

Neighborhood Gangs in Algerian Cities.

Aldjia Henane¹

¹Lecturer Class A, University of Mouloud Mammeri Tizi-ouzou , Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, Department of Social Sciences Algeria. Email: aldjia.henane@ummtto.dz

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Abstract:

Crime is one of the oldest phenomena known to human societies. It has evolved alongside societal changes, taking different forms and being shaped by cultural conflicts. Furthermore, it has been intensified by the development of modern criminal means. The motives for crime are numerous and varied, differing from one environment to another depending on place and time.

Neighborhood gangs are considered one of the most serious and complex social problems as they undermine the security and stability of societies by generating insecurity within residential neighborhoods. Algeria has recently experienced significant growth in this phenomenon, especially in major urban centers. Incidents and crimes committed by neighborhood gangs are increasingly reported in the daily news, and these gangs have come to pose a genuine threat to citizens' lives. These gangs are often led by young people and adolescents who transform residential areas into arenas for disputes, altercations and clashes, using bladed weapons such as knives and daggers — and, in some cases, modern weapons — against each other. They also extort money from residents of these neighborhoods. This study aims to examine and understand this phenomenon, including its circumstances, underlying causes and mechanisms for combating it or limiting its effects.

Keywords: neighborhood gangs, crime, city, violence, social reproduction.

Introduction

The “city” is recognized as a civilizational system that brings together a large number of inhabitants, which requires the existence of structures within this system to meet residents' educational, health, and security needs. What distinguishes the city is that its population is greater, leading to crowding and the concentration of inhabitants into residential blocks across multiple neighborhoods, often with the goal of benefiting from one another. The city is also characterized by a relatively high standard of living and greater ease of life due to the availability of diverse living and administrative facilities, such as educational institutions, various government administrations, shopping centers, and places of worship. Moreover, the city is characterized by demographic diversity in terms of culture, economy, society, and even politics. This diversity necessitates adherence to social laws established by official authorities to govern and stabilise society.

Consequently, city life is complex: multiple differences intersect and can result in various social phenomena, including ‘neighborhood gangs’. These gangs consist of individuals who unite through deviant behaviour and commit crimes as a reflection of their inability to adapt to urban living conditions. This occurs through the formation of bonds and relationships characterised by extremism and deviation from societal moral standards. These gangs function as a defensive mechanism to make

their members feel secure, protect themselves or their families, and/or create a social position that restores their sense of belonging to society.

As human beings are inherently inclined to belong to a group, this inclination drives these individuals to do whatever is necessary — even if it violates societal ethics and laws — to gain acceptance into these gangs. Such belonging provides individuals with opportunities for self-expression and affirming their identity and personality through affiliation, thereby establishing a place for them within a particular social environment in which they can assert themselves through chains of social interactions. In light of these changes, individuals gain status in society by joining groups with criminally deviant orientations in various fields. Recently, crime has spread significantly in residential neighborhoods, especially as perpetrators have begun to form groups that spread fear among residents, thereby intensifying the danger of crime.

Based on this, neighborhood gangs are considered a complex social phenomenon that poses a significant challenge to societies worldwide. Typically formed by groups of individuals who adopt aggressive or criminal behaviours, these gangs negatively affect security and stability in residential areas. This research project aims to examine the causes of the emergence of these gangs, as well as their impact on individuals and communities, by analysing field data and information. Through this analysis, we hope to gain an understanding of the internal dynamics of these gangs and their impact on residents' lives.

Furthermore, we hope that this study will contribute new insights to help explain this complex phenomenon and support the development of effective strategies to confront it.

Problem Statement

Crime has existed since the existence of human beings on earth

Over time, it has diversified and developed in line with societal changes and the evolution of its inhabitants, as well as through conflicts of interest and culture. Additionally, the modernisation of criminal methods has contributed to the spread of crime, increasing both deviance and its prevalence. These developments are largely the result of disruptions to the functions and foundations of the social institutions responsible for regulating society as a whole. This regulation begins with the family, which is considered the first building block of society, and continues through schools, neighborhoods, and other institutions. Furthermore, technological development and progress have affected all of humanity's activities and areas of life, altering individuals' conditions and circumstances relative to their previous state.

Thus, criminal thinking emerges, often driven by the desire to defend a particular interest or resolve psychological frustrations and conflicts generated within an environment characterised by injustice. Such environments may be characterised by a harsh upbringing that favours violence over dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation — first with oneself, and then with the surrounding community, beginning with family members and extending to society at large. This also relates to communities' capacity (or difficulty) to reconcile with one another.

