

PREDICTORS OF ADOLESCENT INVOLVEMENT IN CLIQUES AND GANGS**DOI:** <http://doi.org/10.26758/11.1.3>

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Abstract

Objectives. The gangs came to the attention of the authorities because of the criminal nature of some of them. To understand which are the appropriate measures to prevent and reduce gang delinquency, this paper aimed at identifying the predictors of adolescents' belonging to such groups.

Material and methods. Relevant articles published between 2010 and 2020, were searched in three access platforms to the scientific literature. The papers based on the quantitative analysis of the data, which evaluated the predictors of the involvement of adolescents aged 14-21 in gangs, were preserved.

Results. Resulting in 33 significant articles, with samples between 75-26232 participants, 11 studies had a longitudinal design, the rest being cross-sectional. Most studies were conducted in the USA, and the rest in European, American, African, and Asian countries. Three categories of predictors were distinguished: familial factors (e.g. deficient parenting, domestic violence), personal factors (e.g. trauma history, low level of self-control), social and economic factors (e.g. criminogenic neighborhood, material and financial instability). The most common predictor was the criminogenic neighborhood, identified by 16 studies. There were also highlighted gender differences regarding gang membership, adolescent boys being more likely to be gang members.

Conclusions. This systematic review highlighted that the main factors that can compete to adolescent gang involvement are: criminogenic social environment, low level of self-control, dysfunctional family-educational environment, and low socioeconomic level. As research has shown that many of these can be risk factors for violence, it is necessary to develop coping strategies and heal traumas to prevent the formation and maintenance of the antisocial identity of adolescent gangs.

Keywords: gang, clique, adolescents, violence.

Introduction

For adolescents, entering this period of development brings with it changes, from which social relations are no exception. Adolescence corresponds to a period of biological, mental, and social vulnerability (Selosse, 1978, pp. 503-511, as cited in Săucan, Liiceanu, & Micle, 2009, p.11). Even if they continue to have friends in the form of a dyad, it can be noticed the importance that adolescents give to the type of community called clique, respectively to the larger ensemble, specific to adolescence - the gang - whose purpose is to give its members identity, image or a certain reputation (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 1978/2010, p. 411). "Sitting between two chairs, between his family of origin, from which he separates, and the one he has not yet founded, between the school that, most of the time, no longer interests him, and the labor market, which receives him reluctantly, the adolescent often takes advantage of the freedom that adults give him and their vaguely worried tolerance" (Cusson, 2002, as cited in Săucan, Liiceanu, & Micle, 2009, p.11).

The "gang" concept refers to a phenomenon that initially appeared in North American cities in the twentieth century, and its meaning differs slightly from one country to another (Smith & Egan, 2014). According to the National Gang Intelligence Center (2015), "street gangs are criminal organizations that formed on the street and operate in neighborhoods throughout the United States" (p. 11). In Europe, however, "an annoying group of young people" may correspond to the term "gang" with the characteristic of sustainability, street orientation, and an identity shaped including by involvement in illegal activities (Klein, Weerman, & Thornberry, 2006, p. 418). A particular type of gang is the prison gang, which is formed in the criminal system, but which continues to act outside the prisons (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2015). The clique, on the other hand, is a concept which designates "a small group of people who spend their time together and do not welcome other people into that group" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Gangs are generally formed according to age and neighborhood criteria (Cristea, 2011, p. 101). Within the gang, adolescents undertake common activities (walks in nature, hangs out in the city, 18th birthday parties, meals served in fast-food restaurants, gossip etc.), reaching in some cases to the manifestation of some antisocial behaviors (sometimes with a criminal character) who are approved by the group of friends who constitutes the gang, such as smoking, alcohol and drug use, truancy etc. (Dobrescu, 2016, pp. 108-109; Papalia et al., 1978/2010, pp. 411-412; Baciu, 2019). In the literature, the gang can also be found under the name of the "band" (*bandă*, in the Romanian language), the latter being used more frequently in the context of delinquency (Papalia et al., 1978/2010; Heywood, 2001/2017; Cristea, 2011). In other words, when the criminal characteristics are added to the general characteristics of a gang, the group can be seen as a band. The bands are organized hierarchically and do not tolerate deviations from group norms (Rodríguez et al., 2016). Zimbardo (2009) presented the initiation process into a band, providing examples from his own experience as an adolescent: theft, beatings between children, and intimidation were forms of compliance with the rules of the band and a way of subordination to its leader (p. 11).

Cliques, usually hostile, are formed as a result of the subdivision of a larger group, this separation being a consequence of the divergences between the members of the initial group (Maisonneuve, 1996). Similar to gangs, cliques may involve a certain level of delinquency, but the average delinquency tends to be lower among clique members, as opposed to gang members (Klein et al., 2006).

From the perspective of social psychology, the cliques and gangs formed by adolescents represent primary and belonging groups, which exert a considerable influence on the members who identify with the group (Duduciuc, Ivan, & Chelcea, 2013, pp. 124-126). According to the same authors, the group of affiliation can be simultaneously the reference group of the person. In this case, adolescents compare themselves with the members of the cliques and gangs they belong to and behave like them. In their turn, the reference groups can be positive or negative, depending on the acceptance or rejection of their norms and values by society, this delimitation being a significant

condition in the study of delinquent subcultures.

Although the benefits of belonging to groups such as cliques and gangs are undeniable, adolescents having the opportunity to experience new ways of relating, which contribute to the development of self and self-image (Cristea, 2011, p. 101), the risks posed by such adolescent groups have been highlighted. For example, gang membership has been recorded in the group of risk factors for youth violence (World Health Organization - WHO, 2020). Another representative danger is the war between the gangs, which falls into the category of collective violence (WHO, n.d.).

