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Cocaine, kicks, and strain: patterns of substance use in Milwaukee gangs

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This study describes the patterns of substance use by male and female gang members in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from their teenage years in the 1980s into adulthood. Milwaukee gangs started out as one form of neighborhood-based drug-using peer group. There was much variation in drug use, and family variables explained little of the variation. Male gang members raised in families with a history of gang involvement and drug use were more likely than other gang members to use cocaine and to use it seriously. On the other hand, severe family distress was not related to onset, duration, or seriousness of cocaine use in either males or females. Cocaine use for both males and females increased in adulthood. It appears that the etiology of adult and adolescent drug use may differ. Neither social control theory nor differential association theory is well suited to explain the variations in gang drug use by age or gender.

What do we know about drug use among inner-city gangs? Unfortunately, not too much. In an era when a "war on drugs" drives public policy, social scientists ought to be able to go

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beyond generalities and describe actual patterns of drug use by gang members. One first step would be to describe variation in gang drug use patterns, particularly by age and gender.

An underlying question is the relationship between family background, gang membership, and patterns of drug use. If male and female gang members come homogeneously from severely distressed families, their gang membership and drug use may both derive from family troubles. On the other hand, if gang members come from different kinds of families, we would want to determine whether gang members from more troubled families were more likely to become more serious drug users.

A second issue is whether gang members who become serious drug users as teenagers tend to continue their heavy use into adulthood. Do drug use patterns differ substantially by gender or ethnicity over time? If heavy drug use by adults is not simply the continuation of teenage drug use, we would need to search for other motives for teenage and adult use.

Theoretically a positive relationship between family distress and drug use would support social control theory. Variation in degree of family distress or background, but uniformity of drug use by gang members, would be more consistent with differential association theory. Differences in drug usage patterns over time may be best explained with a life course perspective.

This study describes the patterns of substance use by male and female gang members in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from their teenage years into adulthood. It covers the period from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, a time when cocaine became the primary climax drug in that city. First we describe substance use of teenage gang members by gender and ethnicity, with a special focus on cocaine. Second, in a preliminary manner, we explore what factors might account for variations in the onset, intensity, and duration of cocaine use

of our respondents. Finally, we look at the impact of cocaine use on the adult lives of gang members by ethnicity and gender.

A brief history of gang drug use

Drug and alcohol use have been reported through the years as one of many delinquent activities of adolescent gang members (e.g., Thrasher, 1927/1963; Yablonsky, 1966; Short & Strodbeck, 1965; Moore, 1978; Bowker and Klein, 1983; Fagan, 1996). Cloward and Ohlin (1960), utilizing Merton's (1938) notion of retreatism, elevated gang drug use to the status of a subculture. They argued that in areas where illicit opportunities were few, groups of youths who were unable or unwilling to fight became "double failures." These gangs of kids retreated into a drug subculture that directed their frustrations inward. This theory paralleled press reports in New York during the fifties and sixties that the introduction of heroin had "wiped out" gangs. Instead of fighting or joining the Mafia, gang members of that era reputedly just got high.

Not everyone accepted those reports at face value, and many researchers had problems with the idea of a "retreatist subculture." Walter Miller (1975) firmly debunked the idea that gangs had disappeared in New York due to drugs or for any other reason. He demonstrated that New York gangs persisted throughout the fifties and sixties, but media attention to them varied. Preble and Casey (1969) harshly punctured the stereotype that drug use was "retreatist" behavior, describing the active life of "hustling" by heroin addicts (see also Johnson et al., 1985). Moore's (1978) description of heroin-using East Los Angeles gang members was also inconsistent with Cloward and Ohlin's "retreatist" subcultural perspective. Gang studies consistently failed to find empirical support for the retreatist or other subcultural categories hypothesized by Cloward and Ohlin (e.g., Short and Strodbeck, 1965; Hagedorn, 1988).

In the 1980s and 1990s, numerous studies found strong participation of gangs in drug markets (e.g., Perkins, 1987; Taylor, 1989; Miezowski, 1990; Padilla, 1992; Waldorf, 1993a; Venkatesh, 1996; Fagan, 1996). Although there are many studies that looked at gang sales of cocaine, fewer looked carefully at cocaine use by gang members. Waldorf (1993a; 1993b), echoing reports by Taylor (1989), found that African-American gang members had rules forbidding cocaine use by gang drug sellers, while Latinos did not. Fagan (1989) and Fagan and Chin (1991), on the contrary, found that African-American and Latino cocaine sellers typically used cocaine, similar to past practices of drug users/dealers. Crack sellers, both Waldorf and Fagan found, were more violent than non-sellers. Moore (1991) and Vigil (1988) continued to report PCP and heroin use by East Los Angeles gang members, with only limited use of cocaine. Drug use patterns in the 1980s and 1990s continued to vary by region and ethnicity.

Moore and her colleagues' studies of drug use among Los Angeles gangs are without peer. She has described heroin and other substance use by male and female gang members in various age-graded "klikas" over several decades. Her work—too detailed and vast to adequately summarize here—has been our reference point for analyzing Milwaukee gang drug use. Briefly, she found that most East Los Angeles barrio heroin use had begun with the gangs (1978). Many male gang members began heroin use in their teens and were incarcerated in their twenties. This began a cycle of addiction and incarceration that led about a third of gang members to become "tecatos" (Long, 1990) and to lead an addict's life on the streets. Significantly, Moore (1991, 108) could find few family level differences between those gang members who used heroin and those who did not.

