The Silicon Valley Council of Nonprofits (SVCN) continues our interest in increasing our community's understanding of a critical issue in the City of San Jose, regarding the role of young girls in gangs. This includes violence against girls, girls in gangs, and teen pregnancy. This report highlights the concerns, observations, and recommendations that were shared with us from different service providers and community justice leaders who work directly with this youth.

We are asking the City of San Jose to consider three policy changes to impact this public safety issue.

**SVCN Policy Recommendations**

1. Request the City of San Jose provide a $250,000 increase in funding for programming specifically focused on girls and gangs in the City Street Worker Gang units and in BEST community services provided by nonprofits.
   
   a. $150K to increase the capacity of the City Staff in Mayor's Gang unit to include female street outreach workers and programming to heighten understanding and impact the rising issues of girls within the gangs in the City of San Jose. Hire staff that have specific skills sets to be able to connect with the girls life experiences, understanding of female health issues and be able to provide peer mentoring for girls and gangs target population.
   
   b. $100,000 to increase gender specific programming with the CBO array of services.

2. Increase and improve the tracking and data collection within BEST reports to reflect gender issues related to the gangs including, female arrests, citations, teen pregnancy, sexual assault, etc.

3. BEST staff should develop a training component for all city and CBO staff to increase awareness of the issues of girls and gangs and provide some best practice training to increase outcomes for girls and gangs. Specific gender based understanding and improved techniques for impacting girls.

**Girls & Gangs: The Girlfriend Role & Girls as Gang Members**

We know locally there has been a slight increase in girls’ involvement in gangs. Female involvement in gangs typically stems from their role as the girlfriend of a gang member. Even though girls may not consider themselves a part of the gang, their lives are affected by it as they participate through supportive communities.
roles. Some of the roles of girlfriends are: sexual pawns, alibis, and drug mules. These girls tend to have little education and no job training, therefore they primarily rely on their boyfriend and the gang. Deputy Chief Probation Officer Juvenile Services for Santa Clara County, Laura Garnette, states that “While there are certainly some, “girl gangs” and girls or young women who will openly proclaim their gang affiliations that is not the norm. Instead, there are many young women who are either related to or in a dating relationship with known gang members and their involvement varies greatly... Many girls report that they are often the ones to carry illegal weapons or drugs because they are less likely to be searched. They also talk about being “jumped in,” which often includes being required to have some type of sexual encounter with many members of the gang - sometimes at the same time. They report being sexually exploited for a variety of reasons and witnessing horrendous violence. Girls will often report, “There was no way to leave... I would have been killed.” Whether it is perception or reality, undoubtedly, many young women become involved in situations where they feel hopeless to try and control their own destiny and surrender to the gang life style.”

Girlfriends of gang members tend to have children at a young age. These girls are the primary parent for their children and sometimes, the only parent that a child interacts with. When these girls have no education, they are trapped in a cycle of poverty and that puts their children at risk of being in a neighborhood where gang involvement is prominent and the norm. Young girls in this unhealthy environment are at greater risk of domestic violence from their partner, rape from their partner or other gang members, and sexually transmitted diseases.

We heard that it is important for girls to have female staff to connect with as some of the male staff seem too similar to the guys on the street who have abused them. We need to provide a continuum of services both gender specific and integrated programming for gang involved youth. However, the gender specific issues of girls needs to be integrated within the streetworkers work with the guys as well, such as increased awareness of teen pregnancy, rape, domestic violence and STD’s. Girls need specific gender programming to be able to talk freely about breaking cycles of abuse and health concerns. It is important to understand that if you uplift the girls, mothers, and women you can uplift the whole family and impact future generations. A concentrated effort to impact girls and gangs will produce a positive outcome for San Jose.

**Key Trends**

Though some trends overlap for boys and girls, like low academic and employment achievement, criminal record, peer pressure, fear, and chronically dysfunctional families, there are gender specific issues that affect just girls who are gang involved. Some gender specific issues are:

a) Teen Pregnancy
b) Preventive Health Issues (Birth Control, Venereal Disease, Aids/HIV, and Reproduction)
c) Rape
Girls need peer mentorship and female team members to reach out and connect with the girls. Group sessions for girls involved with the gang environment should be integrated into gang intervention programs.” – Burga Santiago, Retired Supervising Probation Officer in the Juvenile Gang Unit at SCC.

Program Issues for Consideration

As the City looks to increase programming for girls here are the key areas we developed for your review:

a) More female staff in city programs can help reach more girls, girls who are unlikely to talk to males who have the same characteristics of the people they are victimized by gangs. Currently there are no female outreach workers with the street teams.

b) Girls who are involved in gangs are usually more likely to have a history of being the victim of some type of physical or emotional abuse, as well as rape. To cope with trauma, girls will turn to drugs. The stress from trauma and the lack of “love” and family structure is another reason for girls to turn to gangs. Counseling can give an outlet for girls to talk about their experiences and get resources to deal with their trauma.

c) Peer Mentorship programs that provide female to female support, understanding and guidance is a critical element.

d) Teaching young girls about birth control and ways they can prevent teenage pregnancy. Many girls involved in gangs have children at a young age.

e) Teach teen mothers how to handle young motherhood, prevent future pregnancies, and care for their children.

f) Girls involved in gangs or in a relationship with a gang member are more likely to experience domestic violence at the hands of their partner. Interpersonal Violence (domestic violence/PTSD)

g) Girls in or associated with gangs are usually involved in intergenerational poverty. Financial literacy training and job development will help get them out of poverty and dangerous neighborhood/situations.