In developing countries, such as Barbados and Colombia has been recorded an upward trajectory of gang violence and criminal acts (WHO, 2019a, 2019b). However, the activity of street gangs has also been noticed in cities of developed countries, such as London, where gang members are responsible for half of the incidents involving firearms and for 22% of all serious acts of violence (HM Government, 2011, p. 3). In the United States of America (USA), the trends recorded in the period 1996-2012 in relation to gang problems reflect their predominant occurrence in large cities, the following in descending order of incidence being suburban areas, small towns, the lowest rate being registered for rural areas (National Gang Center, n.d.). Also in the USA, according to data obtained from victims in a nationwide study, approximately 6% of violent crimes recorded between 1998 and 2003 were committed by members of some gangs (Harrell, 2005). Also, according to estimates of law enforcement structures, there are around 30,000 gangs in the USA, totaling about 850,000 members (Mora, 2020). Looking towards Central America, the information available at the El Salvador country-level indicates that of the 262 municipalities, in more than 247 of them exist gang members exercising control (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Illegal activities of the gangs have also been recorded in the European Union. The year 2019 marked an increase in violence caused by them in Copenhagen, the Danish authorities suspecting a link between local and Swedish gangs (Overseas Security Advisory Council, 2020). Delinquent behaviors have also been reported in youth gangs in countries such as Greece, France, Italy, and Romania (Smith & Egan, 2014). In 2009, 222 violent gangs were identified in France, amounting to 2500 ordinary members, to which was adding an approximately equal number of affiliated members (Pillet, 2009, as cited in Smith & Egan, 2014). According to the same source, between 2008 and 2009, there were 366 gang confrontations on the territory of France, resulting in six deaths, and another 143 people were seriously injured. In Romania, according to data provided by the police, 140 neighborhood groups and gangs were detected in 2005 only at the level of Bucharest municipality, 89 of them having a criminal history (National Anty-drug Agency, 2006). Regarding existing data at the level of Greece, in a study conducted in Crete with 305 pupils, 10.9% of them reported being part of a youth gang, and the majority (74.3%) had knowledge of such groups (Riga, 2012, as cited in Smith & Egan, 2014). On the territory of Italy operate the so-called "baby gang", which are groups made up mainly of adolescents, which are formed on ethnic criteria and which exhibit a dynamic specific to small organized crime, the phenomenon being significantly increasing in the peninsula (Commissione parlamentare per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza, 2000) [Parliamentary Commission for Children and Adolescents].

The phenomenon of juvenile delinquency began to be officially recognized in Romania in 1646, when Vasile Lupu initiated the first code of laws, called the "Romanian Book of Teaching" (Colectivul pentru Vechiul Drept Romînesc al Academiei R.P.R., 1961 [Collective for the Old Romanian Law of the Academy R.P.R.]. Both the first code of laws and the "Îndreptarea Legii" ["Law Guide"] from 1652 of Matei Basarab (Colectivul de Drept Vechi Romînesc, 1962 [Collective of Old Romanian Law], differentiated the criminal liability of the person according to his age and his ability to discern. With the advent of the "Condica Criminaliscească" ["Criminal Codex"] of Şuţu and Sturdza, in 1826, as well as the Ghica-Ştirbei Code, called "Condica Criminală" ["Criminal Codex"] (1852), the age limit for criminal liability changed from seven to eight years, eliminating the distinction between boys and girls previously established (Dvoracek & Stihan, 1984, as cited in Lefterache, 2011). The minority was legislated in the Criminal Code of 1865, and the Criminal Code

of 1936 replaced understanding and moral development with the criterion of discernment (Brezeanu, 1998).

In Romania, starting from 1646, until 1969, the minimum age of criminal liability varied, and with the entry into force of the Criminal Code from 1969, it stabilized at 14 years (Lefterache, 2011; Petruț, 2014). National legislation considers convicted persons between the ages of 14 and 21 to be young, and if the educational measure of deprivation of liberty is required, they are interned in educational or detention centers, where adolescents are included in recovery programs, depending on the particularities of each person's age and personality (Petruț, 2014; Parlamentul României, 2013) [Parliament of Romania].

Starting from the problems raised by the antisocial behaviors carried out by adolescents in group, this meta-analysis aims to investigate the characteristics of adolescents who adhere to social structures such as cliques and gangs, to provide a broad understanding of their prejudicial manifestations.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The aim of this meta-analysis was to highlight the factors that announce the involvement of adolescents in cliques and gangs. The results of the study could contribute to the development of prevention and combat directions for juvenile delinquency, taking into account both the needs of adolescents in general and the needs of cliques and gangs in particular.

To achieve the intended purpose, the following objectives have been outlined: identification of some factors that predict the involvement of adolescents in cliques and gangs; development of recommendations to support the process of preventing and combating delinquency in adolescent groups such as cliques and gangs.

Starting from these objectives, the following research questions have been formulated: what are the most common factors in the literature that predict the membership of adolescents in groups such as cliques and gangs? Can these predictors be considered risk factors for the delinquency of adolescent gangs? Are there gender differences regarding adolescent involvement in cliques and gangs?

Material and methods

Data sources

The strategy for identifying the literature relevant to the research involved searching for papers related to adolescents and their membership in cliques and gangs in the following platforms providing access to scientific literature: Web of Science, PubMed, and Oxford Journals. The following keywords were used to obtain scientific publications of interest: *adolescent*, *clică*, and *gașcă*. These have been translated into English by the following terms: adolescent, clique, and gang. Three combinations were made using the three terms, these word combinations being used in advanced search, as follows: "adolescent AND clique", "adolescent AND gang", "clique AND gang". In the search performed on the Web of Science, as this is allowed, an asterisk was inserted after each searched word, this symbol having the role of identifying articles including by the derivatives of the words entered (e.g. cliques, gangs, gangster, adolescence etc.).

In order to refine the search process, the settings provided by the three platforms were used. Research article and data article, written in English and published between 2010 and 2020, was chosen. Studies published over the past 10 years have been chosen out of a desire to capture current predictors, so that the recommendations address the needs of contemporary society. It was also taken into account that the year of publication of a work does not always coincide with the year in which the data were collected, thus there is the possibility of extending the results beyond the threshold represented by 2010. Following the implementation of this strategy, 2281 search results were

obtained.

Inclusion criteria

The total search results were subsequently subjected to the selection procedure.

The criteria established for the inclusion of studies in the meta-analysis were the following: participants were between 14 and 21 years of age at the time of the research, or at least the average age of the participants was between 14 and 21 years; studies were based on quantitative analysis of the data; studies referred to the factors that predicted the involvement of adolescents in cliques and gangs.