Fewer of the women in Moore's older "klikas" used heroin, but those who did were more likely to come from families with an addicted father or brother. Nearly half of the women

had tried heroin by their twenties (Moore and Mata, 1981), with many mothers using heroin as a way to cope with the stresses of family and life on the streets (Moore with Devitt, 1989). Women in all klikas were more likely than male gang members to come from troubled homes. The climax drug during the periods studied by Moore and her colleagues was heroin, not cocaine.

Most other recent gang studies have focused on drugs other than heroin or cocaine. For example, Bjerregaard and Smith (1995) reported on alcohol and drug use by 13- to 15-year-old gang members in an analysis of the Rochester Youth Survey. They reported that 71.4% of gang boys and 51.4% of gang girls used alcohol, and 38.8% of gang boys and 43.7% of gang girls admitted marijuana use. There was no mention of cocaine use. Gang membership was self-reported in this school-based sample, raising problems of selectivity and making between-groups and within-group comparisons difficult (see below). The authors found that "gang membership appears to have an effect on delinquency and substance use across both sexes" (101).

Jeff Fagan (1989) described drug use among inner-city gangs in Chicago, Los Angeles and San Diego. He argued that the correlation between delinquency and drug use was spurious and was probably related to underlying third factors (see Watters et al., 1985). Fagan's sample was selected by community agencies and divided into gang and non-gang samples by self-report of gang membership. At the time of his survey, 67.4% of teenage male gang members had used alcohol and 72.0% used drugs of one type or another. Among female gang members 59.8% used alcohol and 56.3% used drugs.

In another study, Dan Waldorf (1993a) surveyed 568 self-reported male gang members in San Francisco who were between the ages of 13 and 40. His sample included 293 African-Americans and 157 Latinos. He used conventional National Institute on Drug Abuse survey questions detailing

weekly, monthly, and lifetime drug use. Waldorf's study is important because he specifically included questions on cocaine use.

Waldorf found that Latinos used drugs more frequently than other ethnic groups. Three-quarters of the African-American gang members reported that they never used crack, compared with less than a quarter of the Latinos and half of Asian gang members. More than half of the Latinos reported that at some time in their lives they felt "addicted," compared with less than a quarter of the African-Americans.

Crack sellers, according to Waldorf, reported less drug use than non-sellers (see also Waldorf, 1993a). He found that almost all (96.7%) of the men used marijuana, with three-quarters reporting having smoked marijuana in the last week. Unlike Moore's East Los Angeles sample, only 10% of all gang members reported that they ever injected any drug. Lauderback et al. (1992) and Brotherton (1996), using Waldorf's data, also found variation in drug use and dealing among female San Francisco gangs.

Waldorf's contribution is that his is the first detailed study of gang cocaine use, and he demonstrated that ethnicity is an important source of variation in cocaine use. His sample, however, is problematically based on self-reports of gang membership and is drawn from many different age groups (see below).

Explaining gang drug use

Gang drug use has usually been explained by some variant of differential association theory. In other words, gang members learn drug use from other gang members as they hang out. Although the issue of causality is unclear, it has been firmly established that drug use coincides with delinquency (Hawkins and Wies, 1979; Kandel, 1980; Watters et al.,

1985). White et al. (1986, 361) look at major criminological theories and conclude, with most of the literature, that "friend use and friend tolerance of use are by far the best predictors of adolescent substance use." Bjerregaard and Smith (1995) come to similar conclusions examining a youthful male and female sample of gang members. Moore's conclusion could easily be generalized to most adolescent gangs: ". . . hanging around and partying were and remain the major activity of these gangs, with drugs as a continuous part of the scene . . ." (Moore, 1991, 53).

Kandel (1996), in an important review, raises some questions about her own prior support for the overriding influence of peers in substance use. She argues that selection effects may be at work in that peers are singled out for friendship. She thinks that parental influences may be greatly underestimated (see Brook et al., 1988; Ripple and Luthar, 1996). Her revised position harkens back to the Gluecks' "Birds of a feather flock together" (see Cohen, 1955, 14), and is consistent with social control theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). According to this perspective, gangs are formed by similarly troubled youths, with both drug use and joining a gang seen as symptoms of underlying family problems.

Most studies that support the dominance of gang peer influences in drug use are drawn from unrepresentative or convenience samples and do not address Kandel's concerns. Some focus only on drug use at a single age, and others ignore male/female differences. What may be even more problematic is that most gang studies have been cross-sectional, thus seeing drug use at only one point in time and leaving out the *consequences* of teenage drug use (see Friedman et al., 1996). These studies cannot explore variation in use over time nor whether teenage gang drug use may have an etiology separate from that of adult use. It could be that family factors are more influential in earlier years but less influential in adulthood.

For example, Waldorf reported that older gang members used drugs more often than younger gang members, consistent with Moore (1978; 1991). For Moore, the adult impact of prison and reduced barrio economic opportunities were prime correlates of continued adult heroin use. Interestingly, Cloward and Ohlin (1960, 185) also argued that *adult* gang members may experience more severe drug problems. With the peer group left behind, they face a constriction of licit and illicit opportunities: "Strains are experienced, and retreatist behavior may result."

