

# Gangsterism in Schools: Now Is the Time to Halt It

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Received: February 08, 2023; Revised: February 17, 2023; Accepted: February 30, 2023

**Keywords:** Gangsterism, School, Violence

**How to Cite:** Akanni OO. Gangsterism in Schools: Now Is the Time to Halt It. Int. J. School. Health. 2023;10(2):51-52. doi: 10.30476/INTJSH.2023.97944.1285.

It was reported in a previous study that an alarming prevalence of gangsterism among secondary school students in a metropolitan city in Nigeria was 3.0% (1). However, other research reported higher rates (2). The report focused on risky behaviors among school-going adolescents using the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) developed by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the USA (3). Gangsterism is not part of the YRBS but it was included in the study because it constitutes violence among youth. However, there is increasing evidence over the years that gangsterism is attaining a monstrous dimension among students, which demands urgent attention (2).

The secondary school age coincides with the adolescence period, during which profound biological, psychological, and social developmental changes occur (4). In neuro-developmental changes, the frontal cortex, which aids in decision-making and impulse control, is often the last part of the brain to develop. This may lead many adolescents, who are full of energy, to make choices quickly or impulsively without a lot of critical thought (5) and thus engage in risky behaviors such as gangsterism.

Gangsterism is the use of tactics associated with gangsters, such as intimidation or violence, to achieve something, while the term “gangsters” can be defined as a member of a group of violent criminals (6). Gangsterism involves bullying, extortion, and even physical assault, which can be fatal. The motivation to join a gangster group varies from the desire to extort money, dominate others, and seek attention (7).

Gangsterism is a global phenomenon. It is a risky behavior because of its association with violence and the potential to cause adverse effects on the

overall development and well-being of youths (3, 8). Beyond the individual, it has numerous and far-reaching untoward consequences on schools and society at large (7).

Researchers have identified various factors among students, similar to other risky behaviors, that are associated with gangsterism. They include individual factors such as the male gender, low self-esteem, drug use, other antisocial behaviors, negative peer groups, poor grades, and psychological distress; and also familial elements such as polygamous families, poor parent-child communication, low parental monitoring; and extra-familial variables, like negative school climate, low socioeconomic status, poor relationships with non-parental adults, and lack of religious affiliation (1, 2, 9, 10).

Gangsterism can occur within and outside the school premises (2), though the latter is more common. The school is; however, gradually becoming a nidus for the springing of this epidemic worldwide. Hence, it is imperative to act now before it runs out of control. The intervention required to tackle and uproot gangsterism among students will require a multi-dimensional approach that will involve the family, school, government, and non-governmental institutions.

The family plays a critical role in the early socialization of a child, and inadequate socialization with parental figures may aid gangsterism. Thus, parents should be offered help to improve their parenting skills, which will further enhance the integration of the child into the family and, invariably, to the community. Parents are to ensure they meet the emotional and physical needs of their wards so that they will not look elsewhere to meet them.

Teachers also need to improve their relationships with their students and closely monitor them. Schools should engage their students in sufficient activities, including extracurricular activities, to occupy them. Awareness campaigns about the negative effects of gangsterism should be periodically carried out in schools. This mass education should begin as a preventive program from primary schools.

Government institutions have a significant role to play in addressing gangsterism. For example, within the criminal justice system, the police need to step up their efforts in policing gang-related activities, as they are criminal in nature. Punishments and sanctions should be applied as deterrents, even though some of these students are juveniles. Within the social and welfare arm of government, programs should be implemented to rehabilitate members who denounce gang membership. Joining a gang is akin to cultism, which involves brainwashing. Many gangsters are also involved in drug use, so professionals in psychology/behavioral problems should provide therapy for them.

The government can also coordinate and synergize all of these programs to make them more effective. The government should partner with religious organizations that promote good conduct and discourage violent activities. The media, which sometimes inadvertently portrays gangsterism in an enticing manner needs reorientation. Social media influencers and celebrities who young people identify with, should also be at the forefront of enlightenment on the dangers inherent in gangsterism.

If these measures are pursued vigorously and harmoniously, a lasting solution to gangsterism among students is expected. Thus, all hands must be on deck to stop gangsterism now.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors of this manuscript declare no relationships with any company whose products or services may be related to the subject matter of the article. Oluyemi O. Akanni is a member of the

editorial board.

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