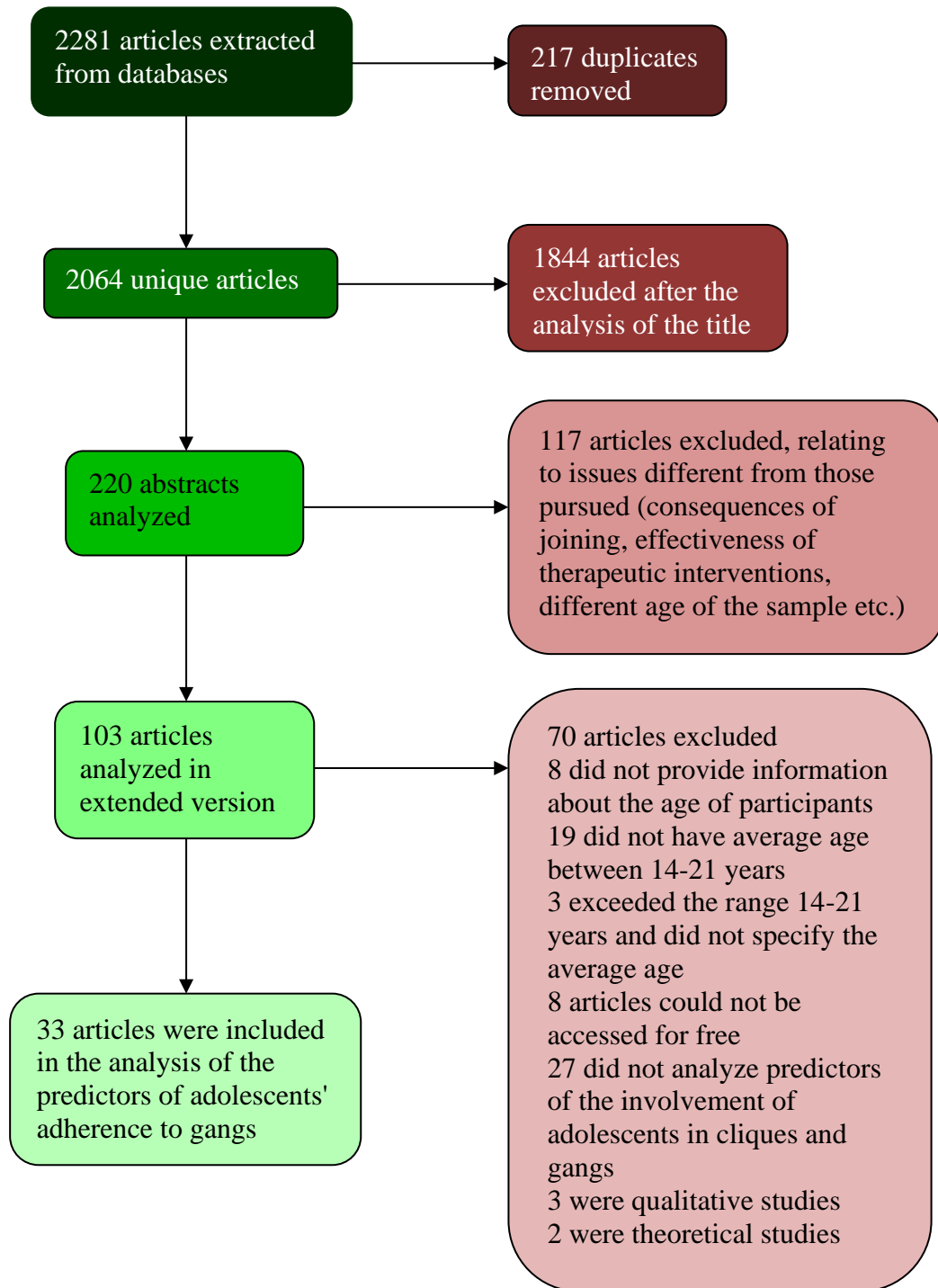
Exclusion criteria

All the resulting items have been archived, this action being performed through the free bibliography management program – Zotero (Corporation for Digital Scholarship, n.d.). This program facilitated the alphabetical listing of the papers, their separate filing, and the identification of duplicate items. The program also allowed viewing information (title, authors, publication name, volume, pages etc.) about each selected record, as well as reading the abstract for each paper, without having to open it in a separate file. It was also possible to keep track of both the original number of papers and the one left after the application of the exclusion criteria by automatically generating the number of records from each collection of titles (file). In this way, Zotero allowed the efficient management of the time for the process of systematic review of the literature.

The first analysis involved the identification of duplicate records and their union. As a result of this process, 217 items were excluded. For the remaining papers, the following sorting was based on the exclusion according to the title, with the removal of those articles whose titles explicitly indicated the absence of any link with the subject of the research (e.g. laboratory animal experiments; studies on epilepsy, dysmenorrhea, heterosexuality, autism; studies with samples consisting of adults or children; ganglion studies etc.), respectively clinical studies (e.g. studies involving patients with bipolar disorder and mania or involving adolescent patients with HIV), literature or history studies, theoretical studies, articles based on literature review and those involving therapeutic interventions (e.g. research with adolescents with autism, studies involving group treatments etc.). At this stage, 1844 articles were excluded. The next phase involved studying the abstracts of the remaining articles, 117 articles being deleted for reasons such as: it was found that the subject was that of leaving the gangs, the article was based on the content analysis (of films, rap songs etc.), the articles referred to the effects of involvement in the gang, respectively to the effectiveness of psychological interventions, the characteristics of the sample did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the meta-analysis, the articles did not have a psychological component, or it was found that the approach of the articles did not focus on cliques or gangs (e.g. some studies validating some psychological assessment tools). Also at this stage were deleted articles based on the literature review that were not removed at the previous stage and those based on qualitative analysis of the data. For the remaining 103 studies, the full-text analysis was used. Figure 1 exposes the entire article review process.

Figure 1

Diagram of the systematic review process



Data analysis and extraction

In the analysis of the 33 articles, the following indicators were followed: sample size, participants' ages or their average age, gender of participants included in the study, place where the research was conducted, type of research (cross-sectional or longitudinal research), and results regarding predictors of participants' involvement in clique or gang type groups. In addition to these main indicators, information related to the particularities of the samples was also noted, such as: people in detention, homeless people, people belonging to a certain subculture, the percentage of affiliated participants versus the percentage of unaffiliated in the case of comparative studies, the time interval in which data were collected in the context of longitudinal research that provided this information.

This analysis aimed to identify predictors of adolescents' membership in cliques and gangs, being selected only those factors that could explain the adherence of people in this age group to such groups. In cases where it was not clear whether some variables are predictors or consequences that arise as a result of the involvement of adolescents in cliques or gangs, their inclusion in Table 1 was waived.

Results

Description of studies

Following the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 33 articles were found that addressed predictors of adolescent involvement in gangs. None of the remaining articles addressed the concept of "clique". These were largely excluded based on the age range of the participants, with the average age of the adolescents being under 14 years. In the case of cross-sectional studies that did not provide information on age, it was mentioned that the participants were enrolled in gymnasium studies (e.g. Closson & Watanabe, 2016).

Of the 33 studies that analyzed predictors of adolescents' adherence to gangs, 11 were conducted according to a longitudinal plan, and the rest were cross-sectional. Of the total studies, 23 were conducted in the USA, five studies were conducted in the United Kingdom (UK), one study was conducted in Georgia, another in Trinidad and Tobago, one study in Asia, one in Africa, and for one of the studies no location was mentioned. Of the 23 studies conducted in the USA, one study operated on data obtained from both the USA and Canada. No studies have been identified to target the involvement of adolescents in Romania in gangs.

In the cross-sectional studies, the youngest participants were 13 years old, and the oldest had an average of 21.32 years old. For the longitudinal ones, the minimum age at wave 1 was 10 years, and the highest at the last wave was 27 years. The highest percentage of participants was represented by male, and among selected publications were included researches involving individuals belonging to only one of the two genders (three studies focused exclusively on boys and four studies involving only female persons). In most researches, a balanced relationship between boys and girls has been maintained. The sample size ranged from 75 to 26232 participants. The information is presented in detail in Table 1, after the conclusions of the article.