This concern with adult drug use finds support in the life course literature. Sampson and Laub (1993, 24) argue that "life-event transitions and adult social bonds can modify quite different childhood trajectories." In other words, events in adult life, especially job stability and informal social bonds to conventional institutions, can have a major impact on adult criminality or substance use, independent of childhood predictors. In fact, the Gluecks' data, re-analyzed by Sampson and Laub, show that adults with low job stability were four times more likely to be heavy users of alcohol as those with more stable jobs (147-148).

All this is especially important when we look at the contemporary consequences of the "disappearance of work" (Wilson, 1996) for gang members and other central-city residents (see Fagan, 1996). The central thesis of *People & Folks* (Hagedorn, 1988; 1998) was that economic restructuring had altered the maturing-out cycle for teenage gang members. Rather than leaving the wild life of the gang behind, getting a job and getting married like gang members in the past (Thrasher, 1927, 287), young adults in the 1980s and 1990s were faced with few job prospects and weak social bonds. These are precisely Sampson and Laub's correlates for adult criminality and substance abuse.

Context of the study

The context of this study is vitally important in order to understand the data on gang substance use. Milwaukee has fashioned its identity as an immigrant city. German, Polish, and Italian waves of immigrants settled in Milwaukee, which became the quintessential U.S. factory town. A prosperous European working class gradually moved out of the central city to the suburbs, much like the classic Chicago pattern (Shaw and McKay, 1942). Also as in Chicago, once African-Americans, Puerto Ricans and Mexican-Americans entered the city, the old pattern of upward mobility was broken (Bernard, 1970). Deindustrialization was among the factors that changed the rules for the newcomers—they moved in and the jobs moved out (Kasarda, 1992).

During the 1980s Milwaukee lost 19% of its manufacturing job base (McMahon et al., 1992). Thirty-seven percent of the large firms that paid high wages and where many minorities had been hired (Trotter, 1985) were shut down. The Milwaukee area lost 42,000 manufacturing jobs while gaining 100,000 service jobs. In 1990 the African-American male unemployment rate was more than 10 times higher than for whites (Rose et al., 1992). Most metropolitan jobs, for the first time, were located in the suburbs.

The kids who formed gangs in Milwaukee at that time were similar to working-class and lower-class kids who had always formed gangs. They were largely the first or second generation of migrants whose families had relocated looking for jobs or to get away from problems elsewhere. Like traditional industrial-era gangs (Short and Strodtbeck, 1965), they were not drawn from the poorest of the poor. For example, slightly more than a quarter of our Milwaukee respondents came from families where the parents owned their own home, a figure only slightly under the citywide average.

These Milwaukee kids formed gangs as gangs had always been formed—neighborhood peer groups fighting with other peer groups and getting in trouble with police and schools (Hagedorn, 1988). What changed was that as these young people got older, the job market was transformed, and they were left to look for other, sometimes illegal, ways to make a living. The drop in the price of cocaine (Hamid, 1992), its accessibility to gang members, and the potential for large profits pushed Milwaukee male gang members into the cocaine economy in the same way as with gang members elsewhere (Hagedorn, 1994b; Fagan, 1996).

Cocaine, however, did not become available at the same time to all Milwaukee communities or ethnic groups. It was widely available to Latinos five to eight years before it became the principal climax drug in African-American communities, only a mile or two away.¹

Methods and measures

This study describes the substance use patterns of 90 male and 73 female Milwaukee gang members from their teenage years until their late twenties. All respondents were selected from verified rosters of 14 male gangs and 8 female gangs. Rosters were developed by respondents and subsequently validated by other respondents included on the rosters. We also report the drug use and other characteristics of 234 males and 176 female gang members listed on those rosters. Median age at the time of interview was 26 for males and 28 for females. Those gang members interviewed were the founding members of Milwaukee gangs formed in the early 1980s (Hagedorn, 1988) and thus may or may not be representative of later age groups. The interviews were conducted from 1991 to 1993. Respondents were paid \$50, and their responses were protected by a Certificate of Confidentiality obtained from the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

More complete descriptions of the sample can be found elsewhere (Hagedorn, 1994a; 1994b; 1996; Moore and Hagedorn, 1995; Hagedorn and Devitt, 1996). Before we display our results, we need to discuss some limitations of our methods and ways we compensated for them.

Distortion in reporting of cocaine use

Data for this study were gathered through collaborative methods first modeled by Moore (1978). Most interviews were conducted by gang members from the same gang as those they interviewed. These "community researchers" were primarily gang members who had worked with the principal investigator on other studies and projects over the previous 10 years. Over a six-month period in 1991 and 1993 they were intensively trained in interview techniques and in the administration of the interview schedule. Peer interviewing facilitates the valid and safe gathering of information on drug dealing and use and other sensitive topics from a "hidden population" (see Hagedorn, 1990; 1996; Moore, 1977).

We found that both male and female gang members tended to underreport the severity of their cocaine use (see Hagedorn, 1996). When interviewed by either Hagedorn or their fellow gang members, respondents were inconsistent in reporting cocaine use. Some of those who did admit use would insist that their use was light or moderate, not heavy, despite convincing evidence to the contrary.

In questioning field staff about this underreporting, several possible explanations emerged. Some respondents may have not wanted to admit heavy cocaine use, which implies "weakness." Our method of peer interviewing may also have contributed to the problem. Increased trust has been found to be an important factor in the reliability and validity of drug use self-reports (Ball, 1967; Swadi, 1990), but increased familiarity with the interviewer may tend to minimize respondents'

admission of serious substance use (Mensch and Kandel, 1988; Winters, 1990).

