

# Troublesome youth groups in Germany - An Interview Study with Seasoned Practitioners and Field Experts

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Troublesome youth groups remain a significant social and public safety challenge. While qualitative studies provide in-depth insights into the dynamics and contextual factors of such violence, standardized data collection allows for comparative analysis across regions. This study bridges these approaches by integrating expert assessments with standardized survey data to explore the structure, risk factors, and preventive measures associated with troublesome youth groups in Germany. **Methods:** The study employed a two-subsample design. Part 1 involved semi-structured expert interviews (n = 6) with professionals from youth centers, street work, and police youth departments in four major German cities. Part 2 utilized the Eurogang Expert Survey [1] to collect standardized data focusing on 13 identified troublesome youth groups. Qualitative data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, while survey data were descriptively evaluated and contextualized. **Results:** The findings indicate that troublesome youth groups in Germany, compared internationally, tend to be a more temporary phenomenon and remain relatively small in number. Nevertheless, these groups are responsible for significant criminal offenses and acts of violence. Key insights reveal that these groups are no longer confined to specific neighborhoods but instead gather at central urban meeting points. Overall, the groups exhibit limited territorial behavior. Furthermore, they are no longer exclusively an urban phenomenon; trends toward group formation are also emerging in rural regions. **Conclusions:** The findings emphasize the importance of combining diverse research approaches to fully grasp the complexity of youth street violence. Future research should prioritize examining the internal dynamics of these groups, as well as the broader social environments in which they operate, to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies.

## Youth Gangs and Troublesome Youth Groups – Definitional Decisions

Our topic is a phenomenon that is frequently referred to in international research literature as youth gangs. The definitions employed are typically quite expansive. For example, Sheldon et al. [2] define a group as a gang “if the group perceives itself as a unified entity, is perceived by external observers as a closed group, and is engaged in illegal activities. These are thus distinguished from loose district cliques who, due to their geographical proximity, spend a considerable amount of time together and may also engage in delinquent activities, but have no binding structure beyond spending time together [2]. Such an expansive definition encompasses groups that transcend generations and city boundaries, exhibit structures and hierarchies akin to those observed in organized crime. These groups often comprise thousands of members and engage in violent initiation and exit rituals, as well as intense conflicts with rival groups. Illustrative examples include the prominent US gangs “Crips” and “Bloods,” which originated in Los Angeles in the 1960s and have a history of violent confrontations with rival gangs [2, 3] as well as smaller groups (“corner crews”; [4]), which are present within a social space for a limited period of time, occupying and defending their territory that sometimes consists of individual apartment blocks.

Fuchs and Luedtke [5] distinguish between the everyday use of the term “gang” in the media and its use in science, which is essential for an academic treatment of the phenomenon. Accordingly, the term phenomenon also results in the glorification of these groups, an

exaggeration of their influence, and a substantial overestimation due to the media’s enthusiastic coverage of sensational headlines, which appears to be well served by youth gangs [6, 7]. From a sociological perspective, however, such a general label is not sufficient to make the phenomenon of youth gangs scientifically researchable. This is why Fuchs and Luedtke [5] set out criteria to define the term “youth gang” more precisely. These include, in particular, the presence of internal hierarchies and a clearly identifiable leader, including the existence of internal differences in power positions within the group, a division of labor in the organization of group activities, awareness and appearance as a group, including demands for loyalty and internal and external identification marks, as well as admission rituals, group names, clothing or symbols, joint criminal acts, reference to a street, district or public place, as well as the violent enforcement of the group’s norms and defense of its territorial space [5]. Using such a narrow definition, modeled after the structure of larger gangs in

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North and Latin America, it becomes evident that very few, if any, existing groups in Germany meet these criteria.