Familial predictors

Nine studies identified the following familial predictors of adolescent gang involvement:

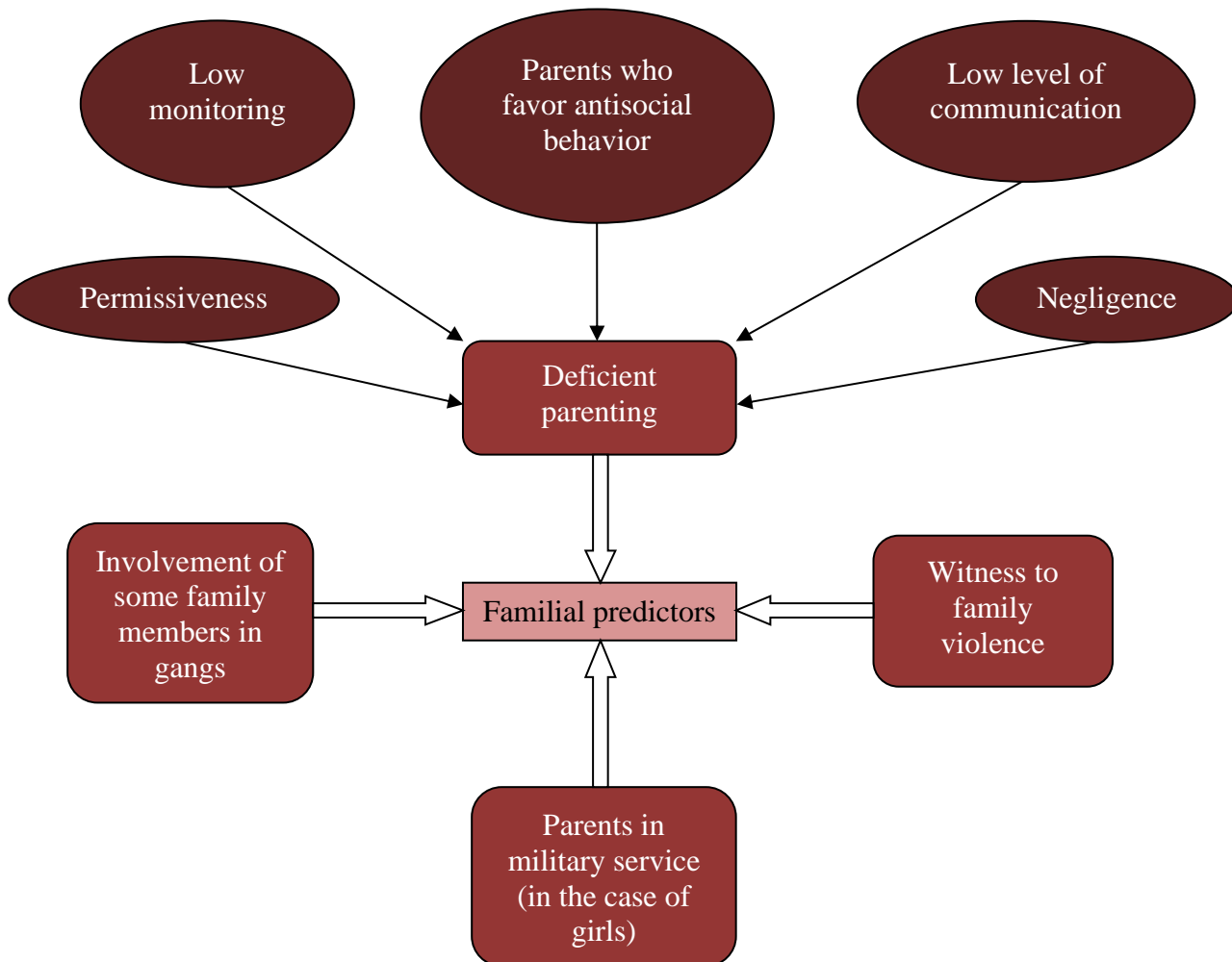
- deficient parenting (low parental monitoring; low level of parental communication; parents who favor antisocial behavior; and authoritarian, neglectful, and permissive parenting styles);
- involvement of some family members in gangs;

- witness to family violence;
- with parents in military service (including military parents deployed in combat zones) in the case of female.

Figure 2 illustrates the graphical representation of these predictors.

Figure 2

Diagram of family factors that predict adolescent gang involvement



Personal predictors

Personal predictors of adolescent involvement in gangs were analyzed in 30 studies. The data obtained were grouped into seven subcategories:

- trauma history;
- personal values;
- low self-control;
- indicators of some psychological disorders;
- consumption or intention to consume alcohol or drugs;
- cognitive predictors;
- affective predictors.

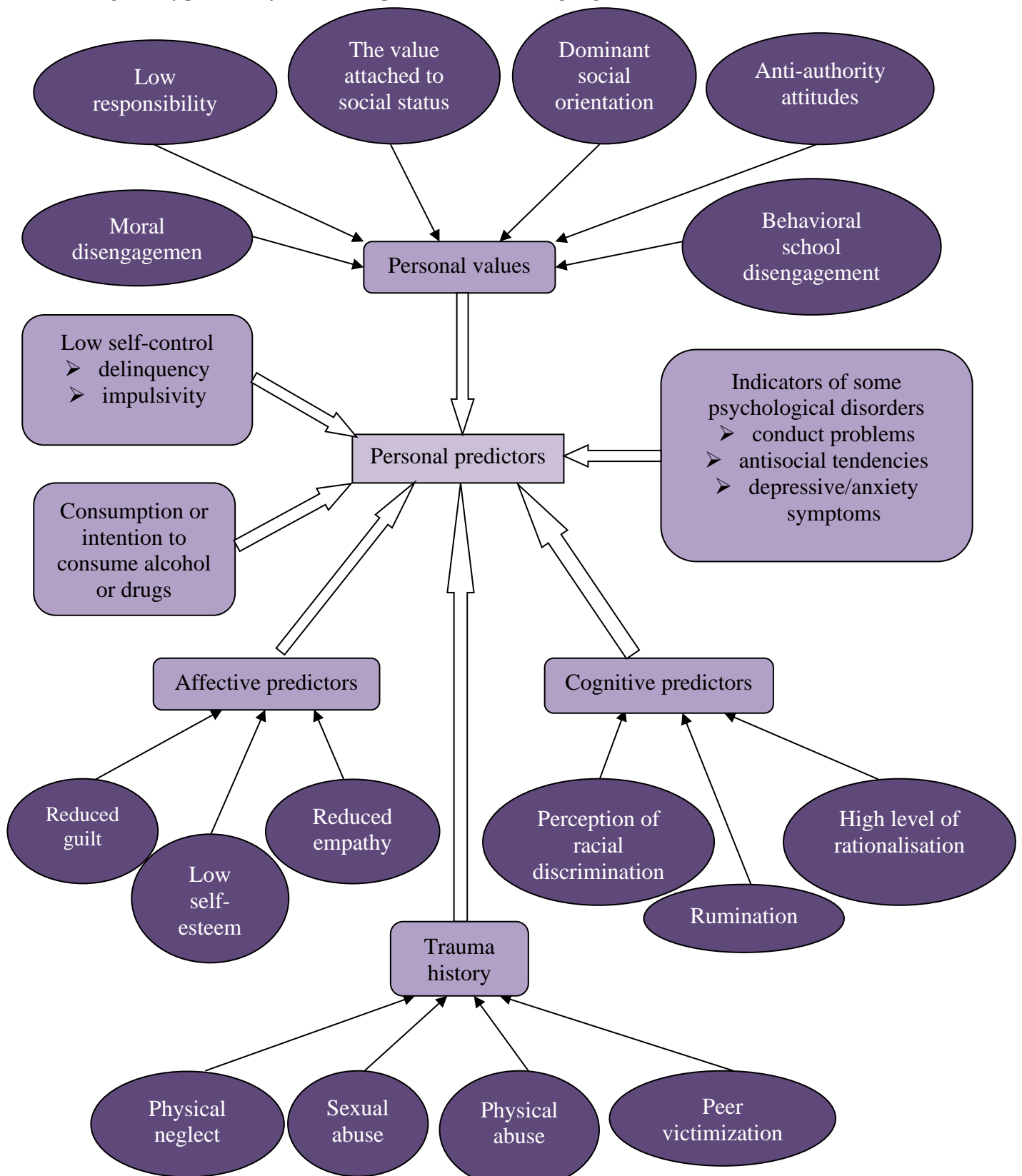
A detailed description of these secondary categories of personal predictors can be consulted