Some of our respondents may not have wanted to admit use because such an admission might violate gang rules. Most (60.4%) said their gang had a rule prohibiting drug use. However, only about one in seven (14.9%) said they followed gang rules “all of the time,” and nearly two-thirds said they followed gang rules only “sometimes” (42.6%) or “not very often” (19.8%). Gang rules in Milwaukee were largely written documents of Chicago gangs and carried very little authority for most Milwaukee gang members.

Multiple measures on our interview schedule also allowed us to correct for distortion. Respondents might answer “no” when we asked them about whether they used cocaine. However, we also asked each respondent to help us fill out a “drug timeline” that listed each substance, including tobacco and alcohol, used at each age. If cocaine was used, the respondent was asked to specify if his or her use was heavy (daily), moderate (weekend), or light (occasional). These questions were repeated for each age. Despite our precautions, we believe cocaine use was underestimated in our data.

Problems with self-reports of gang membership

Most gang studies establish gang membership by self-report (e.g., Fagan, 1989; Waldorf, 1993b; Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). In other words, outreach workers, agency officials, or law enforcement officers will contact youths and researchers will ask if they belong to a gang. The self-admitted “gang member” may be a full member, a “wannabe,” a former member who still “claims” the gang, or a liar. One previously unexplored problem is that the typically used “snowball” sample does not control for *level* of gang membership. In other words, if the gang is a significant factor in drug use, as differential association theory implies, it is methodologically

important to distinguish the level, or "intensity" (Sutherland, 1934), of gang membership when looking at the influence of the gang in substance use. This would allow a reliable measurement of the impact of the gang on different individuals' substance use.

Our method, which includes interviewing only people listed on rosters, controls for level of membership. We also interviewed more than 90% of the members of each of four male gangs and three female gangs in three different neighborhoods. By interviewing nearly all members of a gang, we minimized selectivity and ensured that our respondents would have a uniform "gang" effect.

Measures

Many of the measures developed in this study have been reported elsewhere (Hagedorn, 1996a; in press). A street family index was created, combining responses to 13 questions we believed indicated a "street orientation." Five or more replies indicating a parental history of hustling, gang membership, or drug abuse meant typing as a "street" family. "Conventional" families were those with no drug, criminal, or gang history. Those in between, who had one to four positive responses to questions about a family history of drug use, gang membership, or criminal involvement, were typed as "declining." This type represented families with a few problems who might have moved to Milwaukee to escape them and/or to find economic opportunity. It is theoretically consistent with the macro-economic perspective of William Julius Wilson (1985; 1987), who found disruptive effects of deindustrialization on previously stable families (see also Sampson, 1987). The intercorrelations among the several component variables comprising the street family index were also high, with alpha at .7114 (see Hagedorn, in press).

Distress within a family may exist in any family type (Ripple and Luthar, 1996; Kandel, 1996). Since we can hypothesize that most gang members experience some trouble within their family, in order to explore variation we created an index measuring severe distress. This index consists of six questions concerning fighting within the family and lack of basic resources. Extreme scores on all six measures were combined, and those answering at least three of the six questions with extreme answers were typed as "severely distressed families." For example, a family in which the respondent had seen *both* his mother and his father strike the other parent "more than once a month" *and* the respondent thought his or her family had problems getting adequate food, clothing, or shelter "always or almost always" would be typed as "severely distressed" (indices displayed in appendices).

Results

Consistent with the gang literature (Thrasher, 1927/1963; Short & Strodbeck, 1965; Moore, 1978), Milwaukee gang members came from many different kinds of families found within poor neighborhoods. While nearly a third of gang members came from families who owned their own home, a few (12.5%) came from families who had considerable trouble making ends meet, and most (55.5%) reported severe family economic problems at some time when they were young.² All gang members had some indicators of stress within their families, but less than a third reported extreme distress.

Family background also varied considerably. Less than a quarter of families of male gang members came from "street" backgrounds with a history of gang involvement or drug use. But a similar number came from conventional families with no history at all of prior drug use, alcoholism, or gang involvement. Most (54.3%) came from "declining" families with one to four indicators of family trouble.

Description of teenage and adult gang drug use

Although family background showed wide variation, almost all Milwaukee gang members used drugs or alcohol. Clearly, despite family background of gang members, the gang provided an opportunity for drug use. The following was the modal answer by both males and females describing the teenage gang:

Q: What did your gang do mostly during the night time?

A: Party, we used to party a lot and get high. Hang out at one another's houses.

Gangs began as unsupervised teenage peer groups, and the use of drugs was a constant in a life of partying. Gang members used those drugs that were popular at the time. For the boys, marijuana was the most popular drug; for the girls, "weed" shared the top spot with alcohol.

