

## College Expository Essay

Teenagers constantly look for the place they belong. Isn't it everyone's dream to belong to a certain group of people, to find like-minded individuals and feel accepted? Unfortunately, a vast majority of teenagers take a wrong turn and get lost on their path to acceptance. It is not uncommon for them to join teen gangs feeling like their members understand them, but that is far from the truth. The rise of teenage gangs is a major problem nowadays. But, how serious this problem really is? Consequences of gang membership can scar a person for life in several ways.

Youth, teenage, or juvenile gang is defined as an organized group of adolescents and/or young adults who rely on group intimidation and violence to commit criminal acts with the purpose to gain power, recognition, and control. The rise of teenage gangs is perfectly explained in a study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* wherein researchers discovered there were 1,059,000 youth gang members in the United States in 2010. Moreover, on a yearly basis 401,000 juveniles join gangs. The primary reason why this staggering number of gang members goes unnoticed is due to the fact that they may not conform to popular perceptions of teen gang demographics.

Another potential reason why the total number of gangs and gang members keeps increasing is because a great majority of crimes they commit usually goes unreported. As a result, government officials find it difficult to gather exact data about this growing issue. Youth gang members primarily focus on their peers, bully them, and force them to say nothing in order to avoid harsher consequences.

When discussing the issue of youth crime groups, one must wonder how one decides to join them. Risk factors that enhance a teenager's odds of joining a gang include drug or alcohol abuse, negative influences, peer pressure, a strong desire for recognition and belonging, lack of parental supervision, and limited attachment to the community. Most adults do not take this problem seriously enough and, usually, consider it as just another phase teenagers go through. However, the *American Journal of Public Health* published a research showing that gang membership in the adolescence has severe consequences in adulthood, long after a person leaves the gang. Besides higher likelihood of criminal activities, people who were gang members in the adolescence also experienced financial issues and were in poor health in adulthood.

While most teenagers have a strong urge to feel accepted by their peers, others seek the solace and comfort or escape from their difficult family life in gangs. Although the current data shows the staggering number of gang members it is assumed the problem could be even more severe as most of them do not fit into the gang demographics and many crimes are not reported. Finally, there is a growing need for the entire society to take necessary measures and work on this issue. If not, the consequences could be far more severe.