in Figure 3.

The low activity alleles of the monoamine oxidase A gene predicted involvement in gangs, but only for boys (Beaver, DeLisi, Vaughn, & Barnes, 2010). High self-esteem and grandiose-manipulative traits were predictors of becoming a high-level member in the gang, but only after the age of 17 (Dmitrieva, Gibson, Steinberg, Piquero, & Fagan, 2014).

Figure 3

Diagram of personal factors that predict adolescent gang involvement

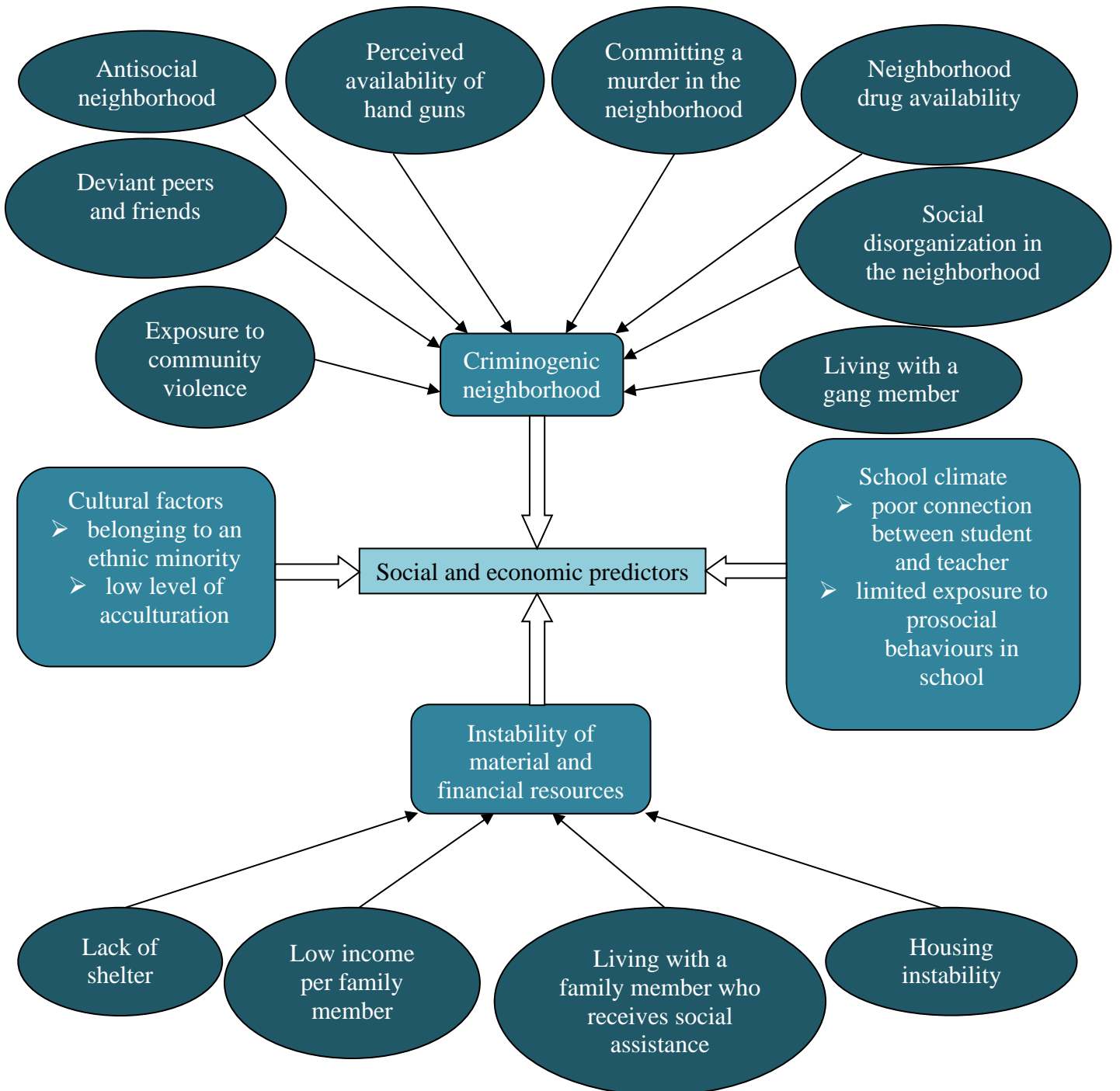


Social and economic predictors

Criminogenic neighborhood, cultural factors, school climate, and instability of material and financial resources are the four categories of social and economic factors that predicted the involvement of adolescents in gangs. These subcategories were built on the results of 17 studies. Figure 4 provides a detailed picture of how the four predictor classes are formed.

Figure 4

Diagram of social and economic factors that predict adolescent gang involvement



Discussions

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the concepts "clique" and "gang", as both were considered important for the period of adolescence (Papalia et al., 1978/2010). The systematic analysis of the literature published over the last 10 years highlighted, however, that clique-type groups were not the subject of numerous research, unlike gangs, whose members were more frequently included in analyses on adolescents. This may be due to the specifics of the cliques, which may be characteristic of preadolescence or early adolescence. As for the gang, this is a model of organization specific to the developmental period of adolescence (Papalia et al., 1978/2010; Dobrescu, 2016).