TABLE 1 Male substance use (n = 86)

SUBSTANCES	MEANS OF AGE OF FIRST USE AND DURATION	
	African American	Latino*
TOBACCO: AGE OF FIRST USE	14.75 (40)	13.89 (18)
TOBACCO: DURATION	7.12 YRS (40)	7.59YRS (19)
ALCOHOL: AGE OF FIRST USE	13.95 (41)	16.00 (26)
ALCOHOL: DURATION	10.56YRS (41)	10.57YRS (26)
MARIJUANA: AGE OF FIRST USE	14.23 (51)	15.78 (23)
MARIJUANA: DURATION	10.02YRS (51)	7.03YRS (23)
ANY COCAINE: AGE OF FIRST USE	20.83 (29)	17.84 (19)
ANY COCAINE: DURATION	3.72 YRS (29)	6.79 YRS (19)
ANY COCAINE: ACTUAL YEAR		1986
		1982
	N=57	N=29

* Latino includes 86% Puerto Rican and 14% Mexican. There were no significant differences between the two groups. Duration means from first use until last use, including periods of interrupted use.

Marijuana and alcohol use began in the early to mid teens for both males and females, at roughly the same time as they joined the gang. Most gang members moved from use of softer to harder drugs. More than three-quarters of the men

TABLE 2 Female substance use (n = 69)

SUBSTANCES	MEANS OF AGE OF FIRST USE AND DURATION		
	African American	Latina*	
TOBACCO: AGE OF FIRST USE	17.33 (6)	15.87 (23)	
TOBACCO: DURATION	4.83YRS (6)	8.35YRS (23)	
ALCOHOL: AGE OF FIRST USE	15.81 (16)	15.86 (44)	
ALCOHOL: DURATION	6.25YRS (16)	7.70YRS (44)	
MARIJUANA: AGE OF FIRST USE	15.13 (15)	15.49 (41)	
MARIJUANA: DURATION	6.71YRS (15)	6.73YRS (41)	
ANY COCAINE: AGE OF FIRST USE	18.71 (7)	17.39 (23)	
ANY COCAINE: DURATION	2.57YRS (7)	5.22YRS (23)	
ANY COCAINE: ACTUAL YEAR		1986	1983
	N=18	N=51	

* Latina includes 63% Puerto Rican and 37% Mexican. There were no significant differences between the two groups.

said they began substance use with both alcohol and marijuana at the same time, and a majority of the women also began substance use with both. Nearly half (42.9%) of the African-American women, however, said they used marijuana prior to alcohol (table not shown). Use of hallucinogens and heroin and an assortment of other drugs was negligible.

The gang is indisputably a risk factor for drug use. Use of marijuana and cocaine by gang members is considerably higher than national averages. Latina gang members particularly used alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine at significantly higher levels than national averages. There were no significant differences between Puerto Ricans and Mexicans.

While marijuana and alcohol use coincided with our respondents' initial gang involvement, cocaine use for Latinos and Latinas occurred almost entirely after joining the gang. Male gang members of both ethnic groups began selling cocaine at the same time as they began using it. Half of all African-American male gang members and two-thirds of Latinos admitted cocaine use. Remember, these numbers probably represent an underestimate of true use.

Tables 1 and 2 show that duration of drug use varied by ethnicity. Latinos and Latinas used cocaine for roughly twice as

TABLE 3 Gang substance use versus national averages

MALES					
	1988 U. S. Population Average	African American National Average (M)	Milwaukee African American Gang	Latino: National Average	Milwaukee Latino Gang
% ever used alcohol	89.50%	83.30%	71.93%	86.60%	92.86%
% ever used marijuana	36.90%	41.40%	89.50%	34.20%	82.70%
% ever used cocaine	13.10%	13.40%	50.90%	13.90%	69.90%
FEMALES					
	1988 U. S. Population Average	African American National Average (F)	Milwaukee African American Gang	Latino: National Average	Milwaukee Latina Gang
% ever used alcohol	80.80%	71.70%	88.90%	72.10%	88.00%
% ever used marijuana	29.70%	26.50%	83.33%	21.70%	82.00%
% ever used cocaine	8.50%	5.90%	38.88%	8.10%	46.00%

Mean age Milwaukee males and females = 28. National data from 1988 NIDA National Household Survey. In 1988 most Milwaukee gang members were at the end of their teenage years.

long as African-Americans. Duration in our data, however, may be mainly a function of availability. While cocaine use was part of the teen gang party scene for Latinos and Latinas, during the early 1980s cocaine was not widely available to African-American gangbangers. The mean age of onset of cocaine for African-American men was 20, significantly older than for Latinos.

African-American women, without exception, did not use cocaine while in the gang. For the Latinas, cocaine was used socially, and only two women reported they had ever exchanged sex for cocaine, or "dope-dated."³ Unlike the girls in Fishman's (1995) study of pre-cocaine-era 1960s Chicago gangs, Milwaukee gang women looked down on "crack whores," who would grant sexual favors to males in order to be accepted. Almost all of the women who had been teenage gang members reported they were no longer involved in any way with a gang as adults.

Not all male and female gang members used cocaine, and of those who did, there was wide variation in use. Because of the problem of underestimating cocaine use, we developed a category of "serious" cocaine use, which represented all of

those gang members who admitted to having used cocaine three or more times per week for at least a year. Almost two-fifths of the males and a fifth of the females reported they had been serious users. On the other hand, two-fifths of the men and three-fifths of the women reported they had never used cocaine, while a substantial portion used it only once in a while.

TABLE 4 "Serious" cocaine use by gang members

COCAINE USE	MALES	FEMALES
Never Used	37.7% (34)	64.4% (47)
Occasional Use	25.5% (23)	16.4% (12)
Serious Use	36.6% (33)	19.2% (14)
Totals	N= 90	N=73

Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Explaining variation in cocaine use

Do family factors account for the significant differences in cocaine use? In some respects, yes. Male gang members raised in families with a history of gang involvement and drug use were more likely than other gang members to use cocaine and to use it seriously.

