

# Factors Associated with Students Gang Membership in Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

The presence of gangs in educational institutions poses a threat to the safety and well-being of students and staff, as well as affecting the overall learning environment. Gangs have become a significant concern in communities across the globe, particularly among youth populations. The objective of this paper is to identify the factors associated with student's gang membership in Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. This study employed Quantitative approach and questionnaire servers as instrument for primary data collection, 300 questionnaires were distributed to 300 students of Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, SPSS software was used for data analysis. This study found out that lack of parental guidance, financial/material gains are part of the factors responsible for students joining gang membership in Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Creating and maintaining a positive and supportive learning environment in schools can significantly reduce gang affiliation among students. Schools can incorporate strategies such as peer mentoring, positive role models, and conflict resolution programs to provide a support system as well as equip students with the necessary skills to navigate challenging situations.

**Keywords:** students, gang, membership, Sokoto, Nigeria.

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Gang affiliations among undergraduate students have become a concerning issue in many communities and universities (Martinez, 2017). The presence of gangs in educational institutions poses a threat to the safety and well-being of students and staff, as well as affecting the overall learning environment. Gangs have become a significant concern in communities across the globe, particularly among youth populations (Hockenberry, 2018). Gang affiliation has been linked to a range of negative outcomes, including violence, drug use, and criminal behavior. Undergraduate students, once perceived as relatively immune to gang involvement, are now being increasingly targeted by gangs. The allure of protection, social acceptance, and economic opportunities can draw students into gang activity (Crank, & Calderon, 2017) Gang activity, which has historically been connected to high-crime and urban neighborhoods, has moved into academic settings, changing the face of students. This shift is a reflection of how gangs are changing, how they recruit new members, and how undergraduates' students come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. In marginalized communities throughout history, gangs have functioned as social structures by giving members a sense of identity, safety, and belonging (Hanson, & Robkin, 2015).

But as they move into college settings, there are new risks and challenges that students and academic institutions must deal with. The media's conventional depictions of modern gang culture are not enough to capture its complexity. College-based gangs nowadays are made up of a variety of affiliations, from loosely affiliated groups to more structured factions, and they frequently use social media and technology for

recruitment and communication (Mooney, & Young, 2010). Furthermore, there are a variety of reasons why people choose to associate with gangs during their college years. Peer pressure, systemic injustices, economic inequality, and the academic community's quest for meaning and identity are all factors in this phenomenon (Hockenberry, 2018). Feelings of alienation in an unfamiliar academic setting, protection, financial incentives, or a desire for social recognition can all contribute to the allure of gang membership (Mancini, 2020). These motives frequently come into contact with more general societal problems like poverty, urbanization, and cultural identity. Concerns are raised regarding the effects of gang infiltration by undergraduates on students' academic goals, safety, and general well-being. Higher education institutions might not have established structured protocols to deal with gang related issues (National Gang Center, 2018).

Family problems and parental neglect are among the factors that lead to gang affiliations among undergraduate students. Family dysfunction and neglect have been associated with gang involvement (Adams, & Johnson, 2022). Undergraduate students who come from broken families or have absentee parents are more likely to seek a sense of belonging outside of the family. In such cases, gangs provide this sense of belonging, which often leads to gang affiliation. Gangs may demand a significant amount of time and attention from their members, interfering with the students' academic responsibilities (Anderson, 2022). Additionally, gang affiliation can increase the likelihood of involvement in criminal activity, leading to arrests, expulsion from college, or even imprisonment (Spergel, 2019). Thus, this research aims to explore the factors leading to gang affiliations by undergraduates' students of Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto.

## LITERATURE

Gang affiliations among undergraduate students have been a growing concern in recent years. This phenomenon can have serious consequences for the individuals involved, as well as for the broader campus community. In order to address this issue effectively, it is important to understand the various factors that lead to gang affiliations among undergraduate students. This examines key factors that contribute to gang affiliations among undergraduate students, including socioeconomic factors, peer pressure influences, family background, lack of institutional support, exposure to violence and crime, and media influences.