The fact that the application of the term “youth gang” is problematic and that, in many countries, there are no comparable phenomena has led many researchers in Europe to reject the term. Yet group-related street violence undeniably exists. It is also evident that the specialist discourse in Germany must be linked to international discourses. In the wake of a conference held in Belgium in 1997, the working group of the Eurogang Research Program [1] opted for a dual formulation in its definition: The logic of “youth gangs and troublesome youth groups” is adopted here. Weerman et al. [1] initially employed a relatively general definition that was closely aligned with Shelden [2]: “A street gang or troublesome youth group (...) is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity” [1,8]. The aspects of the group’s longevity and the focus on committing crimes as part of the group identity are of particular importance in this context, as they differentiate these groups from other youth groups. Youth gangs and troublesome youth groups are not processes of spontaneous group formation that arise ad hoc and are effective for the moment. These groups should be distinguished, however, from organized crime, which manifests in the form of mafia-like or so-called clan-based structures, as well as from motorcycle clubs. Although young people, too, may be involved in such organizational forms, these structures are clearly controlled by adults and exhibit more of a business structure than group and social space dynamics [9]. In order to differentiate the definition of the Eurogang Research Program, a useful typology is introduced with recourse to older work by Maxson and Klein [10]. The typology delineates five distinct categories of problematic youth groups (Table 1). This typology of youth gangs and troublesome youth groups is a valuable tool for comprehending the phenomenon and contextualizing the search for youth groups.

### Methods – Expert Survey – Qualitative Interviews Experts – Sozialdaten der Kommunen

In the context of empirical research on the involvement of young people in violent peer networks, it has been demonstrated that directly questioning those involved often results in distorted data. Young people tend to overestimate the prevalence of delinquent behavior within their social group or to exaggerate it in order to glorify their own actions [6, 11]. On the other hand, the youth may avoid contact with researcher altogether due to concerns of potential prosecution or other forms of repression [12].

The current study capitalizes on the fact that, in Germany, a multitude of projects and support services is available for young people in trouble with the law, both from the police (youth contact officers, specialized youth police forces, prevention projects) and from the courts (youth welfare services in criminal proceedings) and social work (youth centers, street work, district management, individual case assistance, school social work). These resources are present in problematic neighborhoods and also for delinquent youths, where specialists often develop a very close relationship with individual youths and work together for months or years. This indicates that there are numerous avenues for accessing the activities of problematic youth groups, which can be used for data collection purposes. Although each of the aforementioned systems has its own mandate and its own profession-specific perspectives on young people, a great deal of information can be obtained and verified through a multi-perspective approach and by comparing the individual systems.

The study consisted of two complementary subsamples using different interview methods to investigate group-related street violence among adolescents. The aim was to combine qualitative expert assessments (Part 1) with standardized expert data on troublesome youth groups (Part 2).

For the first part of the study, six experts from various professional backgrounds were recruited in four major German cities: two street workers, one head of a youth police department, and three employees from youth centers in socially disadvantaged neighborhoods. This sample composition was chosen because representatives of these professional groups were expected to provide distinct yet in-depth insights into the phenomenon of violence-prone youth groups from their respective perspectives. All individuals contacted agreed to participate. Four of the six interviews were audio-recorded; two participants requested written documentation without audio recording.

For the second part of the study, participants were sought who had current or recent professional contact with troublesome youth groups. Through a ministerial prevention project, experts from police youth departments and social workers in prevention programs were contacted and asked whether they had recently encountered such groups in their professional work. Of the 42 project sites contacted, nine responded positively; the remaining sites reported no current presence of relevant groups in their areas. Additionally, social workers from prevention projects and school social workers were approached

Types of Troublesome Youth Groups				
Type	Description	Members	Active period	Ties to the territory
Classical Groups	large, enduring, territorial group with wide age range and several subgroups	more than hundred	over 20 years	high level of defending territory
Neo-Classical Groups	newer territorial group with subgroups, smaller age range and fewer members than classical groups	around 50 or more	less than 10 years	high level of defending territory
Compressed Groups	short history, age range 12 to 20, less organized within the group	fewer than 50	several months to a few years	defending territory is not a mandatory criterion
Collective Groups	disorganized group without clear characteristics	up to 100	10 years and more	defending territory is not a mandatory criterion
Specialty Groups	focused in a narrow of crime pattern, exist more for criminal than social reasons	arbitrary	arbitrary	defending territory only with regard to specific offenses

Table 1: Typology of Troublesome Youth Groups ([1], visualization by the authors)

through the study leadership's network in two other federal states, resulting in four additional groups being included. In total, Part 2 comprised 25 participants from 12 neighborhoods, providing information on 13 troublesome youth groups.

For the first part of the study, semi-structured expert interviews were conducted. The interview guide was based on international research on violence-prone youth groups [(see Fuchs, Luedtke, 2008) and covered topics such as group structure, group dynamics, the role of violence, risk factors, and preventive measures (see Table 1). The interviews were subsequently transcribed or, where applicable, protocols were prepared.

