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*Adolescents and the Neighborhood Gang Network  
A Sociological Analysis*

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**Abstract:**

Our study aims sociologically to understand the reasons for adolescents' becoming part of the biological gang network and the practices they learn from them, because of the great importance of the subject where young people have become vulnerable to all practices that society rejects, which result from the decline in the role assigned to the family in terms of protection and proper upbringing. Other economic, social and political factors also appear to help in this. And adolescents in our society today are liable to fall into any informal organizations, including the neighborhood gang, in which he finds an alternative to appreciation. The category of adolescents is attracted by the love of exploration, getting to know more about the outside world, and expanding their circle of belonging. Away from the family, especially if they do not find it within it due to family disintegration and the absence of dialogue and family contact.... They also find role models outside the home that some of the neighborhood's children would gather around, where they find a kind of liberation and self-affirmation away from the authority of the parents.

Through this we are trying to find out - How are the adolescents' needs for affiliation that might lead them into the hands of the neighborhood gang and exploit them for drug use?

**Keywords:** affiliation, adolescents, neighborhood gang, promotion, drugs.

**Introduction:**

The phenomenon of neighborhood gangs is a social issue that has been prevalent in most, if not all, countries. These gangs pose a serious threat to both individuals and private and public property. This has made them a subject of psychological and sociological studies, aiming to understand the causes and factors contributing to their emergence and spread. Over time, neighborhood gangs have become a pressing social problem, particularly in Arab societies and Algeria, where criminal activities have significantly increased in urban areas. Crimes such as murder, drug use, and drug trafficking have seen a notable rise, affecting young people and adolescents alike.

The reasons behind the formation of these gangs vary widely. They often emerge in underprivileged neighborhoods, informal settlements, and abandoned buildings. While efforts must be made to combat them, it is also crucial to study the role of adolescents in these gangs. Adolescence is a unique stage in life, marked by curiosity and the desire to explore. Even in families that provide care and proper social upbringing, teenagers naturally seek to expand their sense of belonging. This drive can push them to explore external influences, including peer groups and figures that offer them recognition and status.

Neighborhood gangs often capitalize on this need for belonging, providing a sense of power and control over their surroundings. They impose dominance through repeated acts of violence and disregard for social norms, which in turn earns them fear-based respect within

the community. This, in effect, strengthens the gang and discourages opposition from others. Adolescents who grow up in such environments are often drawn into these groups, where they are gradually exploited for drug use and trafficking. This raises the key question: How does the need for belonging make adolescents vulnerable to neighborhood gangs, leading to their involvement in drug promotion and use?

### **1. The Concept of Drugs:**

#### **Linguistic Definition:**

Drugs are substances, whether plant-based or chemical, that affect both the mind and body. They induce lethargy, weaken physical activity, and impair cognitive functions. Linguistically, the word "drug" originates from the verb khadara (خدر), which conveys meanings of weakness, sluggishness, and numbness (Hilal & Naji, 1999, p. 23).

#### **Medical Definition:**

In medical terms, drugs refer to any natural or synthetic substance containing sedative or stimulant elements. When used outside prescribed medical purposes and without professional guidance, they can lead to dependence and addiction, posing harm to both individuals and society (Ben Ali Al-Hadiya & Ahmed Bin Abdulrahman, 2008, p. 44).

Additionally, the term narcotic originates from the Latin word narkosis, meaning to numb or induce a state of unconsciousness. Medically, drugs are defined as chemical substances that cause drowsiness, induce sleep, or lead to a loss of consciousness while suppressing pain.

#### **Operational Definition of Drug Use:**

Drug use refers to the consumption of substances such as cannabis, heroin injections, or chemical-based pills through various means—whether by ingestion, inhalation, or injection. Repeated use leads to physical and psychological dependence, often with severe health consequences.

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## **2. The Concept of Adolescence:**

Adolescence is a crucial stage in personality development, where biological and acquired traits shape an individual's identity. Dorothy Rogers defines adolescence as "a period of physical growth, as well as a social and psychological phenomenon that individuals experience during a specific life phase" (Amer Musbah, 2010, p. 183).