As the fundamental unit of society, the family is central to achieving balance within the social order, and attention must be paid to its circumstances, as well as to the changes, pressures and challenges that surround it.

Criminal groups, often referred to as ‘gangs’, generally do not possess advanced criminal tools or material capabilities. Instead, they rely on simple, readily available instruments such as bladed weapons, which are used for theft or assault.

This phenomenon of gangs is among the most entrenched social problems in Algeria’s largest cities and surrounding areas. According to statistics released by the General Directorate of National Security, among the cases recorded are 2,300 involving assaults and the carrying of bladed weapons in urban settings, as well as more than 2,414 suspects at the beginning of 2025. This indicates rapid and highly concerning growth for both the state and society alike.

As a result, Algerian families have become fearful of these practices, which spread terror and feelings of insecurity, and negatively affect their daily lives. An examination of housing policy in Algeria reveals a degree of improvisation and a lack of planning, persisting from independence to the present day. This unregulated process has produced cultural and social heterogeneity among residents of these neighborhoods, since many inhabitants came from different regions and brought with them relatively distinct cultures. Such diversity can generate conflicts, including clashes and violence—often beginning with minor skirmishes among neighborhood residents, before escalating into intense and bloody confrontations due to the use of sharp weapons.

In many cases, the main objective behind provoking these fights is to gain control of the neighbourhood — both materially and symbolically — by instilling fear among residents and establishing domination over them. Neighbourhood gangs often create their own ‘community rules’, which they impose on those who resist joining them. This puts pressure on people to obey orders and carry out criminal activities such as drug dealing, pill distribution, theft and other crimes. They use methods that cause children and adolescents to view them as heroes. They are often labelled as ‘neighbourhood leaders’. These gangs then exploit this admiration by recruiting children and adolescents into illegal activities such as promoting and selling drugs or acting as lookouts while carrying out operations in hidden and isolated places.

Gangs have also benefited from technological and technical progress. Whereas forming or joining a gang used to be linked to strict geographical constraints, such constraints have become less rigid thanks to modern means of communication, especially social media. This makes it easier to carry out destructive actions in different locations beyond one’s own neighbourhood. This has contributed to the promotion of gangs on social media, enabling them to gain new support and exchange criminal expertise, which often takes the form of extortion, threats, assault, and property seizure.

Despite considerable attention being given to youth issues, particularly the phenomenon of violence including neighbourhood gangs, these studies rarely address the effects of violence on young people as direct victims. Indeed, in many discourses, there is often a tendency to criminalise these young people without examining the underlying causes of their rebelliousness and their descent into violence (Salim M Zahoud, 2021, p. 11).

Given that Algerian society is largely composed of young people who live in conditions of marginalisation and social instability, the ways in which they suffer can vary. Sometimes it results from educational and professional failure and setbacks, and at other times it stems from unemployment. This situation plunges them into a multifaceted social, cultural and economic crisis, deepening their failure on material and spiritual levels (Boukacemi & Abdellah, 2011, pp. 57–72). Consequently, violence becomes the only means through which they can make their demands heard and assert their existence

in a society that pays them little attention. This neglect leads to deprivation in social, administrative and economic areas, disrupting the idea of equal opportunities and reinforcing the perception of injustice in favour of the wealthy and influential (Boukacemi, Abdellah, pp. 72–73).

Against this backdrop, young people have adopted a language of violence, born out of oppression, marginalisation and social dispossession. They also came to view this language as the fastest way to communicate with the relevant authorities, who they believed had repeatedly refused to listen when they tried to engage in dialogue. Philippe Brand (2004, p. 281) argues that violence is a result of the suffering individuals experience within society.

Young people who join neighbourhood gangs generally share certain social characteristics, particularly marginalisation and social exclusion. This has led them to seek compensation for their failures after social institutions abandon them. Moreover, this situation often intensifies a deep sense of resentment and suffocation within them, which they may direct either towards themselves or towards others.

Having observed the spread of neighbourhood gangs in the Wilaya of Tizi Ouzou, we selected this area for our subsequent study. This city brings together residents from nearly all regions of the country in terms of its demographic composition, and has also witnessed the emergence of the neighbourhood gang phenomenon.

Accordingly, the general research question is as follows: What are the reasons that lead young people to join neighbourhood gangs and spread violence and terror in Algerian cities?

Hypotheses

To answer the research question, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- Social reproduction of violence inflicted upon young people leads to their involvement in neighbourhood gangs.
- The desire to achieve social status within the neighbourhood leads young people to join neighbourhood gangs.

