



Guns and Gangs Awareness Campaign

Summary

Prepared for Public Safety

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For more information on this report, please contact:

ps.communications-communications.sp@canada.ca

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This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey conducted by EKOS Research Associates Inc. on behalf of Public Safety Canada. The research study was conducted with 2,069 Canadians 12 years of age or older between February 28 and March 14, 2024.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Campagne de sensibilisation du public sur les armes à feu et les gangs.

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Communications Branch
Public Services and Procurement Canada
Portage III Tower A
16A1-11 Laurier Street
Gatineau QC K1A 0S5

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SUMMARY

A. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The mandate letters for the Minister of Public Safety, the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General —as well as the 2021 Speech From the Throne and the Budget 2022 Speech—outlined the Government’s commitment to take action to further reduce gun violence in Canada, including by providing gang prevention and intervention funding for provinces, territories, municipalities and Indigenous communities through the *Initiative to Take Action Against Gun and Gang Violence* (ITTAAGGV) and the *Building Safer Communities Fund* (BSCF).

In FY 2021-22, Public Safety Canada launched a firearms awareness campaign, which informed Canadians that the Government of Canada is taking action to prevent gun violence, including by targeting gang violence, among other actions.

This research will help inform future awareness-raising efforts. The focus is on Canadians’ perceptions, awareness, and understanding of gun and gang-related violence in Canada. Specifically, the survey measures:

- Awareness of gang crime and gang-related gun violence, and prevention/intervention initiatives;
- Knowledge and attitudes toward gangs within the Canadian context;
- Media habits and trusted information sources; and
- Behaviours and actions taken by the target audience.

The findings will help to identify current awareness levels, attitudes, and opinions on gangs and gun crime, knowledge gaps, and the types of resources that would best serve individuals, families, and others.

B. METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted between February 28 and March 14, 2024. The survey included 2,069 Canadians aged 12 or older, including the key target groups of youth 12 to 24 years of age (n=385), parents of youth 12 to 24 (n=504), and extended family and/or influencers (e.g., teachers, counsellors and others who provide guidance to those 12 to 24) (n=631). The sample source is an in-house *Probit* panel of randomly recruited Canadians.

Youth were included in the sample through a mixture of sampling panel members under 25 as well as outreach through parents and extended family members, typically by providing an email invitation with survey link that the parent/extended family member could forward to a youth they are in contact with.

The randomly recruited probability sample carries with it a margin of error of +/-2.2% (+/-3.5 to 5.0 for youth, parents and extended family/influencers). The margin of error for other key segments within the sample is between +/-3% and +/-6. The survey instrument was delivered online as well as by telephone and available in both official languages. The average length of the survey was 12 minutes online and 19 minutes by telephone. The overall response rate for the survey was 26%. Appendix A presents further details on the methodology for the survey.

C. KEY FINDINGS

Segments of the Sample

One in five Canadians report that they or someone close them have been affected by gang-related violence. About the same proportion (22%) agree that there are places in their neighbourhood where they can spend time that are free and easy to get to.

Perceived Risk

Canadians are evenly split in terms of their level of concern about the threat of gang-related violence in their local community. Half are not at all or not very concerned, while half are somewhat or very concerned. A much higher proportion (78%), however, are somewhat or very concerned about gang-related violence outside of their local community. Four in ten (40%) say they hear about gangs and gang-related violence in their own community sometimes or frequently. This rises to 80% of Canadians hearing about gangs and gang-related violence outside of their community. In both cases, residents of smaller or rural communities are considerably less likely to be concerned or hear about this frequently in their local community.

Reasons for joining gangs are most often thought to be peer pressure (69%), seeking friends or a social circle (68%), making money (64%), a lack of education (63%) or lack of belonging (63%). About four in ten believe that people who join gangs are doing so to follow family members (45%), for safety or protection (41%) or because of cultural pressure (41%). About three in ten point to intergenerational trauma (34%), and poor mental health (30%) as well as media portrayal (27% as reasons for some people to join gangs. The primary activities most often associated with gangs are drug crimes (76%) and gun crimes (48%), with about one in five linking gangs to organized crime (23%) and violence (20%).

Attitudes Regarding Gangs and Gang-Related Violence

Most Canadians agree that carrying a gun is dangerous (78%) and seven in ten agree that Canada has a gang violence problem, and that all gangs are bad. Just over half (54%) believe that Canada has a gun violence problem. Six in ten believe people join gangs because they have to (59%). Seven in ten agree that the media glamorizes the gang lifestyle, while fewer (55%) agree that social media does the same.

