

# Directing the Eyes Beyond Collaborative Prevention: Voices of Student Victims of Gangsterism

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**Abstract** – Gang violence was a genuine issue in some communities and schools, and it still is. Even while national gang violence has decreased, there is still enough gang activity in some places to make schools dangerous and entire communities unsafe. This paper aims to describe the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of the students who are victims of gangsterism, which answered the three fundamental research questions. The study utilized the phenomenological approach, wherein two (2) data collection techniques, the in-depth interview and focus group discussion, were employed. Fifteen participants from the Montevista district province of Compostela Valley participated in the investigation. Essential themes were generated out from their responses to the research questions.

Moreover, the result of this study was helpful to Compostela Valley Division and nearby cities schools, stakeholder's government agencies concerned, students' welfare advocates, and the law implementers the need to intensify child protection policy and measures that will empower students, their worth as future innovators. Furthermore, outcomes of this endeavor imply that having a concrete system of school practices and a supportive learning environment for students provides an opportunity for students to good quality education. Also, through professing policies and their solid and rigid implementation, agencies concerned, administration, teachers, and subordinates can have the vital force to construct and even build a safe, conducive factory of a competent, inclusive educational institution. Thus, there is a greater need for parents, teachers, and school administrators to collaborate and consult to inject family stability and community resources into the academic environment.

**Keywords** – Collaborative Prevention, Gangsterism, Philippines, Voices of Students

## INTRODUCTION

Gangs have been in existence ever since the rise of humankind. Humans have always banded together for mutual protection and support and to be better dominate others. Gangs have always provided a way for people to get what they want more effectively, especially if it comes to force. Moreover, weaker members of society gravitate toward gangs that they feel can offer a sense of community and protection from others. Even though gang violence is decreasing overall, it remains a problem. In addition, interestingly, it is a growing problem in smaller towns. Gang violence is very real and is a problem in some cities and schools. Even with the overall decrease in national gang violence, there is still enough gang activity to make schools dangerous in some cities and make whole neighborhoods unsafe [1].

According to data, a hand grenade was thrown between La Consolation College and College of the Holy Spirit in Mendiola, injuring 16 individuals; the majority of them were students. The explosion happened just after four o'clock in the afternoon, during rush hour.

According to a PAOCC statement, the national capital region alone has 233 dangerous gangs and fraternities. In the third quarter of 2008, there were also 79 terrible acts committed by various gang members. Other crimes linked to gang members include robbery, kidnapping, assault, auto theft, and payroll holdup. Gang and fraternity membership begins in elementary school, and members are most likely to become involved in criminal activity during their high school years [2].

Physical and sexual violence, gang-related and fraternity violence, drug and alcohol abuse and other acts involving children in the school context have all been reported to the Department of Education (DepEd) in recent years. There is currently no cohesive system in place within the department to address these concerns. As a result, a policy for managing children in conflict with the law (CICL) and children at risk of offending (C.A.R.) is required. According to the present constitution, the state is responsible for protecting and promoting all citizens' right to high-quality education at all levels and taking reasonable actions to ensure that

such education is available to everyone. Anent to this, in support of D.O. No. 40, s. 2012 known as DepEd Child Protection Policy, the Department of Education (DepEd) was mandated through Republic Act 9344, known as the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act, to issue appropriate guidelines and procedures on the management of Children – at – Risk (C.A.R.) and Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) to assist schools and ensure the pupils, students or learners are protected, and their rights are respected.

In secondary schools on the said locality, the following students who participated in the said organization have struggled to educate the following students who experienced the said organization. Numbers of illegally recruited minors, verbal threats, physical abuse, frequent absenteeism, and student's unruly behavior are the most recorded situations from the guidance counselor's office. She often reported at her desk the records of campus riots, students' absenteeism, and student's attitudinal concerns were products of gang violence. Students committed many absences because they were treated by some students whom a member of the said group. Constant unruly behaviors among students were evident because some members of the group protected them. Aside from absenteeism and unruly behavior, teachers take a hard time earning back the interest of the students going back to school because they were afraid of what is within the classroom or even presented to the community.