Key concepts of the study

1. Neighbourhood gangs

First, we review the concept of the neighbourhood.

a) Neighbourhood

A neighbourhood can be considered a geographic area where a group of residents live in adjacent streets. It is characterised by alleys and arcades, as well as narrow streets, which connect it to a network of streets that separate it from the rest of the city's neighbourhoods. It constitutes a small unit within a large city.

Umar Muhammad Mukhtar defines it as follows: 'The residential district or housing community in a city, or a commercial and university neighbourhood' (Omar Ahmad Mukhtar, 2008, p. 600). (Omar Ahmad Mukhtar, 2008, p. 600).

b) The street

The street is traditionally the space through which residents move when leaving or returning to their homes. However, in contemporary contexts, its function has expanded to include various social gatherings and interactions. It is a meeting point for conversation, discussion and social interaction, and even a venue for economic activities, as goods and merchandise are displayed there for sale.

c) Gang

The term ‘gang’ refers to a group of individuals who interact with one another and form close ties influenced by personal motivations. They are united by a common goal. Joining this group, especially for adolescents, may lead the individual to become delinquent. Therefore, the gang’s activities are centred on criminality, vandalism and theft/robbery (Stephan Chevalier and Christian Chevalier, 2013, p. 42).

d) Neighborhood Gang

Jean-Pierre Guay defines a neighbourhood gang as follows: ‘a youth group of a continuing nature; its field is the street, and its identity is characterised by involvement in illegal acts and activities’ (Abdelkader Ben Yahya and Ismail Qarira, 2023, p. 285).

2. Legal definition of a gang

The Algerian legislator provided a specific definition in Article 2(½) of Order/Ordinance 20-03, as follows:

‘Any group, under any name, consisting of two or more people from one or more residential neighbourhoods that commits one or more acts to create a climate of insecurity in residential neighbourhoods or any other space, or to impose control over them, through moral or physical assault against others, exposing their lives or security to danger or harming their property, while carrying visible or concealed bladed weapons.’ This includes moral assault: any verbal assault likely to create fear or terror in others, such as threats, insults, slander/defamation, intimidation, or depriving them of a right’ (Order 20-02, issued on 30–31 August 2020, pp. 5–9). (Order 20-02, issued on 30–31 August 2020, pp. 5–9).

Urban setting: The City**1) Linguistic definition**

The city is defined as “large, permanent urban population clusters characterised by a distinctly urban mode of living” (Mislal al-Salih, 1999, p. 88).

2) Conceptual/academic definition

According to John Friedman and Robert Wolff, the city is a ‘micro-society’, a multidimensional phenomenon characterised by spatial, cultural, natural, economic, social and demographic features. This leads us to consider the city as a social system in which its inhabitants interact, creating interdependence between the city’s systems and its residents. Therefore, the city functions as a subordinate social system within society as a whole (Saeed Nassef, 2002, p. 22). (Saeed Nassef, 2002, p. 22).

For this study, the city can be considered a social space with a specific and limited area that brings together clusters of individuals (‘residents’) who share the same way of life.

Violence:**Definition**

Violence is defined as “the use of physical force to intentionally cause harm or damage to persons or property, or to compel a person to perform such acts in response to pain or harm suffered” (Merriam-Webster, 2025).

Additionally, the Encyclopedia of Crime and Justice defines violence as all direct or threatening behaviours that cause harm to property, individuals or society. (Al-Issawi & Abd al-Rahman, 1984, p. 36).

For the purposes of this study, violence refers to acts resulting from physical force that harm an individual, others or the property of others, as well as acts expressed through threats and intimidation, and verbal statements that terrorise the victim, such as verbal bullying and racist remarks in neighbourhoods.

Social Reproduction

Linguistic/conceptual definition

In sociology, the concept of social reproduction was developed through Marx's work, in which he described economic processes as simple acts of repetition that nevertheless involve ongoing production and stable relations of production. People are replaced over time, but the system reproduces the same form again. (Raymond Boudon & François Bourricaud, 1986, p. 39).

Development of the concept

Building on Marx's work, Pierre Bourdieu adopted the concept of social reproduction and used it to explain processes in education. This resulted in the book he co-authored with Jean-Claude Passeron in 1970, *Reproduction*, in which he presented his theory of reproduction within modern educational systems. In this work, Bourdieu rejected the idea of symbolic domination, as well as its rules and foundations. Instead, he developed the notion of 'social reproduction' as a mechanism for managing the symbolic violence inherent in the principles of legitimation, recognition and re-establishing a socially legitimate order.