Social factors play a significant role in shaping an individual's decision to join a gang. A study by Carson, & Esbensen, (2014) found that social networks and peer influences were strong predictors of gang membership among undergraduates' students. Students who have friends or family members involved in gangs are more likely to join themselves as a way to gain social acceptance and a sense of belonging. Additionally, students who feel marginalized or alienated from mainstream society may be drawn to gangs as a means of finding a sense of community and identity. Gang affiliation among undergraduate students is a significant social issue in Nigeria that has far-reaching consequences on individuals and society at large. In order to understand the factors leading to gang affiliations by undergraduate students in Nigeria, it is important to review the existing literature on this topic.

Study by Hockenberry, & Pate, (2018) explores the prevalence of gang affiliation among university students in Nigeria and identifies socio-economic background, peer influence, and thrill-seeking behavior as key factors contributing to gang membership. The study found that students from low socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to join gangs as a means of economic survival, while peer influence played a significant role in encouraging gang affiliation. Additionally, students who were thrill-seekers and attracted to the excitement and danger associated with gang activities were also more likely to become involved in gangs. Another study by Kelly, & Reynolds, (2017) examined the role of family dysfunction in contributing to gang affiliations among undergraduate students in Nigeria. The study found that students who came from dysfunctional families, characterized by neglect, abuse, and lack of parental supervision, were more likely to seek belonging and security in gang membership.

Study by Sloan, & Hendrickson, (2010), found that socioeconomic factors such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunity have been linked to gang affiliations among undergraduate students in Nigeria. Many

young people join gangs as a means of survival and to gain access to resources that they do not have access to in their academic environment. Poverty and lack of economic opportunities push students to seek alternative means of financial support, which may lead them to engage in criminal activities and join gangs. Furthermore, a study by Barcena, & Miller, (2017) highlighted the influence of societal factors such as unemployment, poverty, and lack of basic amenities on students' susceptibility to gang affiliations. The study found that students who faced economic hardship and lack of opportunities for personal and professional growth were more likely to turn to gangs for support and financial security. Peer pressure is a common factor that influences students to join gangs. A study Crank, & Calderon, (2017) found that peer pressure plays a significant role in influencing undergraduate students to join gangs in Nigeria. Students may feel pressured by their peers to join gangs as a way of fitting in or gaining social status within the academic community. Peer pressure can be a strong motivator for students to engage in criminal activities and join gangs. Family background also plays a crucial role in influencing students to join gangs. Students who come from dysfunctional families or have experienced violence and abuse in their homes are more likely to seek refuge in gangs as a way of finding support and belonging (Raisina, & Iglesias, 2016).

Family dynamics, such as parental neglect, lack of emotional support, and exposure to violence, can contribute to students' decisions to join gangs. The lack of institutional support from academic institutions can also contribute to students' involvement in gang affiliations. A research Mooney, & Young (2010) noted that many Nigerian universities lack the necessary resources and programs to support students who may be at risk of joining gangs. The absence of counseling services, mentorship programs, and extracurricular activities can leave students vulnerable to gang recruitment and influence. Without adequate support from their academic institutions, students may turn to gangs for companionship and support.

Exposure to violence and crime in the surrounding community can also influence students to join gangs. According to Hockenberry, (2018) highlights that Nigeria has a high rate of violent crime, which exposes students to danger and the lure of criminal activities. Students who live in crime-ridden neighborhoods may feel pressured to join gangs as a way of protecting themselves and gaining a sense of security. The pervasive influence of violence and crime in the environment can normalize gang affiliations among undergraduate students. To Carson, & Esbensen, (2014) affirm that the media also plays a role in influencing students to join gangs. The portrayal of gang culture in movies, music, and social media glamorizes gang affiliations and presents it as an attractive lifestyle choice. The media's romanticization of gang life can influence impressionable students to join gangs in search of excitement and validation. The pervasive influence of the media can shape students' perceptions of gangs and normalize their involvement in criminal activities.