In our locality, different victims, particularly students, even the teachers, had sought the government for their safety and protection and how to control this ballooning group of a criminal organization. However, how do these victims describe their experiences, coping with the challenges, and their insights having the trauma of violence they experienced from their peers.

The previous endeavor cited mainly the effects of gang violence committed by the out-of-school youth outside the school premises. However, I have yet to come across any research that addresses the issues and obstacles experienced by students who are both members of a gang and victims of gangsterism within the school. Furthermore, this research will present significant concepts that may address challenges faced by school learning receivers (students) at the mentioned institution in the local setting.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This phenomenological study intends to describe the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of the students who are victims of gangsterism in Montevista National High School main and annexes, Montevista, Compostela Valley Province. This attempt to gather

information about the negative experiences of the students due to the presence of gang groups who committed violence. The informants of this study that sought school and municipal protection orders are taken from the guidance counselor records exclusively for gang violence cases under the custody of the school guidance counselor. They will be interviewed about the kind of violence and severity they encountered, how it affected them, and their various ways of overcoming it.

Moreover, the study aimed to provide the school, stakeholders, government agencies concerned, students welfare advocates, and the law implementers with the insight found in this research that suggests the need to intensify child protection laws and measures that will empower students, their worth as future innovators and the best strategies that can be provided to them for their spiritual, moral, emotional and skills recovery supporting them towards viable livelihood opportunities in the future in the future. Generally, this study is conducted to describe, understand, analyze, and document the students' experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights on gang violence.

#### **METHOD**

The study utilized the qualitative phenomenological design. The investigation involves a student who encountered problems from existing school violence. The method of this study was qualitative, and one of the approaches of this qualitative research study is the phenomenological study, an inquiry that describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences with the concept or a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence and develops a composite description of the importance of the experience [3].

It was also a study of phenomena, their natures, meanings, and how things look via experience or awareness to produce a richly detailed explanation of lived experiences. In addition, phenomenology is characterized as a discipline that focuses on individuals' perceptions of the world setting in which they live, what it means to them, and how meaning emerges in experience [4]-[5].

On the other hand, Phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the individual's perspective, "bracketing" taken-for-granted assumptions and common ways of experiencing. Phenomenological approaches are epistemologically grounded on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, emphasizing the importance of unique perspective and interpretation. As a result, they help decipher subjective experience, getting insights into people's intentions, and

cutting through the clutter of assumed assumptions and shared wisdom.

Similarly, the study employed two data collection processes and techniques: in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Information is frequently discovered using strategies such as individual interviewing, interpreting and transcribing written responses, and or making documentation and observations of community targets. As a result, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews are best when you want to learn about individual experiences, perspectives, and feelings about various issues that can only be obtained through informal dialogue with a young informant. As a result, they're particularly well-suited to exploring delicate topics like dangerous situations. On the other hand, focus groups are ideal for examining children's accounts or realities and how they negotiate these stories with others, revealing divergence or convergence in their viewpoints [6].

In addition, another method in conducting qualitative research is the focus group discussion. Focus group discussion (F.G.D.) is used to generate information on collective views and the meaning behind those views. They are also helpful in developing a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs; suggested criteria for using focus groups include a standalone method for research relating to group norms, meaning, and process, in multi methods, and to feedback research participants.

### **Research Participants**

This section will discuss the participants and use criteria to determine the number of participants or informants, recruitment strategies, and sampling methods to achieve data response saturation. This study's informants and participants were the students of Montevista National High school- central and annexes who encounter problems and conflict from gang groups. One of the most significant objectives in this phase is identifying eligible participants and informants who can provide the most valuable information about their own experiences, awareness, knowledge, and expertise about the phenomenon or obstacles they have encountered.

Additionally, my informants were chosen with a purposive sampling technique. Purposeful sampling is a qualitative research technique for identifying and selecting information-rich situations to use limited resources efficiently. This entails locating and selecting people who are particularly informed or experienced about a subject of interest [7].