### **Adolescent Age Range:**

Adolescence is typically considered the transitional period between childhood and adulthood (Abdul Karim Bakkar, 2010, p. 27).

### **Definition of an Adolescent:**

An adolescent is a young person undergoing gradual physical and emotional changes, transitioning from childhood dependence to social independence. This stage is characterized by a desire for self-expression, idealism, and a critical attitude toward societal norms. Adolescents seek autonomy, often distancing themselves from parental authority and traditional structures. Their independence is symbolized by their behavior—spending more time outside the home, challenging family rules, and striving for self-identity.

### **Operational Definition of Adolescence:**

Adolescence is a phase where individuals transition from childhood to early adulthood, experiencing complex physiological and social transformations. This period is often marked by emotional fluctuations, secrecy, and a strong desire for self-affirmation. Due to these changes, adolescents require careful guidance from older figures.

According to psychological studies, individuals are driven by social needs, which in turn shape their behavior. Fagher Aqel (1990) highlights that one of the primary social needs is security (Amer Musbah, 2010, p. 191).

Security is a fundamental necessity for every individual, whether within the family or the broader residential environment. When a person lacks security in their surroundings, they

actively seek it elsewhere. This search often leads adolescents toward neighborhood gangs, where they find protection and a sense of belonging, even if it comes at the cost of engaging in violence and crime. This highlights the urgent need for authorities to address the presence of these gangs and the social dynamics that allow them to thrive.

### **3. The Concept of Neighborhood Gangs:**

The term "neighborhood gang" is a relatively modern expression used to describe groups of criminals who operate informally within residential areas. These gangs organize themselves secretly and engage in various forms of criminal activity, including physical assaults, vandalism, theft, and verbal harassment of local residents.

Gangs are often loosely structured, consisting of small, loosely connected groups involved in varying levels of criminal behavior (Guay & Others, 2015, p. 95).

In Algeria, Law 20-30 legally defines neighborhood gangs as "groups of more than two individuals residing in the same or different neighborhoods who engage in activities that threaten public security, enforce territorial dominance, or violate individual freedoms and safety—whether through verbal harassment, physical assault, or the use of weapons" (Fawzia Hamel, 2022, p. 1115).

### **Operational Definition of Neighborhood Gangs:**

Neighborhood gangs are informal criminal groups, typically composed of local youth from the same or nearby residential areas. They engage in physical and psychological violence, often utilizing weapons such as knives. Their activities include theft, drug distribution, and extortion, which contribute to widespread insecurity within their communities.

### **4. The Concept of Promotion (Drug Trafficking):**

Economic Definition:

From an economic perspective, promotion refers to all activities undertaken by sellers to communicate with potential consumers and persuade them to purchase a product. This includes

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advertising, personal selling, sales incentives, and public relations (Fahd Salim Al-Khatib & Mohammed Suleiman Awad, 2000, p. 6).

### **Operational Definition of Drug Promotion:**

Drug promotion refers to the process of distributing illegal substances through various marketing tactics, often targeting vulnerable individuals such as adolescents. It involves direct and indirect communication methods aimed at encouraging drug consumption, either for financial profit or social influence.

### **Sociological Analysis of the Impact of Neighborhood Gangs on Adolescents in Drug Use and Trafficking**

Modern societies face various forms of violence, which manifest in different settings, including schools, sports fields, and residential neighborhoods. According to Webster's Dictionary (1979), **violence** is defined as "the use of physical force to harm or injure others" (Jaber Awad Al-Sayed & Abu Al-Hassan Abdel-Mawgoud, 2004, p. 239).

Crime has spread in all its forms, and its roots often lie in family-related social issues such as lack of communication, rigid parental authority, and neglect during childhood and adolescence. When parents fail to guide their children or involve them in decision-making, young people often seek validation elsewhere. Beyond basic physiological needs like food and shelter, human beings crave **security**, which includes protection from crime, abuse, and economic instability. If these needs go unmet, individuals—particularly adolescents—seek alternative sources of safety and belonging, sometimes within neighborhood gangs.