Accordingly, viewing the theory of social reproduction as a sociological model is necessary, since its value lies in its operational flexibility and the variety of meanings it takes on in different contexts.

In conclusion, social reproduction indicates that society attempts to reproduce itself through the production of social relations that link individuals within it. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 141).

Therefore, operationally, we adopted the concept of social reintegration/re-entry and applied it to the issue of neighbourhood gangs, in order to demonstrate that individuals who join these gangs reproduce the same violent behaviours that society produces and teaches them through social institutions.

Social status:

Linguistic definition

Linguistically, social status can be defined as the position that a person, family or group occupies relative to others within the social system. Social status determines the nature of relationships with individuals who hold different statuses, as well as the rights and duties among them, and therefore the ways in which people behave. Social status is distinguished by level of education, income, property ownership, social rank of employment and other social activities. (Mislal El-Salih, 1999, p. 88).

Social status may also be defined as the rank occupied by an individual's role within a structured group. Achieving a higher status depends on biological and social factors.

Operationally, social status refers to the position held by individuals within neighbourhood gangs in their area — a position they often obtain through aggressive means, such as spreading fear among residents by using violence against them and damaging their property and state property.

Areas of study

The research comprises three main areas, structured as follows:

1. Spatial scope: Tizi Ouzou City.
2. Temporal scope: from September 2025 to January 2026.

3. Phases of the research: This period was divided into two stages. The first stage involved identifying a method to establish contact with the respondents, particularly to gain their trust, because the topic of the study is sensitive. After a period of time, we obtained members of the sample and began conducting interviews.

Research method

We used the quantitative approach, as it enables a clearer and more precise examination of the population. This enables a deeper understanding of the reality experienced by gang members. This is achieved through the analysis and interpretation of the information and observations gathered in the field, as well as the data recorded during interviews.

Sample of the study

In our study, we used a snowball sample because it was suitable for achieving the research objectives. This type of sample resembles a snowball in that it starts small and gradually increases in size as it rolls downhill. Similarly, this sampling method is appropriate for our study subject, since access to our research population is difficult. Consequently, we were unfamiliar with most of the key elements and participants involved.

We also relied on a research informant — a resident of one of the neighbourhoods in Tizi Ouzou — who was familiar with the area. We also benefited from prior knowledge, as his assistance was facilitated by his previous involvement in a family dispute setting (what we refer to as an ‘informant’). He then directed us to individuals who met the main requirements of the study. We subsequently conducted seven semi-structured oral interviews with them.

Data Collection Tools

We relied on observation to collect the necessary information and facts related to the field of study. This tool was used to gather information related to the field dimension of the research and to conduct the exploratory study. This process provided us with a realistic picture of neighbourhood gangs and enabled us to observe certain acts of vandalism, such as the burning of individuals’ properties and graffiti on various buildings and doors. We also examined several locations used for drug and alcohol consumption, which were often dark and isolated places within the area where we observed gang members gathering. Notably, we identified a meeting place on the roof of old shop buildings, which the gang had converted into a headquarters. This is where they typically convene at night and where non-members are prohibited from being present.

We also conducted interviews because they are an effective methodological tool characterised by high scientific value. This is because they directly capture realities that can be difficult to access through observation alone, relying largely on direct social communication with the study sample. The interview guide included questions organised into three axes:

1. Axis one: initial/personal data.
 2. Axis two: social reproduction of violence committed against young people as a reason for becoming involved in neighbourhood gangs.
 3. Axis three: the social status obtained by gang members in the neighbourhood after joining the gang.
- Finally, we conducted a content analysis of the interviews we carried out with gang members.

Analysis of results

After the coding stage, which involved extracting common characteristics from the interviews conducted in the field and consolidating them into meaningful, general categories, we identified units of analysis that were directly related to the research hypotheses in order to test them.

First: Characteristics of the sample

Table 1 presents the distribution of sample members according to age.

Age	Frequency	Percentage
[25–27]	3	42.85%
[28–30]	4	57.14%
Total	7	100%

Based on the previous table, we can see that 57.14% of the sample, whose ages range between 28 and 30 years, represent the most frequently occurring group. This is compared with 42.85% of the sample whose ages fall between 25 and 27 years.