For the second part, the Eurogang Expert Survey Interview [1] was administered to the 25 experts. Data collection followed the standardized categories provided by the survey. Responses were recorded in tabular form and documented by group. Additionally, available social reporting data for the respective neighborhoods were integrated and linked with the expert data.

Prior to analysis, all data were fully anonymized. Personal identifiers, as well as references to cities and neighborhoods, were removed or coded. The transcribed interviews and protocols were systematically analyzed and categorized using qualitative content analysis [13]. The process included deductive category formation based on the interview guide and the study's research questions.

The Eurogang data were prepared in tabular form by group and analyzed descriptively to characterize the structural features of the reported groups. The response categories were predefined by the questionnaire [1]. Subsequently, the data were linked with neighborhood-level social reporting data for contextual interpretation.

## Findings

The youth groups examined in the study exhibit a considerable degree of diversity. In nearly all discernible dimensions, there are notable variations within the data set. This reflects the diversity of the dynamics of street crime committed by youth groups, underscoring the importance of differentiation. The material at hand also demonstrates that the diversity of dimensions is not arbitrary; rather, patterns and categories can be identified that can be used to describe the dynamics of troublesome youth groups. The following section will present an overview of the material, after which significant patterns will be identified.

The Eurogang Expert Survey instrument enables the differentiation of material on the basis of transparent, empirically validated criteria. The information about the individual groups is compared with the initial hypotheses of the qualitative interviews as part of an explication [13], thus providing insight into the situation of troublesome youth groups in Germany. Given a sample size of  $N=13$ , it is not possible to assume that the data is entirely representative. Conversely, there is no reason to suggest that the general call for specialists (in one case across the entire federal state, and in all municipalities where special projects for juvenile crime exist) has resulted in a significantly distorted, or even trivialised, response.

### Size of Groups

The size of the groups varies considerably. Two groups have fewer than ten members, while three groups demonstrate an activation potential of over 30 members involved in individual group activities.

However, the groups of over 30 members have a distinct core of up to ten who exhibit a high degree of cohesion and proximity in contrast to the rest of the larger group. The majority of groups comprise between 12 and 18 members. In some cases, a fixed core and a relatively loose periphery can be identified, while other groups consist of several smaller, interconnected subgroups. The qualitative expert interviews corroborate this observation. The experts indicate that the groups may comprise up to 20 or perhaps 30 individuals, but that the criminal acts are always perpetrated by a significantly smaller subgroup. When this result is considered in the context of the broader international research literature, it becomes evident that youth groups in Germany that engage in problematic or criminal activities tend to be relatively small.

It is noteworthy that the sample shows a correlation between group size and age structure. Six of the groups were classified within the "mainly 16–18 years" age range when queried about the age distribution of the group, while seven groups were placed within the "mainly 12–15 years" age range. All of the groups comprising more than twenty members exhibited a younger demographic profile on average and belong to the category "mainly 12–15 years." The two small groups comprising fewer than ten members were, on average, among the older youth "mainly 16–18 years."

### Naming of the Groups

Several of the groups have chosen to designate themselves with names. Seven of the thirteen groups operate under a fixed designation. The naming of these groups follows different patterns, with some groups using several of the codes at the same time or in combination. Two of the groups use this designation exclusively as a hashtag (#) on social media during their acts of violence, while others employ it as a self-designation in day-to-day communication. Two groups use nomenclature that references postcode endings or streets. One group uses a house number (comprising a two-digit number and a letter) of a fast-food restaurant where the core group initially convened regularly and from which they subsequently embarked on criminal activities. Another group uses the term "family" in a foreign language that none of the young members are proficient in. Six groups had not designated a name for themselves.

In the qualitative expert interviews the practice of naming is mentioned on only a few occasions, and emphasis is placed on reference to the local area (district, street name, or postcode). In this respect, the findings regarding naming in the qualitative interviews differ from those observed in the Eurogang Expert Survey study.

### Temporal Dimension

None of the groups in question had been in operation for a period exceeding three years. Only one of the groups, which had existed for approximately three years, was still active. The five groups that had largely disbanded by the time of the study had existed for a period of between one and a half and two years. Two groups had existed for approximately three years, yet had not been involved in criminal activities in recent times. The remaining groups had been in existence for a period of less than two years at the time of data collection, with the majority having been in operation for between six and fourteen months. A review of the period during which criminal and violent acts were most prevalent indicates that this occurred over the course of approximately one year. These observations are entirely consistent with the findings of the qualitative interviews. A comparison with the

international research literature reveals that youth groups in Germany that engage in disruptive or criminal activities tend to be relatively short-lived.