## **METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS**

In this study, quantitative descriptive research approach was employed. The study was conducted in Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto. The study population comprised of undergraduate students living in both campus and private hostels comprising both male and females. Multi-stage cluster sampling technique was employed to select a representative sample. The data for the study was gathered through the use of structured questionnaire using popular online survey tool Kobo Collect. The data was inputted into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software for accurate analysis, result precision, and interpretation of findings.

## **RESULTS/FINDINGS**

Table 1 Motivation to join gang affiliation

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agreed	128	42.7
Strongly agreed	149	49.7

Neutral	10	3.3
Disagreed	6	2.0
Strongly disagreed	7	2.3
Total	300	100

Source: field survey

Table 1 revealed that (49.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed that financial gain motivate students to join gang affiliation and also about (42.7%) respondents agreed that financial gain motivate students to join gang affiliation, (3.3%) respondents were neutral which means they are not certain whether financial gain motivate students to join gang affiliation and (2.3%) of respondents strongly disagreed and also (2.0%) disagreed that financial gain could not motivate students to join gang affiliation. This implies that majority of students will join gang affiliation because of financial gain and gang affiliation can of course leads to deviant behavior which eventually disrupt students' academic achievement.

Table 2 Responses on lack of parental guidance

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agreed	48	16.0
Strongly agreed	241	80.3
Neutral	3	1.0
Strongly disagreed	8	2.7
Total	300	100

Source: field survey

Table 2 the results from the study on the above table show that the majority of (80.3%) strongly agreed that lack of parental guidance contribute to gang affiliation so also about (16.0%) respondents affirms that lack of parental guidance contribute to gang affiliation whereas (2.7%) respondents strongly disagreed that lack of parental guidance cannot contribute to gang affiliation and about (1.0%) respondents were neutral mean they don't have certainty. This show that lack of parental guidance contributes to gang affiliation ss the majority of respondents agreed with the total percentage of (80.3%).

Table 3 Responses on income inequality

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Agreed	36	12.0
Strongly agreed	242	80.7
Neutral	4	1.3
Disagreed	13	4.3
Strongly disagreed	5	1.7
Total	300	100

Source: field survey

Table 3 show that majority of (80.7%) respondents strongly agreed that income income inequality play a role in the formation of gang affiliation among students and (12.0%) respondents also agreed that income inequality play a role in the formation of gang affiliation only about (4.3%) of the respondents disagreed that income inequality cannot play role in the formation of gang affiliation followed by (1.7%) respondents strongly disagreed that income inequality cannot play a role in the formation of gang affiliation among students, (1.3%) respondents were neutral which means they don't have certainty.

This statement suggests that if there is a wide gap in income, like money, economic status between students a lot of students will engage themselves in gang activities.

Table 4 Social media influence

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Agreed	58	19.3
Strongly agreed	225	75.0
Neutral	7	2.3
Disagreed	3	1.0
Strongly disagreed	7	2.3
Total	300	100

Source: field survey

Table 4 revealed that about (75.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed that social media has influence on gang affiliation among students and (19.3%) respondents agreed that social media has influence on gang affiliation among students, (2.3%) respondents were neutral meaning that they assure that social media has influence and also about (2.3) strongly disagreed that social media does not have influence on gang affiliation among students also (1.0%) respondents disagreed that social media does not have influence on gang affiliation. This implies that as the majority of respondents agreed that social media has influence on the formation of gang activities among students, this is true because social media today have great influences on shaping the way live and a lot of students were addicted to social media.

Table 5 High-crime neighborhood

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Agreed	40	13.3
Strongly agreed	245	81.7
Neutral	6	2.0
Disagreed	5	1.7
Strongly disagreed	4	1.3
Total	300	100

Source: field survey

Table 5 show that majority of (81.7%) respondents strongly agreed that living with high-crime neighborhood impact student's decision to join gang and also about (13.3%) of the respondents agreed that living with high-crime neighborhood impact student's decision to join gang, only about (2.0%) respondents were neutral meaning that they don't have certainty either living with high-crime neighborhood can impact student's decision to join gang or not, (1.7%) respondents disagreed that living with high-crime neighborhood cannot impact student's decision to join gang likewise (1.2%) respondents also strongly disagreed that students living with high-crime neighborhood cannot join gang. This indicate living with high-crime neighborhood can impact student's decision to join gang simply whenever you are living together with people, their attitudes, behavior will definitely influence yours and as such if students are intermingling with high-crime neighborhood eventually he/she will become criminal.