The systematic review of scientific articles has highlighted predictors of adolescent involvement in gangs. The value of the paper is given by the diversity of data obtained both through cross-sectional studies and through repeated measurements in the context of longitudinal research. The 11 longitudinal studies are intended to support a potential causal link between certain factors and adolescent gang involvement. According to the Institute for Work & Health (2015), longitudinal studies are more likely to suggest a cause-and-effect relationship compared to cross-sectional studies, as data collection is not limited to a single point in time, allowing the sequential division of a particular event. In this way, a longitudinal design could explain the adolescent gang involvement according to the course of their development, from preadolescence to mid-adolescence, respectively from mid-adolescence to the end of this age period.

The most often analyzed predictor was the criminogenic neighborhood, supported by the results of 16 studies. The following predictor in order of frequency of occurrence in processed studies was low self-control, this factor being a significant predictor in 14 articles, followed by trauma history, significantly in 13 studies. Deficient parenting, as a subcategory of familial predictors and affective predictors, as a subcategory of personal predictors, predicted gang involvement in five studies each. Consumption or intention to consume alcohol or drugs, as well as personal values, predicted involvement in the gang in four studies each. The indicators of some psychological disorders, subcategory represented by depressive symptoms, conduct problems, and antisocial attitudes, were the subject of three articles. Other subcategories of predictors among the familial (the affiliation of a family member to gangs, witnessing family violence), personal (personal values, cognitive predictors), and social and economic ones (instability of material and financial resources, school climate) significantly predicted the involvement of adolescents in gangs in two studies each. However, differences between samples prevent generalizations. As some results were obtained following the investigation of a population in a detention center (e.g. Wood, Alleyne, Mozona, & James, 2014; Dmitrieva et al., 2014), those cannot be extended to the general population. In addition, the research undertaken by Wood et al. (2014) followed the involvement of participants in the activity of prison gangs, which may explain those unique predictors, which were not highlighted in any of the other studies. In another study, a particular subculture called Jugalloos was addressed, which, according to Petering, Rhoades, Winetrobe, Dent, and Rice (2017), was the subject of a contradictory discussion in the context of considering it to be a gang. It is also important to take cultural differences into account, as the authors analyzed data from samples from different continents (America, Europe, Asia, and Africa). However, in terms of the low level of emotional regulation, the data obtained indicate that it is a predictor of involvement in gangs in both the USA (Lenzi, Sharkey, Wroblewski, Furlong, & Santinello, 2018) and in Georgia (Voisin, King, Diclemente, & Carry, 2014), respectively in South Africa (Mfidi, Thupayagale-Tshweneagae, & Akpor, 2018). This result may suggest that the regulation of emotions is not a factor dependent on a particular culture when considering its role in the adhesion of adolescents to gangs.

Although not included in this systematic review, it is worth mentioning an article from another platform for access to academic literature (different from those used in this paper), with data from 52,714 adolescents between 12 and 16 years old who lived in 1997 in the USA, which highlighted that the low level of intelligence quotient is an important predictor of adolescent

participation in gang activities (Seals Jr. & Stern, 2013). Also, completing the category of family predictors, the Child Welfare League of America recalls among the risk factors of gang involvement parents' criminal history, belonging to a gang being a response of the child to the traumatic experience represented by the incarceration of the parent (North Carolina Division of Social Services & Family and Children's Resource Program, 2002).

Regarding gender differences, some authors did not find significant differences between girls and boys, while other authors found that people belonging to the male gender are more likely to be affiliated with gangs (Voisin & Neilands, 2010; McDaniel, 2012; Vasquez, Osman, & Wood, 2012). Moreover, Beaver et al. (2010) demonstrated that only boys carrying alleles with low monoamine oxidase A gene activity were at increased risk of joining such groups. In the research conducted by Reed, Bell, and Edwards (2014), the military service of parents turned out to be a significant predictor of gang membership only in the case of female participants.

Predictors resulting from this systematic analysis of literature can be considered risk factors for the actions with attributes of some offenses, committed by adolescent gangs. Mfidi et al. (2018) showed that adolescents' inability to emotional self-regulation predicted gang formation, which the authors described as destructive groups. Comparative studies between adolescents involved in gangs and those not involved in such groups have also shown that gang members were more likely to have committed violent acts or exhibited other risky behaviors, such as drug use (Weitzel, Hopper, & Herridge, 2020; Petering, 2016). Referring to the high levels of delinquency as a predictor of adolescent involvement in gangs, the risk for antisocial actions committed with the gang is obvious (Barnes, Beaver, & Miller, 2010; Lachman, Roman, & Cahill, 2012; McDaniel, 2012; Wood et al., 2014; Ang, Huan, Chan, Cheong, & Leaw, 2015; Hennigan, Kolnick, Vindel, & Maxson, 2015; Hautala, Sittner Hartshorn, & Whitbeck, 2016).

The results of the cross-sectional research conducted by Faus, de Moraes, Reichenheim, da Matta Souza, and Taquette (2019) in Rio de Janeiro, with 699 participants, showed that traumatic childhood experiences, especially emotional, sexual abuse, and physical neglect, increase the chances for violence among adolescents. Based on the analysis of archival data, physical neglect in childhood has been proved to be a predictor of violent behavior for male adolescents (12-19 years) in the custody of a USA detention center (McGuigan, Luchette, & Atterholt, 2018).

It is noted that there is a need to intervene on the predictors that determine adolescents to get involved in gang activities, to reduce the risks that these factors entail in such a collective. This finding is based on the results of the experiment undertaken by Dimant (2019) with 185 participants in Germany, which showed that social proximity increases the likelihood of transmission and taking over of antisocial behavior, the contagion being much more significant than in the case of prosocial behavior. Thus, if there are adolescents in the gang who exhibit violent behaviors, there is a risk that other members to become violent. Cristea (2011) explained that the gang formation mechanism is based, in addition to the age index, on neighborhood criteria. Most of the studies analyzed in this paper showed that the criminogenic neighborhood predicted adolescent gang involvement. Therefore, concentrating the findings of Cristea (2011) and Dimant (2019) in a macroscopic analysis, the following reasoning can be configured: if the gang members live near neighbors who commit undesirable actions, it could increase the risk that some of them take over this behavioral model, which can later become an element of the value system of the gang.

Criss, Smith, Morris, Liu, and Hubbard (2017) found after a research conducted on a sample of 206 adolescents from America (10-18 years) that violence and the threat posed by neighborhood were associated with antisocial behavior. The same research revealed, however, that the emotional regulation and prosocial behaviors of peers have reduced the link between violence in the neighborhood and the antisocial behavior of adolescents, and the high quality of the relationship between parents and adolescents has been shown to be a protective factor against danger and violence in the neighborhood.