### Typology of the Groups

A review of the groups according to the Eurogang Manual (Table 1) reveals that neither classical nor neo-classical gangs were identified in the context of this study. The size, history, and development of the groups in question do not align with those of the aforementioned two typologies, and the degree of structuring is also significantly lower. With a total of ten groups, the compressed group phenomenon represents the primary focus of troublesome youth groups. The groups are relatively small, have a limited history, and exhibit territorial behavior, albeit to a lesser extent than observed in the gangs described in the international research literature. Furthermore, the role of successive generations, clear recruitment activities, and advancement in the hierarchy is insignificant. It is apparent that two of the groups can be distinguished as specialty groups. These groups exist for the sole purpose of engaging in highly selective criminal activities. In one case, they are involved in the theft and resale of e-bikes and their batteries across the nearby borders with Belgium and the Netherlands. In the other case, they are engaged in the sale of drugs within a specific area. These groups display a clear structure with a distinct use of violence, employed solely in the defense of the “business.” Their territorial behavior with respect to the specialized crime is limited, while the members of the group demonstrate a high degree of indifference toward other aspects. One group can most readily be identified as a collectivist group, although its distinction from the compressed group is not entirely clear. While the group has chosen a fixed name, the lack of clarity regarding its boundaries suggests that it may be more accurately classified as a collective group. This is because the group’s membership is not clearly defined, making it difficult to ascertain who is included and who is excluded. In addition to a fixed core, there are constantly changing group constellations.

Based on the qualitative interviews it was anticipated that there would be a greater prevalence of collectivity groups. These groups, which are particularly noticeable to street workers, appear to be of less concern, however, in terms of criminal activity than the smaller, albeit somewhat more cohesively organized compressed groups. In essence, the data demonstrates a pronounced emphasis on compressed groups, with a lesser prevalence of specialty and compressed groups, and an absence of classical and neo-classical gangs.

### Social Spaces and Territoriality

The social spaces in which the groups emerged also cover a wide range. Two groups are based in rural or small-town areas. Two other groups formed in urban areas (<100,000 inhabitants), while the other groups are based in large city areas (four) or in metropolitan regions (five).

A total of six groups had their primary meeting location within the confines of their respective residential zones. Three of the locations were shopping centers. One group selected a playground as its meeting point, while two groups convened in public squares situated in the neighborhoods where they resided. In contrast, five groups convened at transportation hubs (central station, subway stations, bus station) in the city center and subsequently dispersed into pedestrian zones or shopping malls. Two groups had their central meeting point on

private property, which they typically used as a point of departure for subsequent visits to parks, schoolyards, and playgrounds.

Considering the qualitative interviews, it was surprising that six of the thirteen groups demonstrated no discernible spatial affiliation with a specific neighborhood or district. Instead, members from diverse locations converged within the respective cities and congregated at central inner-city meeting points or transportation hubs.

Only eight of the thirteen groups manifest a pronounced territorial behavior, exhibiting a proclivity to assert dominance through force at the meeting place. Only three groups were engaged in protracted conflicts with other fixed groups. For the remaining groups, instances of conflict with other groups were relatively infrequent.

### Criminal Offenses and Acts of Violence

Five of the troublesome youth groups under examination engaged in a comprehensive range of illicit activities. In seven groups, the range was narrower. One group was primarily engaged in theft. The other six groups, which exhibited a narrower range of criminal activities, were involved in assault, robbery, and extortion. The five groups that exhibited a broader range of criminal activities were engaged in sexual assault, drug dealing, aggravated theft, burglary, and in some cases property damage and vandalism, as well as traffic offenses (driving without a license). For some groups, criminal acts were carried out almost daily at the height of their criminal activity, while for a few groups criminal acts were limited to rare, well-prepared events. There is considerable variation in the propensity for violence both within and between individual members of the groups. Yet it should be noted that all groups posed a significant threat to their victims in their violent behavior.