The study generally targeted leaders and heads of these gangs rather than ordinary members. This is why most of the respondents are in the second half of their twenties, i.e. over 25 years of age. This reflects the fact that adolescents and younger individuals are more prevalent at the base of these gangs as active members, whereas at the ‘upper tier’ there are youths who are more experienced and skilled in this field. Such experience qualifies them for leadership positions and enables them to gain the trust of the other members.

Table 2 represents the distribution of sample members according to educational level.

Educational level	Frequency	Percentage
No level	0	0%
Primary	0	0%
Secondary (middle)	6	85.71%
High school	1	14.28%
University	0	0%
Total	7	100%

As can be seen from the figures in the above table, most of the sample members left school at an early age, i.e. they experienced early school dropout. Specifically, 85.71% of the sample had an intermediate level of education, while 14.28% had a high school education.

Table 3 shows the distribution of sample members according to marital/social status.

Marital status:	Frequency	Percentage
Single	7	100%
Engaged/fiancé(e)	0	0%
Married	0	0%
Total	7	100%

From the figures presented in the above table, we can infer that the majority of sample members are single and have never been married. This is due to their precarious social and economic circumstances, as one respondent put it: “We are six brothers. We own an apartment with only two rooms — how

could I think about marriage under these circumstances?” Another respondent stated: ‘Today I’m here, tomorrow I might be in prison.’ This reflects the instability and risks of their environment, where they engage in illegal activities. Consequently, they do not consider marriage or having children, as they could be imprisoned at any time.

They also view themselves as a marginalised group, rejected by society, and most families do not accept marriages within the group.

Table 4 represents the distribution of sample members according to occupation/profession.

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Unemployed	6	85.71%
Employee	0	0%
Self-employed	1	14.28%
Total	7	100%

From the results in the above table, we can infer that most of the sample members are unemployed, meaning they do not have a job or stable position. Based on the interview content, most of them were unable to obtain employment due to their low educational level, and because of widespread unemployment in Algeria, where the job market is almost closed.

Moreover, even when these youths joined gangs as adolescents, the gangs provided them with financial resources that far exceeded what they could have obtained through any regular job.

Table 5 represents the distribution of sample members according to the duration of residence in the neighbourhood.

Length of residence:	Frequency	Percentage
[2–8]	2	28.57%
[9–15]	5	71.42%
Total	7	100%

From the figures in Table 5, we can infer that the majority of the sample (71.42%) reside in the same neighbourhood for a period ranging from nine to 15 years. This suggests that they grew up in these neighbourhoods, interacting with the environment during their adolescence and becoming embedded in their social upbringing.

Second: analysis of units related to hypothesis one.

Table: Shows the total number of units that were grouped and integrated in relation to Hypothesis One, conveying the same meaning across the dismantled interview content.

Subject category:

Social Reproduction of Violence and Neighborhood Gangs.

Unit number	Unit of analysis	Frequency	Percentage
1	family violence	6	30%
2	school violence	7	35%
3	violence in the residential neighbourhood	7	35%
Total		20	100%

A. Analysis of Family Violence

One of the family's most prominent roles in society is to socialise and raise individuals so that they internalise the moral values and social norms that respect the rules of the society in which they live. Although there are many social institutions, the family remains the first and most important, as it determines what individuals receive in material and emotional terms throughout the stages of life.

Family violence refers to behaviours to which a person is subjected within the family by another individual, whether directly or indirectly, with the intention of causing harm, whether verbal, psychological, physical or sexual. (Mouna Younes Bahri & Nazek Abdel-Halim Qutayshat, 2011, p. 38).

We can therefore conclude that family violence is manifested in all forms and patterns of violence practised within the family and directed towards one of its members, resulting in physical and/or psychological harm.

After analysing the interview content, we concluded that most of the sample members come from unstable families characterised by tense internal atmospheres and a lack of stability. Some of them come from families where the father is violent, beating both the children and the mother. As one respondent stated: "Because my father likes to drink alcohol, whenever he gets his salary, he comes home drunk and starts beating whoever is in front of him — my mother, me or my brothers. And sometimes, when he runs out of money, he becomes enraged and mistreats everyone in the family".

Others come from broken families: after their parents divorced, their father abandoned them and they lived with their mother. However, their mother soon remarried and they went to live with her new husband. According to him, he was marginalised and subjected to mockery and bullying by his stepfather and, in particular, his stepbrothers. He also dropped out of school, which led him to leave home and end up living on the streets.

There are multiple types and forms of violence. In this study, however, we focus on the two most prevalent types among the respondents. The first is physical violence, which involves causing bodily harm through assault using one's limbs or other means such as sticks or belts. The second type is psychological violence, which was more widespread among the respondents. It involves causing psychological harm through insults and forms of moral and verbal harassment. This kind of violence leaves victims feeling frustrated and coerced due to what they have been forced to endure.