In selecting the study participant, I strongly followed some criteria in participants' selection of likely type of phenomenon, theoretical perspective, and the

characteristics of the target participants. The informants of this study are students who are victims of gangsterism from Montevista National High School –main and annexes but can successfully cope with the problems. I preferably used gang members and fresh recruits as participants of this study because, in most cases, recruits are the ones who are possible recipients of treats and any forms of violence as they enter and depart from the said organizations.

### **Data Analysis**

After collecting and organizing data, it was then presented to experts or authorities for the data evaluation to have data accuracy and validity, whether it is accurate, coming from the source, or coming from anyone unknown and imagine [8]. The process of using statistical and logical approaches to explain and demonstrate, condense and recap, and assess data is known as data analysis. Also, obtaining raw data and changing it into helpful information will serve as a basis in decision making during the presentation of the data, answering the questions, and accepting and disproving then given and the presented theories. Furthermore, the participant's responses will be examined using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be used to connect seemingly unrelated pieces of information. This method is beneficial since it is a versatile and essential instrument for evaluating data that may likely give a large data group. It can methodically gather knowledge and empathy about a person, an encounter, a group, a scenario, an organization, or a culture by analyzing qualitative data [9].

In the process, thematic analysis involves the data reduction wherein there is a deletion of unnecessary data and improves them into helpful information for the study so that the bundle of information can be quickly craft and understand by the readers. Highlighting the transcribing process of this study includes the following steps.

### **Ethical Consideration**

Ethics looks for reasons to act or refrain from doing, from approving or disapprove of activity, to believe or reject something about good or wicked norms or virtuous or cruel behavior. Individual and social ethical considerations can both be addressed. A research project should be concerned with ensuring that the interests of study participants are not harmed due to the research. In this phase, five (5) key ethical principles are expected to include informed and voluntary consent, the confidentiality of information shared, anonymity of research participants, beneficence or no harm to participants, and Justice.

Before I conduct this research, the researcher is asked to provide some important documents such as informed and voluntary consent to be submitted to the authority to formally request permission to study the problems and challenges encountered by the students who are victims of gang violence in Montevista, National High School-Main Campus, Montevista, Compostela Valley Province. Therefore, I will have to ensure their safety, cover their identity, and provided the full support to render their thorough following ethical standards in the conduct of the study such as confidentiality of information, respect for persons, beneficence, Justice, and consent.

With the anonymity of research participants and confidentiality of information, I will ensure that the information, testimonies, details given from the participants will be held privately. They will provide any documents, which will support any statement of agreement not to upload or download their audio-recorded explanations. They will be asked to offer pseudonyms to hide their true identities, and they will be given assurances that their names will not be used in the study. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality are intended to reassure them that every effort will be taken to ensure that the data they provide will not be traced back to them in reports, presentations, or other forms of dissemination [10].

The beneficence or no harm to the participants is another study standard that qualitative research must meet. In this research, I will prioritize the participant's safety by providing and closely monitoring them from their setting to the venue of the conduct of the interview. Then, participants are not allowed to ride any 2-wheel vehicles such as motorcycles to avoid any accidents. In addition, along with the interview duration, participants will be given or served with meals both In-depth interview and focus group discussion on seeing to it that they will not hungry as the time of insights sharing on about the research problem. Moreover, we cannot deny the fact that an emotional scenario will occur along with the data gathering and as the researcher task it to encourage the participants not to deeply imagine that event s which makes them dynamic instead letting them realized that being emotional is one way of alleviating stress through times. According to the data, beneficence entails a dedication to reducing dangers to research participants while maximizing the profits owed to them. Participants are to be protected at all times, and every documented file will not be left unattended or unprotected.