These findings may be expected, but they are inconsistent with Moore's (1978) heroin-use finding of few family level differences between those who used heroin and those who did not. In our study, those male gang members who used cocaine with family members were significantly ($p < .05$) more likely to become serious users. Males who used with siblings used cocaine for slightly longer (5.4 years) than those who used with parents or another relative (4.4 years) or those who never used with relatives (4.9 years). So it appears that those gang members who were socialized to the streets by their families were more likely than other gang members to be cocaine users and to use cocaine heavily.

TABLE 5 Cocaine use by family type (males only)

	CONVENTIONAL FAMILY	DECLINING FAMILY	STREET-ORIENTED FAMILY
Ever Used Cocaine	27.8% (5) *	70.5% (31)	68.4% (13)
Average First Use of Cocaine	19.8 yrs	19.1 yrs	21.1 yrs
Duration Use of Cocaine	3.8 yrs	5.3 yrs	4.2 yrs
Ever a Serious User	27.8% (5) **	29.5% (13)	68.4% (13)
N=90	N=18	N=44	N=19

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

On the other hand, the picture was not so clear-cut when we looked at the impact of family processes (Kandel, 1996). We found that both females and males from families with severe levels of distress were only slightly (and non-significantly) more likely to use cocaine than gang members from families with lower levels of stress. Severe family distress was not related to onset, duration, or seriousness of cocaine use.

TABLE 6 Severe family distress by cocaine use

Females N= 73	Severe Distress	Not Severe Distress
	29.3% (22)	70.7% (51)
Ever Used Cocaine	59.1% (13)	38.5% (20)
Average Age First Use of Cocaine	17.9 yrs	17.1 yrs
Duration Use of Cocaine (SD= 3.94 yrs)	4.5 yrs	5.0 yrs.
Ever a Serious User	31.8% (7)	13.2% (7)
Males N= 81	Severe Distress	Not Severe Distress
	30.5% (25)	69.5% (56)
Ever Used Cocaine	72.0% (18)	49.1% (28)
Average Age First Use of Cocaine	19.0 yrs	20.3 yrs
Duration Use of Cocaine SD= (4.15 yrs)	6.0 yrs	4.0 yrs.
Ever a Serious User	28.0% (7)	41.1% (23)

Not many variables aside from family type predicted variation in gang drug use. Education was related only to whether or not males used cocaine; in that case those who did not graduate from high school were twice as likely as those who did graduate to ever use cocaine. Consistent with other literature on the relationship of early sexual activity to drug use (e.g., Brook et al., 1988), girls who reported they were sexually active while in the gang were twice as likely to have ever used cocaine ($p < .05$). However, they were not more likely to become serious users. Gang girls who reported sexual abuse were not more likely to use cocaine or to become serious users. Males, but not females, who reported that they regularly attended church while growing up were significantly less likely to have used cocaine ($p < .01$). There were no significant differences on any of these variables by ethnicity.

Adult use of cocaine

Consistent with Waldorf's and Moore's data, hard-drug use was a more severe problem for both male and female gang members when they became adults than when they were juveniles. Figure 1 shows the increasing frequency of weekly use of cocaine by both males and females from age 19 or 20 on. A third of the males were using at age 24, and nearly a quarter of the females were using at age 19. Those who used cocaine as adults used it regularly, in a generally increasing pattern over time, consistent with Moore's gang heroin findings. As both men and women approach 30, cocaine use appears to decline for some, but those who continue to use do so regularly.

Consistent with Waldorf's San Francisco sample (1993b), Latinos began cocaine use earlier, and they also experienced more family problems due to cocaine and alcohol use (Table 7). Adult Latino gang members reported more of their closest friends were "heavy" users of cocaine, and adult Latinos fought more often with family because of their substance use

(Table 8). One-third of all respondents had been to drug or alcohol treatment programs, although almost all those who quit drug or alcohol use said they quit "by themselves."

FIGURE 1
Gang cocaine use by gender

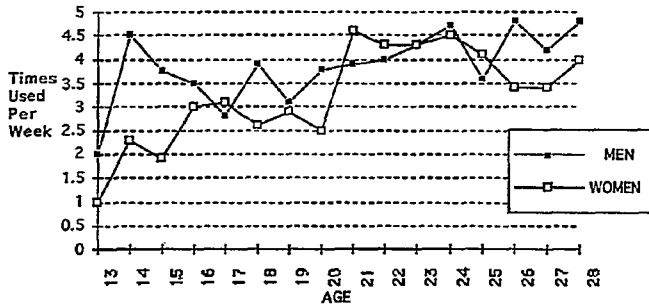


TABLE 7 Cocaine and alcohol use and family violence

How often has the use of drugs or alcohol got you into a physical fight with family or the ones you love?	African American Males	Latino Males
NEVER	64.2% (34)	31.0% (9)
A FEW TIMES PER YEAR	26.3% (15)	27.9% (10)
ONCE A WEEK TO ONCE A MONTH	1.9% (1)	17.2% (5)
MORE THAN ONCE A WEEK	3.8% (2)	17.2% (5)
TOTALS	N= 53	N= 29

n.s. $p < .06$.