The famous **Maslow's hierarchy of needs** suggests that after satisfying physiological needs, individuals are driven to seek safety and social belonging. Adolescents, in particular, are drawn to social groups where they feel recognized, valued, and protected. If they do not find

this within their families—especially in cases of domestic instability, substance-abusing parents, or communication breakdowns—they are likely to turn to external influences, including gangs.

This phenomenon has given rise to neighborhood gangs, a form of informal social grouping that often emerges in lower-income urban areas, abandoned buildings, or informal settlements. These gangs, usually consisting of local youth, impose their dominance through violence and intimidation, creating fear within the community. Over time, they become powerful enough to engage in criminal activities such as drug trafficking and extortion.

### **The Rise of Neighborhood Gangs and Their Impact on Adolescents**

In Algeria, the government has taken legal measures to combat the spread of neighborhood gangs. **Law 30-20, issued on August 30, 2020**, defines neighborhood gangs as "any group of two or more individuals residing in the same or different neighborhoods who engage in acts intended to create insecurity, impose dominance, or violate the freedoms of others through psychological, physical, or material aggression—often involving the use of weapons" (Official Gazette of the Algerian Republic, 2020, p. 5).

However, legal action alone is not enough. Social factors such as **poverty, unemployment, school dropout rates, and family disintegration** significantly contribute to the formation of these gangs. The failure of institutions such as schools, religious centers, and community programs in providing proper social education and instilling values has left many young people vulnerable. Social environment theory suggests that **crime is often a product of one's surroundings**, particularly in overcrowded neighborhoods where economic hardships and community tensions create a breeding ground for delinquent behavior (Mohammed Harshouf, 2008, p. 82).

Adolescents growing up in disadvantaged areas often compare themselves to wealthier individuals, leading to resentment and a desire for quick financial gains. This frustration can either manifest in **peaceful social movements** (as seen in some studies from the United States) or, more commonly, the **formation of violent gangs** that threaten social stability.

### **The Role of Social Belonging in Adolescent Deviance**

According to **Subcultural Theory**, deviant behavior stems from the social and cultural structure of a community. In every society, there exist **two sets of norms and values**:

1. The norms and values upheld by the middle class, which dominate mainstream society.
2. The norms and values of the lower classes, which often conflict with mainstream culture.

Adolescents born into lower-income families experience **frustration and social alienation**, as they struggle to achieve the same success as their middle-class peers. Since they cannot easily integrate into mainstream cultural expectations, they develop **alternative subcultures** that validate their behavior, often leading to delinquency (Mohammed Harshouf, 2008, p. 83).

The **Anomie Theory**, proposed by **Robert Merton**, explains that social deviance arises when individuals are pressured to achieve socially-approved goals (such as wealth and success) but are not provided with legitimate means to do so. Faced with economic barriers, young people may resort to **illicit activities such as drug dealing or gang violence** as an alternative route to financial stability (Adhim Bin Barak, 2010, p. 14).

Neighborhood gangs exploit this frustration by **offering adolescents a structured identity**, a sense of purpose, and financial incentives through criminal activities. Their goal is to **expand**

**their power and control**, often through intimidation, extortion, and illegal trade. Once an adolescent joins a gang, leaving becomes difficult, as they become entangled in the gang's financial and social structure.

### **The Connection Between Neighborhood Gangs and Drug Trafficking**

Gangs rely on **drug distribution** as a primary source of income. Adolescents are an easy target for recruitment into drug trafficking operations, often lured by promises of money, protection, and social status. **Drug use is introduced gradually**, often under peer pressure in informal social gatherings, making withdrawal and escape from the cycle extremely difficult.

The presence of gangs in residential neighborhoods creates an atmosphere of fear, forcing residents to either submit to their rule or avoid confrontation altogether. This further solidifies the gang's control over the area and makes it easier for them to manipulate young recruits.