The last research standard needs to be addressed in this qualitative research is Justice. In this phase, giving due credit on what the participants contribute is expected

in this particular study to correspond to their earnest effort in building and constructing the study towards success. As a sign of acknowledging their contributions, a token and certificate of participation will be given to each participant to fully recognize their total force effort in the conduct of the said study. Participants will be sure that their testimonials will be beneficial as an encouragement to students who have been victims of gang violence, in addition to being recognized for their genuine efforts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The conduct of the study generated a massive percentage of data that are essential to this endeavor. The information was gathered from the two (2) techniques, such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions captured/recorded with tape and cellular phone. The informants' responses are transcribed and carefully analyzed through the categorization of data or emerging themes. The gathered data was used to determine the experiences of students who are victims of gang violence, their coping mechanisms, and their insights.

### Experiences of students who are victims of gangsterism

Three (3) essential themes emerged from the analysis of data for research question number 1. These comprise the following: frequent absences, being bullied and humiliated, and receives low academic grades. The informants expressed their experiences from teaching subjects outside of their field of specialization.

#### Theme 1.1 Frequent Absences

Gang violence is no longer confined to street corners, prisons, or impoverished communities, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, but is openly visible and operating within and harming the community and school system. According to the findings, teens attending schools with gangs and drugs were twelve times more likely to miss at least three days of school per week and three times more likely to have used alcohol than teens attending schools without gangs and drugs. This confirms that parents do not allow their children to attend school if they may be exposed to gang violence.

Consistent responses were confessed from the participants regarding their experiences as victims of gang violence in school and the community. According to them, they usually skip classes to meet up with frat mates and start to drink and smoke cigarettes. Similar experience shared:

*"We've been into meeting up with my frat mates; cutting classes becomes the habit of the group that is why we lost our interest going to school." (ID1004)*

Mark added:

*"Just like we go wherever we want to go. We swim at (Manat) river, drink a lot, smoke cigarettes, then look for trouble." (FGD001)*

### Theme 1.2 Being Bullied and Humiliated

The presence of gangs fosters a culture of violence and bullying. Cases of victimization and bullying of both students and instructors by gang members and non-gang members are expected. It claims that gang presence increases levels of violence linked with bullying, particularly among teenagers, including being compelled to perform things like transport narcotics, make verbal threats, and use insulting phrases. According to the participants, some adolescents will even drop out of school or join gangs to end the bullying process. Learners are given no choice but to join the gangs or face being intimidated by threats and physical assaults if they refuse to do so.

Most responses from the participants revealed that they feel ashamed as to the nasty rumors enunciated from school or even outside the campus. Isolation is very much evident since others stayed away from them, which seems to be a massive problem to whatever activities they tend to join. Whatever information is solicited from them, others consider it as nonsense. Still, some treat these as the most serious ones, affecting their self-determination from going to school, which leads them to lower performance achievements. In addition, most of all, they were considered troublemakers and trouble finders in school and the community.

Informant quoted saying:

*"It hurts me and too embarrassing! I've heard people judging about me, and even my neighbors told their children not to be with me for the reason of bad influence". (FGD004)*

Den2x also shared:

*"I was ashamed of the rumors I've heard in school. My friends would no longer communicate with me because they think I am a bad influence to them". (FGD003)*

### Theme 1.3 Receive Low Academic Grades

In the United States, educational achievements differ substantially amongst schools. Many underperforming

schools, particularly in Chicago, are also plagued by high levels of violent crime on campus. Frequent exposure to this form of violence may play a significant role in altering the educational experiences of already disadvantaged pupils. This research takes advantage of changes in violent crime rates inside schools over time to evaluate their impact on academic attainment. According to fixed-effects models used in schools and neighborhoods, violent crime rates had a detrimental effect on test scores. This effect is more likely linked to direct losses in learning caused by cognitive stress and classroom disruptions than to changes in perceived safety, school atmosphere, or punishment methods [12].

Within a school, school district, and community, gangs are a big concern. Gangs and gang members have an impact not only on the school where they go but also on the individual who is a part of the gang. Many gang members struggle academically because their primary concentration is on their gangs rather than academics, and their group does not see education as a path to instant success [13].