Other Issues (Safer Housing, Mentors, Confidence and Self Esteem Building, Health Educators)

The Data & Research on Girl Gang Members Continues to tell the story on why our community needs to invest in girls and gangs to impact the gang culture of San Jose.

SVCN reviewed national studies that provide a glimpse into trends related to girls and gangs

- 20 to 46% of youth girls are involved in gangs
- Roles of women have become more violent. The number of violent crimes committed by females under the age of 22 in the United States has risen 300 percent in the past 10 years
• Of the girls in gangs, reports show that 79% carried concealed weapons, 90% have been in a gang fight, 69% attacked with a weapon to cause serious injury
• 60% of gangs do not allow female members (Girls hang around and go to parties, but are not considered “members”)
• 40% of gangs allow female members, but only 1 out of 10 members is a girl
• There are very few all girl gangs. Only 2% of all gangs are female only
• Female gang members commit fewer crimes and violence; Their incarcerations tend to be for drug use, larceny, petty theft, status offenses or domestic issues (e.g., fights with parents and runaway)
• Substance abuse is a big issue with girls involved in gangs: 98% smokes marijuana, 58% sold marijuana, and 56% sold crack cocaine
• 70% of incarcerated girls report having been sexually abused or victimized as children, 65% of girls incarcerated have a psychological issue such as clinical depression or generalized anxiety vs. 30% for boys, 26% of girls in jail have been in special education. Although there are far fewer girls than boys in special education, girls who do have “learning differences” are at very high risk for gang association
• 15% of juveniles incarcerated are female and 85% are male

 Locally...

• Girls connected with gang activity has increased from about 3 percent to as much as 15 percent in the last decade
• 47% of middle and high school girls reported psychological bullying
• In 2012, Latinos are considered to have the highest high school drop-out, poverty rate, and unemployment in Santa Clara County
• Only 60% of middle and high school girls reported that they felt safe at school
• 4% of middle and high school girls reported they have been hit or slapped by a boyfriend/girlfriend
• Since 2002, there have been 100 domestic violence-related deaths in Santa Clara County. The number of deaths each year have been decreasing, but then increased sharply in 2011. During this period, the police departments of San Jose and Santa Clara have handled the greatest number of domestic violence-related deaths as compared with other county police departments
• In 2012, the County of Santa Clara had 9 domestic violence-related death, Latinos/Hispanics being at the highest risk.
• Latina girls represent 70% of the girls in foster care in Santa Clara County
• Male arrest rates have been dropping while women’s been increasing in Santa Clara County
• The percentage of both Latina and African American female dropouts in Santa Clara County has been much higher than that of other racial/ethnic subgroups in the county
• In Santa Clara County, Latinas had the highest teen birth rates
• Teen birth rates are highest in South County and Central/East San Jose (ie. 95122, 95127, 95111, 95112).
• Teen pregnancy in Santa Clara County - 42.7 to 1000 for Hispanics, 34.1 to 1000 for African Americans, 11.2 to 1000 for Whites in 2011.
Case Examples of Girls involved in Gangs

Case 1:

I am an 18 year old Latina and I do not want to testify against my boyfriend in court, because I will be beaten up the gang. My boyfriend's gang brothers showed up in court and sat behind him. I was scared so I ended up lying on the stand to avoid retaliation and a beating from the gang. I had no other choice.

- Latina girl, 18 years old
- Did not want to testify against her boyfriend but she had a bench warrant to testify
- Gang showed up to court and sat behind the defendant
- She reported the men to the Task Force but said they couldn’t do anything because the people who showed up were not known to the task force as gang members
- The girl ended up lying on the stand to avoid retaliation from the gang

Case 2:

I am a 17 year old Latina and a member of the Norteño Street Gang. I come from a home plagued by Domestic Violence since I was a child. I have been expelled from school for selling weed and now I live on the streets. I have been arrested for a stabbing during a robbery where I was trying to steal alcohol for my addition. A few months ago, I was raped by a rival gang.

- She stabbed a clerk in the hand when trying to rob a store for alcohol. She has problems with drug and alcohol (smoke and drink)-Hospitalized for alcohol poising
- There was Domestic Violence in home and she witnessed her mom being abused as a small child. Also she was abused by mother and step mother (emotional issues)
- Her mother has Mental Health Issues (Depression, bipolar, substance abuse)
- She started getting into trouble with the law at the age of 14 because of vehicle vandalism
- She has been expelled from school for selling weed
- She was jumped by rival gang and raped
References

   a. Violence is the cornerstone of gang activity; whether female victimization is sexual, emotional, or physical in nature, it occurs if the teen is either a gang member or the girlfriend of a gang member. Often females are physically or sexually abused when joining or leaving a gang; among gang members, they are considered as sexual objects or property (Brown, 2007).


   a. Domination over and violence towards women, which are considered stereotype roles, take complete form in gangs; this can be attributed to maintain gang status and masculinity among members. Sexual aggression and gangbangs are crimes committed by male gang members and are rarely reported; pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are often the result (Fleury & Fernet, 2012).


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