Perception of Measures to Address Gang-Related Violence and Crime

Perceived performance of the Government of Canada when it comes to introducing measures to address gang-related violence is quite low among respondents. Seven in ten feel that the performance has been poor (43%) or fair (27%). Only one in ten believe it to be good (10%) or excellent (1%), although 19% say they “don’t know”. Parents of youth 12 to 24 are the least positive with 50% perceiving performance to be poor.

Perceptions of Youth

Most youth say they always or mostly feel safe in their school (88%) or in their community (86%). Youth say they would primarily talk to a parent or guardian (71%) or friend (60%) if they were feeling unsafe in their community. Over one in three (37%) would talk to another family member, while one in four (26%) would approach a teacher, educator, or coach.

Three in ten youth (30%) have felt pressure from friends or peers to take drugs. Roughly one in five have felt pressure to engage in sexual activity (20%), steal (19%) or to conduct bullying or cyberbullying (18%). Fewer than one in ten youth report pressure from peers to conduct physical violence (8%), sell drugs (6%), distribute intimate images without consent (6%), carry a weapon (5%) or join a gang (2%). Over half of youth say that someone has spoken with them about the risks and harms of gangs; typically, a teacher, educator or coach (73%), or a parent or guardian (53%).

After school, youth are primarily engaged in entertainment such as TV, video games, YouTube and social media (82%). Six in ten do homework (68%) after school or get together with friends (60%). Nearly half (47%) are in sports after school. One-third (33%) of youth work at a part-time job, while two in ten youth are involved in an after-school (21%) or art (18%) program.

Perceptions and Experience of Parents and Influencers

The majority of parents (56%) and one in three influencers of youth (32%) report that they have spoken to a child about the risks and harms of gangs. Half of respondents (52%) say they have not heard about available resources and programs that can help at-risk youth and prevent youth from joining gangs. When searching for information on how to support a child who may be at risk of joining a gang, the majority of youth (58%), parents (55%) or influencers (65%) say they would look to a non-profit for resources. Other primary sources for information include the police or authorities, schools and educators, or friends and family. Government websites are a potential source according to 49% of youth, 33% of parents, and 34% of influencers.

Youth programs are a very or somewhat effective way to help keep kids out of gangs, according to 85% of respondents. Two in three youth (67%), as well as half of influencers (50%) and parents (53%) say they have participated in a youth program as a child. While parents and influencers believe these programs to be effective (83% to 87% respectively, youth are less likely to believe youth programs keep youth out of gangs (75%, with 16% of youth seeing that as not very effective. Top reasons noted by parents who have not participated in or enrolled a child in a youth program are that their child was not interested or it was deemed unnecessary. Over one in three (37%) simply never thought about it.

D. NOTE TO READERS

Detailed findings are presented in the sections that follow. Overall results are presented in the main portion of the narrative and are typically supported by graphic or tabular presentation of results. Results are also described and presented in charts for the main three segments of interest in the study: youth aged 12 to 24, parents of youth and others who influence or support youth (excluding parents) referred to throughout the report as “influencers”. Where results for parents and other influencers are similar they have been combined.

Results for the proportion of respondents in the sample who either said “don’t know” or did not provide a response may not be indicated in the graphic representation of the results in all cases, particularly where they are not sizable (e.g., 10% or less). Results may also not total to 100% due to rounding. Similarly, some totals of percentages added together for two responses may not appear correct due to rounding.

Bulleted text is used to point out any statistically and substantively significant differences between sub-groups of respondents (e.g., based on region, education, household income). Testing for additional key target groups (e.g., those born outside of Canada, those with a physical, mental health or cognitive disability, individuals identifying as members of a racialized or Indigenous population, or as 2SLGBTQI+) compares results against all other respondents in the sample, typically described as “others”. If differences are not noted in the report, it can be assumed that they are either not statistically significant¹ in their variation from the overall result, or that the difference was deemed to be substantively too small to be noteworthy.

The programmed survey instrument can be found in Appendix B.

E. CONTRACT VALUE

The contract value for the POR project is \$96,352.28 (including HST).

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To obtain more information on this study, please e-mail ps.communications-communications.sp@canada.ca

F. POLITICAL NEUTRALITY CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed by:



Susan Galley (Vice President)

¹ Chi-square and standard t-tests were applied as applicable. Differences noted were significant at the 95% level.