Tables 7 and 8 show wide variation in the severity of drug and alcohol use problems for adult gang members. They indicate that perhaps a third of adult gang members experience continuing severe problems with cocaine and alcohol abuse, particularly Latinos. Those who are serious cocaine users,

TABLE 8 Close friends' use of cocaine

Think of your three best friends again. How many would you consider heavy users of cocaine?	African American Males		Latino Males	
NONE	55.6%	(30)	37.9%	(11)
ONE	27.8%	(15)	10.3%	(3)
TWO	5.6%	(3)	24.1%	(7)
THREE	11.1%	(6)	27.6%	(8)
Totals	N=54		N=29	

$p < .05$.

however, do not appear to be more violent than other gang members. Male gang members with a history of violent arrests were no more likely than others to be serious cocaine users, to have begun cocaine use any earlier, or to use it longer. Those gang members who were exposed to high levels of gunfire were also no more or less likely to be cocaine users. Drug-related violence among adult male gang members was likely to be systemic (Goldstein, 1985), with instrumental violence strongly related to "new jack" or amoral attitudes. Cocaine use, age of onset, and duration were unrelated to amoral "new jack" attitudes (Hagedorn, in press).

We know less about adult female alcohol or drug use due to the nature of the interview with female gang members, which focused more on the teenage experience. Figure 1 shows that women particularly experienced a sharp rise in cocaine use in adulthood. Half of the women who had children admitted to some cocaine use as mothers. Women who were more traditional, particularly Puerto Ricans, tended to be users of cocaine as adults (Hagedorn and Devitt, 1996). For both males and females, church attendance as adults was unrelated to cocaine use or duration. Male gang members who attended church regularly were slightly less likely to become serious users as adults ($p < .10$).

One final way to describe adult cocaine use by gang members is to examine the reports of drug use of the 234 males and 176 females listed on our rosters. In this related data set, gang members described drug use, employment, and other characteristics of all the original members of their gangs. Of the women, 39.8% (70) of all the members of eight gangs were confirmed as having used cocaine at some time in their lives, 47.2% (83) never used, and our respondents were unsure about 13.1% (23). There were no significant differences between cocaine users and non-users in whether or not they were working, were mothers, or had been to prison.

For the 234 men in 14 gangs on our rosters, 46.1% (108) were confirmed by our respondents as having used cocaine and 19.7% (46) were reported as never having used; it was unclear whether the remaining 34.1% (80) had ever used cocaine. But for the men, cocaine use appeared to be related to employment status and where they lived. Those who used cocaine were more likely to be unemployed and to be hustling for a living, and they were slightly more likely to have spent some time in jail. Both men and women were significantly more likely to have used cocaine if they still lived in the old neighborhood. Our roster data are limited in that they do not detail length of prison sentence or severity of cocaine use.

Discussion

One stereotype of gangs is conclusively punctured by our data: gangs are not solely made up of kids from dysfunctional families who use drugs to compensate for parental brutality or incompetence. The context of gang membership remains fundamentally ecological: gangs typically form in poor neighborhoods and recruit youths from many different kinds of families. The gang is a sort of coalition of different kinds of troubled kids who are socialized mainly by the streets rather than by conventional institutions (Short, 1997; Moore,

in press). For many gangs a basic component of this street socialization is unsupervised drug and alcohol use. The gang exercises a major influence on all its members despite their family background, consistent with the tenets of differential association theory.

At this preliminary level of analysis, however, we cannot disentangle the selection issue raised by Kandel (1996)—i.e., whether kids with a proclivity to drug use and delinquency choose their friends based on similarly patterned family experiences. It seems to us, though, that the question of whether gangs cause drug use or drug use prompts young people to join gangs is posed improperly. Milwaukee gangs appear to be one form of neighborhood-based drug-using peer group. Both drugs and gangs are coincidental and are aspects of rebellion—neither appears to be causal of the other in a formal sense. Drug-using gangs were the norm in Milwaukee, rather than being a distinct type of gang, or a “retreatist” subculture, as hypothesized by Cloward and Ohlin (1960).

Although our data show that gangs are a risk factor for initiation of substance use, there is much more variation in level of use of serious drugs such as cocaine. A large percentage of Milwaukee gang members never used cocaine at all, and most of those who did used it only occasionally. For kids from conventional and street-oriented families, *everyone* who began cocaine use eventually used it seriously. But our data also show that most gang members do not fall victim to serious drug problems. So the effects of peer drug use on gang members are uneven—not what we would expect from differential association theory.

We can conclude that prevention efforts ought not to consider drugs and gangs to be different facets of the same problem, as social control theory suggests (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1991). Social programs may be able to reduce or prevent drug use for male and female gang members while being ineffective in discouraging gang participation, or vice versa.

Secondly, as social control theory would predict, drug use for gang members does appear to be related to family type. Those kids with a family history of drugs and gangs were more likely to use cocaine and to become serious users. Street socialization, at least in our sample, appears to be strongly related to cocaine use. Considering the growth of an underclass where street socialization may be becoming more common (Wilson, 1987, 1996; Vigil, 1988), this has implications for the future of gangs.

However, social control theory would also predict that harsh family processes would influence drug use, but our data do not support that prediction. Cocaine use by both male and female gang members appears to be more likely in families under severe distress. But family distress is not related to serious cocaine use, duration of use, nor age of onset for males or females. While nearly all kids in gangs come from families with some troubles, variation in level of use is unrelated to variation in level of family distress.