From the results of the content analysis of the interviews, we concluded that the motives that lead a person to commit domestic violence can be summarised into three factors:

1. Personal motives, which accumulate within the individual as a result of external factors such as poor treatment, neglect and exposure to violence during childhood. As a result of their experiences, the individual tends to reproduce the same behaviour — namely, violence — by directing it towards others or, in some cases, towards themselves.

Severe economic hardship within the family can lead to violence. In a family setting, violence perpetrated by the father against other household members often serves as an outlet for feelings of disappointment and poverty. Due to the intensity of his feelings of powerlessness, poverty and distress, he expresses them through violence towards his family members. This affects the socialisation of the children, who grow up with an unstable personality that may incline them towards violence in adulthood.

Social motives, summarised in the customs and traditions that have become entrenched in our society, also play a role. Under these norms, men are expected to demonstrate their masculinity in a way that is neither easy nor weak. Instead, it is expressed through power and violence because these are viewed as the measure of a man's masculinity. Furthermore, it is certain that parents' use of inappropriate methods when raising their children, characterised by harshness, oppression, cruelty and neglect, can lead to deviance. Harold Burt emphasised the importance of family influences by stating: 'The most common, dangerous and destructive factors affecting an individual's life are the influences and factors revolving around their family life in childhood. These influences are reflected in the child's personality, as well as their social and occupational development. These influences are linked to the child's education, reflecting, determining and shaping their social and occupational future because they are conditioned by and connected to their education' (Radia and Ali, 2015, p. 233). (Radia & Ali, 2015, p. 233).

Therefore, the domestic violence experienced by the respondents, who often reproduce and manifest it elsewhere, most commonly occurs in their neighbourhood. When individuals suffering from the same condition come together, they form strong relationships within neighbourhood gangs that convince them they have finally found their place.

B/ Analysis of school violence

One of the most prominent social institutions established by society, school is designed to organise accumulated and complex knowledge, enabling individuals to grow up in a structured manner. However, the school environment can also become a setting for violence in all its forms. Today, school violence is a widely discussed phenomenon, whether it originates from teachers towards students, or from students towards their peers or teachers.

Through content analysis of the interviews, we found that most of the respondents had dropped out of school and disengaged from their studies without completing their education. The majority of them had experienced violence in the form of bullying, academic failure and exclusion, or had been marginalised by teachers because they were perceived as unsuccessful and unremarkable students. Consequently, they developed repressed aggressive feelings. They found the residential neighbourhoods to be the appropriate space in which to release — or 'vent' — all that had been suppressed, and to take revenge on society and on the school, which they considered to be one of the most significant institutions. From their perspective, the school had excluded them and failed to provide the necessary support.

Consequently, they developed the belief that they had no role or place within either their families or society, since they felt rejected by everyone. According to their view, the most effective way to carry out this revenge is to join groups that share the same mindset and support them — namely neighbourhood gangs.

C/ Analysis of violence in residential neighbourhoods

There are numerous criminal patterns within residential neighbourhoods. In this study, we focus on two of these patterns that emerged repeatedly in the interviews we conducted.

Firstly, crimes relating to the consumption and sale of narcotic substances

These crimes are a serious social problem due to their dangerous nature, and they are becoming increasingly prevalent across different social groups. They are closely associated with residential neighbourhoods, especially urban ones, where neighbourhood gangs have begun to promote them,

particularly among young people experiencing boredom and unemployment. This has made it easier to involve them in this social ill. Based on the interviews, it became clear that most of the sample group use drugs. They often initially obtain them for free from certain young men in the neighbourhood who befriend them. Initially, these youths provide drugs free of charge, but later, once the users are dependent on them, they ask for payment. If the users are unable to pay, the gang members take the opportunity to recruit them and involve them in their activities. Initially, new recruits may only be required to transport goods from one place to another. Gradually, they participate in the sales process, develop regular customers and, through this, are able to recruit new members and expand their illicit operations.

Secondly, there are crimes involving theft and burglary of homes and shops

Neighbourhood gangs sometimes attack commercial premises, even in broad daylight. According to interviews, these activities have recently decreased due to tighter police security measures and merchants' increased awareness, especially among those who have begun equipping their shops with the latest surveillance and protection technologies. However, there is also bullying and extortion by youths from nearby neighbourhoods. To protect themselves, some merchants resort to joining these neighbourhood gangs. Consequently, no one dares to bully or rob them.