### **The Psychological and Social Impact on Adolescents**

Gangs do not merely **influence adolescents**—they **reshape their entire worldview**. Young people exposed to gang culture adopt new norms of behavior, language, and even dress. They begin to equate **violence with power** and **drug trafficking with financial success**. Gang members often flaunt their wealth through expensive clothing and accessories, sending the message that illegal activities lead to material prosperity.

Additionally, gangs use **verbal and psychological manipulation** to recruit new members.

Common tactics include:

- ❖ Convincing adolescents that they are now "adults" and must take control of their lives.
- ❖ Encouraging defiance against parental and school authority.
- ❖ Offering a sense of brotherhood and loyalty, making it difficult for members to leave.

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## The Role of Media and Pop Culture

Modern media and entertainment play a significant role in normalizing criminal behavior.

Movies, television series, and music often portray **drug lords as successful and untouchable**, reinforcing the idea that crime leads to power. Adolescents, who are highly impressionable, may begin to romanticize the gangster lifestyle and seek to emulate it.

## Breaking the Cycle: Solutions and Interventions

To **combat the spread of neighborhood gangs and drug abuse**, a **multi-layered approach** is needed. The following strategies should be prioritized:

### ❖ **Community Engagement and Parental Involvement:**

- Strengthening family bonds through **effective communication and parental guidance**.
- Encouraging fathers to take an active role in their children's lives, rather than leaving all responsibilities to mothers.

### ❖ **Educational Programs and Awareness Campaigns:**

- Implementing **school-based prevention programs** that educate adolescents about the dangers of drug use and gang involvement.
- Organizing **youth mentorship programs** that provide positive role models.

### ❖ **Recreational and Social Alternatives:**

- Establishing **sports clubs, community centers, and creative workshops** to give adolescents an alternative to gang activities.
- Encouraging participation in **volunteer work and religious activities**, fostering a sense of responsibility and self-worth.

### ❖ **Strengthening Law Enforcement Measures:**

- Enforcing stricter laws against gang-related crimes while also focusing on **rehabilitation rather than punishment**.
- Providing **specialized training for law enforcement** to address gang-related issues effectively.

Neighborhood gangs represent a significant **threat to social stability**, particularly in underprivileged urban areas. Adolescents are **especially vulnerable**, as they seek belonging and recognition in a world that often neglects them. Without proper guidance, they become easy targets for gangs that exploit their **psychological needs for validation and security**.

Addressing this issue requires a **comprehensive strategy** that includes **family support, community initiatives, and government intervention**. Only through **collective efforts** can we prevent more young people from falling into the cycle of crime, drug abuse, and social exclusion .

## Conclusion

In conclusion, neighborhood gangs have become a growing issue in Arab societies, particularly in Algeria, where their rapid spread has threatened social stability. These gangs have not only endangered public safety but have also contributed to the rise of serious social problems, including drug trafficking and substance abuse—especially among adolescents, who represent the most vulnerable group. The danger lies in the fact that gangs actively recruit young people, drawing them into a criminal network that exploits them for financial gain through drug dealing and other illegal activities.

Recognizing the severity of this issue, the Algerian government has taken significant steps to criminalize and combat gang-related activities. Laws have been enacted to **penalize gang formation and illegal activities**, while educational institutions have been encouraged to

implement awareness programs. These initiatives include **seminars, workshops, and national conferences** aimed at educating both young people and society at large about the dangers of gang involvement.

Adolescents remain the primary target of these gangs, being **lured into a world of crime, drug abuse, theft, and even sexual exploitation**. Therefore, raising awareness among young people is **crucial** to prevent them from falling victim to these criminal organizations. They must be educated about the dangers surrounding them, the negative impact on their futures, and the importance of adhering to moral and social values that promote peace and stability.

Families and social institutions must play an active role in **guiding and supporting adolescents**, particularly those living in high-risk neighborhoods. Parents should **educate their children about the dangers of bad company**, discourage them from associating with unofficial groups whose activities are unknown, and ensure that they **never consume any substance that has not been prescribed by a medical professional**.

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