Other authors have stated that reducing the level of aggression could be a way to prevent

violent crime (Li, bt Roslan, binti Ahman, binti Omar, & Zhang, 2019). The study undertaken by them with 60 participants between 18 and 19 years in China showed that the levels obtained on all subscales of aggression decreased significantly for participants in the group involved in interpersonal group psychotherapy. Further research is needed to indicate whether group psychotherapeutic intervention on adolescent gangs leads to reducing levels of aggression of the members and whether this is a prophylactic measure in preventing and spreading violence by adolescents through gangs.

Conclusions

The systematic review of the literature highlighted predictors of adolescent gang involvement, which belong to the following categories: familial predictors, personal predictors, and social and economic predictors. The most common predictor was a social environment factor (criminogenic neighborhood). Personal predictors (low level of self-control and history of trauma) were the next important factors in joining gangs. Less frequent in the investigated articles were shown to be the familial predictors.

It was found that there were gender differences between adolescents regarding joining gangs. The results of comparative research between girls and boys indicated a higher probability of males being affiliated with such groups.

It is important to mention that following the search procedure described in the methodology section, no scientific articles regarding the gangs of adolescents in Romania have been identified. This needs to be taken into account by the policies for the prevention of juvenile delinquency at national level, being recommended to undertake research on the phenomenon of involvement of Romanian adolescents in gang activities. The results of such studies can provide useful information to guide efforts to prevent the increase in crime rates across the country. The merits of forensic science need recognition in the context of preventing, investigating, and combating crime, and at the same time, there are still some reservations of forensics in this direction (Gheorghiuță, 2016), so that the research of adolescent gangs could contribute to the completion of the body of knowledge, according to existing requests from the ever-changing society.

Most of the individual predictors identified in this paper can be considered risk factors for antisocial actions perpetuated through adolescent gangs. The criminogenic neighborhood may encourage adolescents to take up the antisocial behavior model within the gang. There is also the possibility that the abuse suffered in childhood to be reproduced by gang members at the age of adolescence. The low level of self-control may be a favoring factor in this picture of the perenniality of violence and other risky behaviors.

The "broken windows" theory proposes a solution to reduce the negative impact of the criminogenic neighborhood, namely lowering the level of physical disorder (Wilson & Kelling, 1982), however, it was found that this measure is not effective in all cities (Zimbardo, 2009). Therefore, organizing support groups for adolescents and their carers, promoting both the quality of the parent-child relationship and socially desirable behaviors, could be a more appropriate protective measure against the spread of antisocial behavior from the neighborhood through gangs. Learning and integrating effective coping mechanisms, with emphasis on emotional and behavioral self-control, could also help reduce gang involvement in acts of violence. The implementation of personal development programs in the form of psycho-educational groups could prove useful in this regard. Finally, involving adolescent gangs in group psychotherapy programs can be a way to prevent and reduce juvenile delinquency. The psychotherapeutic intervention could give gang members remedial experiences so that the gang becomes a support group for each of its members and not a tool through which traumatic events of childhood to spread in society.

In exposing measures to prevent and combat juvenile delinquency, it is worth remembering the *Tri-Agency Resource Gang Enforcement Team* program, implemented since 1992 in Orange County, California, and whose strategy was based on differentiated sanctions, depending on age, the

degree of violence, and the level of recidivism presented by gang members who committed crimes. This program, which aimed to form multidisciplinary teams made up of gang investigators, a probation officer, and two officials from the district attorney's office, led to a 47% drop in gang crime over seven years (Kent, Donaldson, Wyrick, & Smith, 2000; National Gang Center, n.d.). Kent et al. (2000) recommended that policymakers and researchers replicate this program in different jurisdictions, both to test its effectiveness and to improve it. Therefore, adapting this program to Romania's particularities, implementing the program at the country level, and evaluating the results, could prove useful in the effort to prevent and reduce the negative consequences of adolescent gangs.

Other programs that have had an effect in reducing risky gang-related behaviors or in preventing adolescents from joining groups of this type were presented by Howell (2010), who divided them into two categories: a primary prevention program (*Gang Resistance Education And Training*) and secondary prevention programs (*Preventive Treatment Program; Aggression Replacement Trening; CeaseFire–Chicago; The OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression Model; Striving Together to Achieve Rewarding Tomorrows; Boys & Girls Clubs Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach; Boys & Girls Clubs Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach; The Broader Urban Involvement and Leadership Development Detention Program; Movimiento Ascendencia* etc.). These programs can serve as a starting point in outlining efficacious directions for reducing delinquency among adolescents, including in Europe, through the collaboration of European and American researchers in The Eurogang Project (n.d.).

As the present analysis shows, gangs are an important objective of intervention to prevent and combat juvenile delinquency. In order to diminish the negative impact of the factors that predict the joining of adolescents in gangs (neighborhood with criminogenic potential, low level of self-control, and family with dysfunctional emotional-educational climate), it is recommended that the intervention to be led by multidisciplinary teams (psychologists, social workers, teachers, police officers etc.) and to be carried out at community, family, and individual level. In this complex prophylactic approach, the support of institutions such as the school, the police, and the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection is necessary. Non-governmental organizations can also play a significant role in the joint effort to reduce risky actions undertaken by members of adolescent gangs.

Table 1

Description of studies included in the meta-analysis

Authors and year of publication	Sample size	Gender	Place of study	Type of study
Wechsberg et al. (2015)	237	female	North Carolina	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: history of sexual abuse; history of physical abuse; low social support; low emotional support; witness to gun battles; the occurrence of a murder in the neighborhood.				
Weitzel et al. (2020)	2443	50.8% male	UK	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: lack of shelter; staying in temporary housing.				

Authors and year of publication	Sample size	Gender	Place of study	Type of study
Lachman et al. (2012)	200	55% male	Montgomery County & Washington, DC	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: instrumental purposes (e.g. joining the group in order to obtain protection).				
Mendez, Mozley, and Kerig (2020)	817	25.93% female	Western USA	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: trauma exposure (callous-unemotionality being an explanatory factor).				
Cepeda, Valdez, and Nowotny (2014)	75	male	West Side, San Antonio, Texas	Cross-sectional
Predictor of gang involvement: physical neglect.				
van Dommelen-Gonzalez, Deardorff, Herd, and Minnis (2015)	162	44.87 female affiliated 57.14 female unaffiliated	San Francisco	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: age (those affiliates were older than those unaffiliated); to live with a family member who receives social assistance; affiliation of some family members to gangs; having close deviant friends (truants, who spent a night in custody etc.).				
Kubik, Docherty, and Boxer (2019)	611	52% female	USA	Longitudinal
Predictors of gang involvement: childhood maltreatment; childhood neglect.				
Ang et al. (2015)	1027	58.2% male	Singapore	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: proactive aggression; delinquent behavior; behavioral disengagement from school.				
Reed et al. (2014)	9952	2782 female	Washington	Cross-sectional