In light of the above, we conclude that the respondents live in neighbourhoods where crime and deviance are widespread. In addition to the social, economic and psychological pressures they endure, this pushes them towards violence as a last resort to coexist with others and with society as a whole. Then, violence develops into a more organised and collective form — what is known as gangs — which spread fear throughout residential neighbourhoods and surrounding areas.

Inference/conclusion of the first hypothesis:

Based on our analysis of the units concerning domestic violence, school violence and violence in residential neighbourhoods, we found that violence is present in the social spaces inhabited by the respondents. Due to their experiences and witnessing of domestic violence during childhood and adolescence — and, in some cases, continued exposure to it to this day — some of the respondents have committed acts of violence towards others in their residential neighbourhood and surrounding areas. Furthermore, the bullying and verbal and symbolic violence they experienced at school led them to suppress aggressive feelings, which they later expressed through violence towards residents of their neighbourhoods or neighbouring areas.

In short, the violence prevalent in the respondents' environment — within the family, at school, and in the street — has affected them, awakening a set of responsive reactions reflected in negative behaviours. These manifested as anger, frustration, despair and resentment towards their everyday circumstances. This, in turn, generates a tendency towards deviance and violence on their part. This violence is primarily fuelled by psychological, social and economic factors and influences surrounding them.

Therefore, the hypothesis of the social reproduction of violence was validated: violence imposed on individuals leads them to join neighbourhood gangs.

Third: Analysis of the Units Related to the Second Hypothesis

Table No. 7 shows the total number of units relating to the second hypothesis that were integrated, carrying the same meaning as the disaggregated interview segments.

Theme category: Social status and neighbourhood gangs

Unit number	Unit of analysis	Frequency	Percentage
1	Violence as a Means of Establishing Control within the Neighborhood	7	33.33%
2	The Gang as a Refuge	7	33.33%
3	The Gang as a Means of Regaining Respect and Social Status	7	33.33%
Total		21	100%

A. Unit of Achieving Control within the Neighbourhood

Through analysing the use of violence as a means of achieving control within the neighbourhood, it became clear that most respondents engage in violent behaviour, such as fighting and bullying, as well as acts of vandalism and arson. They believe that this gives them a sense of superiority and prestige, and enables them to exert control over their neighbourhood. It also extends their influence to other neighbourhoods.

According to the interviews, joining these gangs enables them to ‘restore their standing’ by granting them power and authority within their own small community. As one respondent put it, residents of the neighbourhood — and even those in neighbouring neighbourhoods — began to seek their protection. Merchants and property owners, in particular, try to gain their approval to protect their shops and prevent theft. Therefore, respondents participate in fights to demonstrate their ‘strength’ to the inhabitants and force them to submit.

In that sense, as one interviewee stated:

“After being worthless and unconsidered within both my family and the neighbourhood, I have become a person of authority and control. Everyone submits to me, and I must be taken into account.”

B. The gang as a refuge

By ‘the gang as a refuge’, we mean that the respondents rely on it for protection and to meet specific needs, whether material or moral. Our study of the interview content revealed that all respondents turned to gangs to satisfy unmet needs. This was evident in their responses to the question about how and why they joined the gang.

Some joined to meet material needs. In a context of severe unemployment, low levels of education and challenging family circumstances, they turned to gangs to earn money quickly. Consequently, they became involved in drug dealing and assisting in theft, burglary and fighting in exchange for money to support themselves.

However, others found the gang to be like the family they had been deprived of, or had been abandoned by. To them, the gang became a warm ‘embrace’, a second family that sheltered and accepted them. Therefore, joining these gangs is sometimes driven by need, whether moral or material.

By joining these gangs, respondents also learn about crime and deviance. Subcultural theory suggests that individuals enter environments where criminal learning occurs, making them more prepared to

perform deviant and criminal roles. This leads to the formation of an opposing subculture within society. Thus, subcultural theory was developed to explain the high level of deviance and crime among males from lower social classes. It is based primarily on the assumption that individuals' deviance results from their acquisition of the principles of deviance and crime of the groups they join.

In other words, the gang functions as a form of compensation for the respondents: it embraces them, recognises their existence and gives them tasks, while also providing them with a socially unacceptable and illegitimate opportunity to establish themselves in the neighbourhood.