Table 6 Unemployment makes students to join gang

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Agreed	70	23.3
Strongly agreed	216	72.0
Neutral	6	2.0
Disagreed	3	1.0
Strongly disagreed	5	1.7
Total	300	100

Source: field survey

Table 6 show that (72.0%) respondents strongly agreed that unemployment play a role gang affiliation among students and (23.3%) respondents agreed that unemployment opportunity play a role in gang affiliation among students, (2.0%) of the respondents were neutral and (1.7%) of the respondents strongly disagreed that unemployment opportunity cannot play any role in gang affiliation among students likewise (1.0%) respondents also disagreed. This show that unemployment opportunity s critical element in influencing students to join gang affiliation, meaning that being a graduate for so many years without job can leads to a decision of engaging in criminal activities.

## DISCUSSION

The findings further revealed that the significant number of 149 participants which represent (49.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed that financial gain motivate students to join gang affiliation and also about 120 participants which represent (42.7%) respondents agreed that financial gain motivate students to join gang affiliation, (3.3%) respondents were neutral which means they are not certain whether financial gain motivate students to join gang affiliation. This statement suggest that financial gain motivate students to join gang affiliation, meaning that students from lower class status and who take him/herself higher than he/her is, he/she will definitely join gang affiliation. This reflects a study by Miller, (2021) which found that students from low socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to join gangs as a means of economic survival, while peer influence played a significant role in encouraging gang affiliation. Furthermore, findings of the study show that majority of 241 which represent (80.3%) strongly agreed that lack of parental guidance contribute to gang affiliation. This means that students of Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto were of the view that lack of parental guidance contributes to gang affiliation.

The results from the study also revealed that the significant number of 242 which represent (80.7%) respondents strongly agreed that income inequality play a role in the formation of gang affiliation among students. This statement suggests that if there is a wide gap in income, like money, economic status between students a lot of students will engage themselves in gang activities. This finding acknowledges a study by Adams, & Johnson, (2022), found that socioeconomic factors such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunity have been linked to gang affiliations among undergraduate students. Furthermore, 225 which represent (75.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed that social media has influence on gang affiliation among students, it appears that majority of students agreed that social media has influence on the formation of gang activities among students, this is true because social media today have great influences on shaping the way live and a lot of students were addicted to social media.

Furthermore, the results of the study show that the significant number of 245 which represent (81.7%) respondents strongly agreed that living with high-crime neighborhood impact student's decision to join gang. The statements suggest that as long as the students is living with high-crime neighborhood can definitely influenced and join gang affiliation. This reflects a study by Miller, & Decker, (2021) which found that students who live in crime-ridden neighborhoods may feel pressured to join gangs as a way of protecting themselves and gaining a sense of security. Additionally, the results show that the majority of 216 which

represent (72.0%) respondents strongly agreed that unemployment play a role gang affiliation among students. This show that unemployment opportunity s critical element in influencing students to join gang affiliation, meaning that being a graduate for so many years without job can leads to a decision of engaging in criminal activities.

## CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Gang affiliation among undergraduate students is a significant social issue in Nigeria that has far-reaching consequences on individuals and society at large. These groups may be formal or informal, and their members may engage in activities such as drug trafficking, assault, and theft. By understanding the factors leading to gang affiliations among undergraduate students, stakeholders can develop targeted prevention programs and provide support to students at risk. The research's findings could be used to design and implement prevention and intervention programs tailored to the specific needs of university students. Gang prevention programs that address the unique challenges faced by college students can be more effective in reducing gang-related activities on campus.

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