Authors and year of publication	Sample size	Gender	Place of study	Type of study
Predictors of gang involvement: having military parents (in the case of girls); having parents deployed in combat zones (in the case of girls).				
Katz and Fox (2010)	2206	59.6% female	Trinidad & Tobago	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: perceived availability of hand guns; high level of residential mobility; parents who favor antisocial behaviour; early initiation into antisocial behaviours; intention to use drugs; antisocial peers; peers who use drugs.				
Gilman, Hill, Hawkins, Howell, and Kosterman (2014)	808	51% male	Seattle	Longitudinal 1985-1993
Predictors of gang involvement: living with a gang member; antisocial neighborhood; influences of antisocial peers in the previous year.				
Voisin and Neilands (2010)	563	38.89% male	Midwestern	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: lower levels of student-teacher connection; male gender; risky rules imposed by colleagues.				
Lenzi et al. (2018)	11753	59.6% male	California	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: low levels of behavioral self-control; low levels of emotional regulation; low levels of empathy; limiting access to social support (within the school); limiting exposure to prosocial behaviors (within the school).				
Ventura Miller, Barnes, and Hartley (2011)	1633	66% male – belonging to the gang	South Texas	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: low level of grades obtained at school; drug availability in the neighborhood; low levels of acculturation; low levels of school satisfaction; perceiving a higher degree of marginalization based on ethnicity.				
Beaver et al. (2010)	2196	52.59% female	USA	Longitudinal 1994-2002

Authors and year of publication	Sample size	Gender	Place of study	Type of study
Predictors of gang involvement: low activity alleles of the monoamine oxidase A gene (only carrier men are at increased risk of joining the gang).				
Lenzi et al. (2014)	26232	53.4% female	California	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: associating with deviant peers; perceiving the school as an unsafe environment; type of school (special, vocational, alternative vs. comprehensive).				
Petering (2016)	505	27.72% female	Los Angeles	Cross-sectional - homeless population
Predictors of gang involvement: childhood sexual abuse; witness to family violence; childhood physical abuse; witness to interpersonal violence.				
Wood et al. (2014)	188	male	UK	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: the value attached to social status; levels of dominant social orientation; anti-authority attitudes; moral disengagement; threat levels (before incarceration); individual delinquency levels (before incarceration); levels of involvement in group crime (before incarceration); group support on streets; longer current punishments.				
Barnes et al. (2010)	<i>Wave 1</i> - 20745 adolescents, 17700 carers <i>Wave 2</i> - 14738 <i>Wave 3</i> - 15197	50.51% female	USA	Longitudinal
Predictors of gang involvement: low levels of self-control; greater involvement in delinquency; more victimization experiences.				
Ha, Kim, Christopher, Caruthers, and Dishion (2016)	998	52.7% male	Northwestern USA	Longitudinal
Predictor of gang involvement: maltreatment.				

Authors and year of publication	Sample size	Gender	Place of study	Type of study
Gilman, Howell, Hipwell, and Stepp (2016) Predictors of gang involvement: peer victimization.	2450	female	Pittsburgh	Longitudinal 2003-2011
Mfidi et al. (2018) Predictors of gang involvement: improper handling of emotions (anger – the most common emotion experienced).	347	169 male	Eastern Cape, South Africa	Cross-sectional
Smith, Gomez Auyong, and Ferguson (2018) Predictors of gang involvement: delinquent peers; social disorganization in the neighbourhood (graffiti, presence of stray dogs on the streets, vandalized objects etc.); drug use.	15445	50.6% male	Avon, UK	Longitudinal 1991-2019
Dmitrieva et al. (2014) Predictors to be a low-level gang member: low temperance; low perspective; low responsibility; low self-esteem (in early adolescence). Predictors to be a gang leader: low temperance; low self-esteem (after 19 years); high self-esteem (after 17 years); grandiose-manipulative traits (after 17 years).	1354	male - in detention	Maricopa & Philadelphia	Longitudinal
Hautala et al. (2016) Predictors of gang involvement: low income for each family member; low parental monitoring; low links with school (increased risk only for gang initiation); early conduct problems in primary school; risk factors at peer level (increased risk only for initiation); early negative events increase the risk for initiation into the gang; early perception of racial discrimination; anger (risk for initiation); depressive symptoms; hyperactivity / Impulsivity; substance use; high level of delinquency before involvement in the gang.	646	50.5% female	USA & Canada	Longitudinal 2002-2011 - Indigenous population
Frisby-Osman, and Wood (2020)	91	64.8% male	England	Cross-sectional

Authors and year of publication	Sample size	Gender	Place of study	Type of study
Predictors of gang involvement: high levels of conduct problems; moral disengagement; ruminations; symptoms of anxiety; symptoms of depression; higher levels of exposure to violence (being a victim of violent attacks).				
McDaniel (2012)	4131	51.49% female	-	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: belonging to an ethnic minority; male gender; depressive state; reporting suicidal ideation; alcohol or drug use; delinquency; experiencing peer victimization.				
Petering et al. (2017)	495	71.30% male	Los Angeles	Cross-sectional -Jugallos
Predictors of gang involvement: childhood sexual abuse; physical childhood abuse; exposure to community violence; witnessing family violence.				
Vasquez et al. (2012)	310	185 male	London	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: ruminal thinking about aversive events; male gender.				
Vuk (2016)	5935	48% male	USA	Cross-sectional
Predictors of gang involvement: low self-esteem; authoritarian parents; negligent parents; permissive parents; delinquent peers; low levels of self-control; increased levels of rationalization; low levels of guilt.				
Hennigan et al. (2015)	391	67% male	Los Angeles	Longitudinal
Predictors of gang involvement: antisocial tendencies; impulsive risk-taking; neutralization of guilt; parental monitoring; influence of the family gang; negative influence of friends; delinquency of friends; critical life events in the last six months; self-reported delinquency.				
Shelley and Peterson (2018)	1730	55% female	USA	Longitudinal 2006-2012
Predictors of gang involvement: being a bully; being a victim of bullying; being a bully-victim.				
Voisin et al. (2014)	188	female	Atlanta Georgia	Cross-sectional

Authors and year of publication	Sample size	Gender	Place of study	Type of study
Predictors of gang involvement: low self-esteem; emotional dysregulation; trauma history, deviant colleagues; low parental monitoring; low level of parental communication; housing instability; poor quality of the neighborhood.				

Acknowledgements

This study is part of the doctoral research project entitled "Adolescents and Youth in Educational and Detention Centers: Personality Dimensions and Psychological Factors", PhD. Student Flavia-Elena Ciurbea, coordinated by PhD. Cornelia Rada, at the School of Advanced Studies of the Romanian Academy, "Constantin Rădulescu-Motru" Institute of Philosophy and Psychology, Department of Psychology, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania.

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