What *does* predict level of use? Other variables such as ethnicity, education, and religiosity fill in a bit more of the picture. As in Waldorf's data, Latinos and Latinas were more likely than African-Americans to use cocaine, and they experienced more family problems due to use. Latinos were also more likely to have friends who were heavy users.⁴ Those gang members who completed high school were less likely to be users, as we would expect. Those male gang members who were religious as kids were significantly less likely to use cocaine seriously. These findings imply that the school or church, or any conventional institution that pulls boys away from the street, is a good bet to reduce the possibility of serious drug use, even if the boys stay involved with the gang.

For girls, surprisingly, sexual abuse was not related to cocaine use nor to severity of use, but early sexual activity was. This is consistent with our picture of teenage gang drug use as "partying." Use of hard drugs like cocaine appears to be

related for girls to early sexual relations with the boys they party with. Girls may get high and then have sex, perhaps not always willingly (Hagedorn and Devitt, 1996). This suggests that health clinics that dispense birth control devices and medical care may be good places for drug counseling and gang prevention services. Placing health clinics in high schools or middle schools with high levels of gang and drug activity might be good public policy.

For men, drug use as adults appears to be more related to employment and neighborhood than to childhood experiences. Those youths socialized to the streets by their families did not all become adult drug addicts. The trajectories of the lives of gang members are altered by turning points and other events that are not explainable by mechanically referring to childhood background (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Our data suggest that adult gang members who stay in their own neighborhood, or who return there after prison, are more likely to both sell and use drugs than those men who are able to move elsewhere looking for a better life.

The “disappearance of work” may have much to do with the despair of adult male gang members and their turning to drug use as a substitute for finding a good job. For men, the words “gangs” and “drugs” may have a close relationship to the words “factory” and “closed.”

Our data suggest that the etiologies of teenage and adult drug use may differ, not only for men but also for women. What factors are responsible for the sharp increase in adult drug use for a third of female ex-gang members? We do not yet have solid answers. We do know that the women in our sample had higher career expectations than the men, but most became teenage mothers and did not come close to meeting their goals.

Although nearly all left the gang, those who stayed living in their old neighborhood were significantly more likely to use

cocaine as adults. Neither social control theory nor differential association theory is well suited to explain these variations in drug use by age or gender.

Research may better follow the course set by Sampson and Laub (1993) in their reanalysis of the Gluecks' data. They found a disturbing impact of incarceration on family ties, employment, and alcohol abuse among men. Particularly in these times, with so many of the minority males locked up (Miller 1996), there is a potential for increased drug abuse by men returning from prisons to no jobs, weakened family ties, and peers in the old "hood" who are using and selling drugs. If welfare reform is unable to move poor women into decent paying jobs, it may have the unintended effect of increasing female drug use as well as prostitution, drug selling, and other illicit income-generating strategies.

In conclusion, by presenting data on variations in gang drug use, we hope to have added a few missing pixels to what is still a cloudy and confused public portrait of the lives of gang members in this post-industrial era.

Notes

1. The reason for this uneven development lies with the nature of the Cuban connection with Italian organized crime and the struggle for control over the African-American drug market. Unfortunately that story must be told at another time. Hamid's (1992) idea of developmental cycles of drug epidemics needs to be more sensitive to inter-city, inter-ethnic, and intra-city variation.
2. Data on home ownership are for males and females. Reports on degree of economic trouble of family are for females only. We have no reason to believe there would be variation in this area by gender.
3. Of the men, most (54.4%) never "dope-dated," but more than a quarter (27.7%) said they had had sex for drugs at least 10 times.
4. In our data this may be an artifact of Latinos' and African-Americans' differential access to cocaine.

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Appendix 1 **Street-oriented and more conventional responses to 13 questions comprising the street-oriented family index**

Question	Street-Oriented Family Response	More Conventional Family Response
D2, D10 What was your father's (mother's) occupation when you were growing up?	Hustler, informal economy	Any other job
D5, D13 Did your father (mother) ever hustle?	Yes	No
D7, D15 Did your family know about it (father or mother's hustling) at the time?	Yes	No or not applicable
D8, D16 Did your family approve of your father's (mother's) hustles?	Yes	No or not applicable
D33 What did they think about it (R's involvement in a gang)?	Approval	Disapproval
D51 When you were growing up, how many relatives did you know who were hustling?	More than three	None, one, or two
D55 Was anyone in your home a heavy drug user when you were growing up?	Yes	No
D56 Who was that? (heavy drug user)	Father or Mother; or more than one relative named	None, or named only one relative and not father or mother
D69 Did you hear about the gang first from friends or from someone in your family?	From family	From friends

Appendix 2 **Severe family distress index**

Question	Range of Responses	Severe Distress
How often did you see your dad hit your mom?	1 to 5. From "never" to "more than once a month"	More than once a month
How often did you see your mom hit your dad?	1 to 5. From "never" to "more than once a month"	More than once a month
How often did your parents beat or "whup" you?	1 to 5. From "never" to "more than once a month"	More than once a month
How often did you physically fight back?	1 to 5. From "never" to "often"	Often
How well did your parents get along?	1 to 5. From "got along fine" to "fought all the time"	Fought all the time
How often did your family have problems with the basics (clothes, food, etc)?	1 to 5. From "never" to "always"	Always or almost always

