school.
 - o resentful of authority
 - o bad attitude towards family and school
7. Frequent confrontations with the law.
8. Withdrawal from family activities.
9. Evidence of increased substance abuse.
10. Using unknown vocabulary, gang slang, using hand signals, or drawing graffiti symbols and names on books, folders, on bedroom walls.

Key Risk Factors for Juvenile Gang Membership



For more information on this topic refer to the document entitled: "Youth Gangs: An Overview," August 1998, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, NCJ 167249.

(Excerpt from: Edmonton Police Service Website www.police.edmonton.ab.ca)

Gang Identifiers

Gangs need and seek recognition from the rival gangs and the communities in which they operate. The gang's image and reputation is developed and further enhanced through several gang identifiers such as graffiti, hand signs, tattoos, colours, and clothing. Graffiti is one of the most common forms of identifying a gang in your community. Generally, gang members mark neighbourhood areas with graffiti using nicknames, numbers, or symbols to establish their presence in a community, notify rivals of their "turf", or mark an area where gang-related crimes may have occurred.

Gang members have also developed hand sign language to communicate between members. The flashing of gang hand signs is a form of gang communication within their subculture. Gang colours and clothing increases a sense of solidarity among the membership and is generally used to intimidate rivals. It is not uncommon for an assault or confrontation to occur between individuals because of the particular clothing or dress code that they are wearing. In Saskatchewan, red clothing is commonly worn by members of the Indian Posse, Redd Alert, and the Crazy Cree. Black and white is usually worn by the Native Syndicate and dark blue is worn by Mixed Blood members. The Tribal Brotherz have been known to wear black clothing.



Victimization and Public Safety

Aboriginal-based gangs continue to threaten the economic viability and public safety of the communities in which they reside and operate. As well, citizens living in areas where gangs have become more entrenched are exposed to extreme violence and intimidation. These citizens may experience increasing marginalization, feelings of powerlessness, stress, and mental health problems as a result of gang-related crimes.

Citizens living in communities affected by gangs have reported a reluctance to attend local parks and playgrounds, participate in community events, and cooperate with police because of fear and intimidation. The faith of the public in the ability of the justice system to protect them and their property is diminished as a result of the criminal activities of gangs.

While traditional organized crime groups engage in more subtle forms of criminal activities intended to divert attention away from their criminal empire, Aboriginal-based gangs continue to be involved in the more identifiable crimes in our community. They are very overt in their criminal actions and intentions in order to gain respect and instill fear in a community.

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