C. The gang as a means of reclaiming status and respect

Through analysing the units related to the first hypothesis, we found that all respondents had withdrawn from school due to the symbolic violence they had experienced, particularly through exclusion and marginalisation. This deprived them of the opportunity to achieve status in society through legitimate and accepted means, such as obtaining a high position through success in education. This occurs in addition to the poor living conditions they experience. The combination of these factors, together with other standards and pressures, intensifies the burden on the individual, leading them to deviate from recognised and accepted social foundations and rules.

In this way, a subculture forms through interaction among groups of people who share the same problems and are unable to resolve them. This subculture is particularly focused on status issues: when individuals lack legitimate opportunities to achieve status, they have no option but to turn to a subculture characterised by opposition and self-expression.

Thus, by joining a gang, respondents acquire a role and function that grants them social status, even if this status is achieved through methods that violate social and legal norms. According to the respondents, joining the gang is like a 'new birth' into a society that accepts them despite their shortcomings, weaknesses and defects because the gang provides them with a function and a role within the group, thereby enabling them to attain social status and respect.

Conclusion of the second hypothesis:

Based on what was presented in the units related to the second hypothesis, the following can be observed:

Given the poor living conditions endured by the respondents and the opportunities they miss out on to attain a status in society through community-approved means, they encounter gangs as a form of compensation for their failure. Gangs offer them an alternative means of restoring their perceived values within the community, albeit through illegitimate channels. Accordingly, the hypothesis that individuals join gangs to achieve status in their neighbourhood has been confirmed.

General conclusion:

After conducting this field study and analysing the information and data gathered from interviews with 22-29 year old respondents living in residential neighbourhoods in the city of Tizi Ouzou, it became evident that the social environment in which the respondents live is corrupt and lacks effective community regulation mechanisms. This has led them to seek social status through violence and involvement in confrontations and conflicts. Based on this, as well as the scientific analysis of the data, we reached the following conclusions:

1. The prevalence of violence in the social environment in which the respondents live has caused them to reproduce it and project it onto their residential neighbourhood and the surrounding areas as a means of taking revenge on society. Therefore, violence emerged as the only available solution.

2. Given the respondents' poor living conditions and their failure to obtain a place in society through socially acceptable means, such as academic success, ethical integrity or respectable employment, neighbourhood gangs appear to offer them roles, functions and tasks within the gang. They obtain these roles through violent methods such as threats, vandalism and intimidation, which provide them with authority and power. In this way, gangs compensate them for their sense of deprivation, which they seek to replace with a distorted conception of masculinity and steadfastness among neighbourhood residents.

As a young social category, they are characterised by vitality and a desire to utilise their abilities to attain a social standing in their neighbourhood. However, they lack the resources and tools to improve their social condition and participate in social activities. This has led them to join neighbourhood gangs, which offer convoluted and illicit ways of achieving their goals and exploit their frustration and anger towards society to recruit them.

The reasons behind young people joining neighbourhood gangs can therefore be summarised as follows:

- To reproduce what has previously been done to them through violence.
- To seek social status within the neighbourhood where they live.
- Because attaining a respectable position within urban society through acceptable means is difficult, leading them to resort to easier, albeit unacceptable, methods.

Moreover, neighbourhood gang members are characterised by a set of sociological traits, most notably:

- They come from families that are unstable and disintegrating, which creates an atmosphere of intense tension.
- They have failed in their educational and academic path.

They are burdened with feelings of frustration and resentment and lack the support mechanisms that would help them to advance socially.

They are aggressive individuals inclined towards violence and engage in conflicts and confrontations with others in their neighbourhood or surrounding areas in order to impose their authority and take sides in disputes related to leadership and control of the neighbourhood.

Within these gangs, young people experience an atmosphere of social, psychological and cultural interaction that generates a strong sense of belonging and brotherhood, as well as inclusion and acceptance by the gang. This is because the gang enables them to express their dissatisfaction with and anger at their social circumstances.

Conclusion:

From the discussion on neighbourhood gangs in Algerian cities, we have sought to clarify the fundamental reasons why our youth join these gangs. The aim is to address these reasons and accelerate consideration of these motives. The intention is to activate mechanisms that reduce these causes and contributing factors, and to emphasise the need to preserve family stability.

Such efforts also require attention to be paid to teaching systems within schools and to the elimination of all forms of school violence or bullying, in order to maintain a sound environment in which to raise our children. Additionally, greater focus must be placed on youth issues, and channels of dialogue must be established — both within families and by the relevant authorities — without marginalising young people. Marginalisation pushes them directly towards embracing these gangs in particular and towards

violence and criminality in general because, according to their beliefs, violence has become the only way they can attract attention and establish their status in society.

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