As data presented:

*"Students tend to skip class and leave the school campus just to drink with their peers that results to failing grades." (FGD008)*

### Coping Strategies of students who are a victim of gangsterism

To explore student's coping strategies and responses, participants were asked a series of questions about what they have done in dealing with the challenges encountered as a victim of gang violence, what are your means and ways in coping with those challenges and problems, and how do you deal with unexpected notions with regards to your social affiliation. Participants sincerely answered the questions, and from their responses, two (2) essential themes emerged from the statement of the participants during the interview. These are as follows: Motivation of One's Self and Focus on studies.

#### Theme 2.1 Motivation of One's Self

How to deal with stress and impulse control are two aspects of stress management. The ability to withstand unpleasant events and difficult situations while actively and energetically overcoming the anxiety is known as how to bear stress. The ability to remain calm and patient is related to stress resilience. On the other hand, impulse control is the ability to resist and delay acting on impulses and temptations. Last but not least, mood is an essential aspect of emotional intelligence. The mood

component includes happiness and optimism. Happiness is the sensation of being satisfied with our life while also enjoying them because we share them with others. Optimism is the ability to look on the bright side of life and maintain an optimistic attitude despite adversity. Optimism assumes the existence of hope in the face of adversity [14].

Most of the responses raised by the participants who are victims of gang violence on coping mechanisms stress the importance of being happy and motivated to look forward and live life in a better place. Whatever negative rumors you have heard, just accept them and continue molding yourself to become better. Makes it your basis for improvement. Some statements were heard from the participants about how they reacted to the challenges and problems they experienced and how some incoming instances occur.

Participants mentioned:

*"I'll ignore and resist their meetings. Also, I refuse them to be part of their plans in skipping classes". (IDI002)*

Dave also shared:

*"I always attend my classes and refuse their request to join so that I can finish my studies." (FGD008)*

### Theme 2.2 Focus on Studies

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, returning to school allows you to be a decent and productive citizen in the world. The length of time students spend in the classroom is an essential part of their educational access. When children miss school, arrive late, or skip class, they are limiting their learning chances. Furthermore, when students disrupt courses by arriving late or regularly absent, they jeopardize the learning chances of other students. Perhaps most significantly, consistent and on-time attendance is a habit that will benefit young people in their future careers.

Other words were mainly expressed from the participants during data gathering in-depth and focus group discussions when asked to respond to the same queries. Simply looking at your present situation, you were determined to pursue your wildest dream and help your family. Be yourself! Be guided with your goals! This statement serves as their strength to conquer and defy those bad images and negative rumors spread at school or even in the community in a way that individual may realize that creatures of God like a human, therefore, has the right to live and aim as high as they can, guided with education.

Another data revealed:

*"I want to attend classes and finish my studies to help my parents." (FGD006)*

Luz also added:

*"I realized that I am wasting time for this that I should go to school and focus on studying." (IDI005)*

### Different insights of students who are a victim of gangsterism

Two (2) emerging themes were generated from the responses shared by the participants during the conduct of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions; the following are: imposed protection policy on school violence and promote good relationships among students. This information was being confessed and revealed by the student participants to develop and discover more techniques and strategies on how to resolve the problem and how the concerned agency may help protect and promote the right of every Filipino to good and quality education.

### Theme 3.1 Imposed protection policy on school violence

As a result, school officials must develop a holistic approach to gang involvement reduction and prevention. Administrators should put together a diversified task team that includes administrators, staff, students, law enforcement, and other agencies/businesses. The task force will examine the impact gangs have on the school, identify gangs in the surrounding community, and propose methods to eliminate gang conduct on school grounds. Developing action plans to prevent and intervene in gangs is a part of this systemic strategy [15].

Most of the informants confessed the same responses from the questions asked. As to what participants suffered, encountered, or even experienced, how they were treated by others and the difficulties in explaining how they will and how they can be. They want to feel safe and secure from their peers and realize that they should be included to become a better citizen.

Participants asserted:

*"I want these to end. I am looking for rules and policies to stop gangs in school. (IDI001) Stopping gangsterism here in school is better because if they multiplied here in school, many students' would-be victims, not just students or even teachers. (FGD004)*

### Theme 3.2 Promote good relations among students.

Teachers in the classroom play an important role in gang prevention and intervention. Teachers have the best opportunities to connect with kids and form bonds with them. Students who feel a sense of belonging to the school and its employees are less likely to engage in risky behavior. Teachers should make an effort to build rapport with all pupils, especially those who are gang members. Create a positive classroom climate in which the classroom is a calm and neutral environment. Teachers must be on the lookout for even the tiniest signals of "disrespect," stare-downs, and challenges [16].

The last theme emerged from the insights of students who are victims of gang violence that promote good relationships with students. If you monitor, check and handle your students well, maybe it would motivate and guide them as their basis of school improvement and the community as the most common feeling of the participants shared during the In-depth interview and focus group discussion.

Participants assessed:

*"What I can say is that to the teacher, continue to check and monitor your students and have an eye to significant gangs. (IDI002)*

Ban2x also added:

*"All I could say is that if they should handle their students well, then the students will be freed from joining the said organization. (IDI004)*

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Gang violence is a national concern that has had a severe impact on society, leading to a rapid decline in social values and the disintegration of traditional cultures. Furthermore, gang violence has negative consequences in other areas of life, including school and the neighborhood, which serves as everyone's second home and playground. It affects both students and teachers or even young ones in physical, psychological, emotional, and academic aspects of their lives to create a solid and good relationship in school and the community. Gang violence victims suffered those challenges and once those challenges have ended, begins the struggle of students on how to regain the interest towards changing lives for the better.

As a teacher, it hurts upon hearing and learning the stories of those students who had to happen as one of the victims of gang violence both in school and in the community from victimization, realization, relief, and recovery and knowing their strength in revealing out from the shadow, brave enough to say that gang is never

acceptable, it should be stopped and eliminated in school and the community. Child Protection Policy, Anti – Bullying Act of 2013, and the amended RA 9344 known as Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act are now encompassing schools and society because of the long-time battle and persistence of various concerned students' advocates' law-policy makers.

The result showed that the participants encounter salient problems and challenges that hinder their performance in education. As per data presented based on their social affiliation as they join, they were forced to skip classes, smoke cigarettes, drink alcoholic drinks, and sometimes involve in different troubles, which leads them to depart from school and avoid school activities. When they plan to pass and leave the group, they were being judged, humiliated, criticized by their peers, and were not given a chance to join different activities, leading them to lose interest in attending school.

On the other hand, Outcomes of this endeavor (qualitative study) on the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of students who are victims of gangsterism imply that having a concrete system of school practices and a supportive learning environment for students provides students with good quality education. As what the Department of Education promulgated in its mission to protect and promote the right of every Filipino, best practices should be compiled to give school leaders the knowledge they need to create a climate in which they are most vulnerable not only for students but for teachers as well as to feel safe and valued. Through professing policies and their solid and rigid implementation on it, agencies concerned, administration, teachers, and subordinates have the vital force to construct and build a safe, conducive, and factory of a competent, inclusive educational institution.

Therefore, a solid colliding effort of parents, school disciplinarians, guidance counselors, administration, education program supervisors, and most of all to the Department of Education may intensify various plans and programs to support and further help address the gang crisis violence in the educational system. Anent to that, allotting teachers training and seminars on handling children from abusive homes and integrating into the school curriculum that the students can easily understand. Thus, the agency must strengthen the full implementation of the different programs, policies, measures and develop salient activities towards understanding gang violence victims in their current position.

Moreover, the study focused only on the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of the seven participants of the In-depth interview and seven

participants of the focus group discussion, which could not be generalized to all victims of gang violence in schools of another locale. Thus, further research may be done in other locations or districts with another set of informants to determine if they shared the duplicate accounts of live experiences. In addition, a study on successful students who were once a victim of gang violence may be conducted to inspire other students who consider violence as a no-escape situation. Also, a future research endeavor may be performed on the children of the successful students who were once victims, not only to their children but also to other school-age young ones to hear their experiences, feelings, and commentary as part of the abusive unrecognized social organization.

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