What these groups have in common was that not all members were directly involved in the criminal activities; rather, the group provided the context and support for smaller subgroups to carry out the crimes. There were even groups in which individual members were never punished, even if they belonged to the inner core of the group. Nevertheless, it is evident that affiliation with the group and acting on behalf of the group constituted the context that rendered many crimes feasible in the first place. The interviewees in the qualitative expert interviews pointed out that robbery victims, for instance, are less likely to defend themselves if other group members are present in the vicinity. Large-scale events, such as brawls involving more than twenty individuals, are exceedingly rare events. They occur primarily when the group is subjected to significant external pressure from rival youth groups or confronted with organized criminal networks. In these instances, the cohesion within the group served as a protective shield.

A salient feature of the violent conduct exhibited by troublesome youth groups is that, with a few exceptions, the violence remained almost exclusively among young people. It is rather rare the threats and intimidation also affected adult residents in the immediate neighborhood. The seasoned Experts interviewed in qualitative interviews generally agreed on this point.

### Ethnic Criteria

The topic of ethnicity is a recurring theme in the international literature on youth gangs. Emphasis is less on nationality and more on the factors of ethnic identity and belonging to marginalized groups.

The Eurogang Expert Survey inquires into these factors [1]. The survey includes a question about the ethnic composition of the group, as well as a question about whether the group members were born in other countries and, consequently, whether they have migrated.

Only in one group did all members identify with a single ethnicity. This is striking insofar as the country they migrated from is home to numerous distinct ethnic populations, and the members themselves have different ethnic backgrounds and different mother tongues. The unambiguous criterion for joining the group and the rationale for violence and crime was affiliation with the country of origin (in its multi-ethnicity), rejection of the situation of their parents as labor migrants living in severe poverty and poor working conditions, and identification with an ethnic minority that faces severe discrimination in the home country. This group is one that has no connection to a particular neighborhood; rather, its members congregate at meeting points in the city center, hailing from a multitude of different neighborhoods.

The remaining twelve groups were characterized by an ethnic mix. Seven groups exhibited an absence of an identifiable ethnic profile. Their composition was evidently shaped by the proximity of their neighborhoods and it reflected the demographic profile of the surrounding residents. This could be verified by comparing the information the interviewees provided with the data from their respective social reports.

The young people in question were of German origin, children of second- or third-generation immigrants born in Germany and holding German citizenship, as well as those with more recent migration histories from parts of Eastern Europe, the Arab and North African regions, Central Africa and the sub-Saharan region. Southeast Asian and Latin American members were an exception in the sample. In conclusion, these seven groups reflected the ethnicity of the youth population in their respective neighborhoods.

Five groups also exhibited ethnic diversity within the group, without reflecting the composition of the neighborhood in a representative way, but instead in line with other criteria. Rather, they are indicative of an emerging phenomenon, namely the lack of prospects for people with difficult family backgrounds and risk factors for exclusion. A common thread runs through all of these cases: a precarious family environment and challenging education.

The findings of the Eurogang Expert Survey lend support to the hypotheses derived from the qualitative interviews regarding the significance of ethnic aspects in the formation of troublesome youth groups. There was consensus that crucial factors in the formation of the groups concerned the neighborhood and the social environment.

Overall, the results underscore the current state of research in Europe: Belonging to a particular ethnic group or identifying with a particular culture or religion is not in itself a risk factor for favoring a criminal peer group or membership in a troublesome youth group [14-16]. In all Western-oriented industrialized countries, young people belonging to the most disadvantaged, poverty-stricken and segregated minorities are disproportionately represented in troublesome youth groups irrespective of their region of origin, ethnicity, culture or religion. The following aspects are essential. Firstly, individuals with a history of migration are on average significantly younger than the average population of the country to which they have migrated. It is

well established that age is a risk factor for crime. The socio-spatially assignable groups in this study also demonstrate that the proportion of individuals with a migration background in the under-21 age group was significantly higher than in other neighborhoods and in other age groups within the same neighborhood. Consequently, a comparison of the average population with a specific ethnic minority without adjusting for the age factor is typically not meaningful. Secondly, a multitude of factors, including insecure escape routes, labor migration with challenging family reunification, and gender discrimination in the country of origin, contribute to a higher prevalence of male migration compared to female migration [17]. Thirdly, there is a strong correlation between educational opportunities and crime [18,19]. In this regard, a multitude of risk factors for delinquent behavior [20]—others could be identified—converge in individuals with a history of migration. By contrast, a migration background itself does not contribute to this accumulation.

### Girls within the Groups

Four of the groups included female participants. But in all four groups, they formed a clear minority. In one group with a neighborhood orientation, girls occasionally participated as “girlfriends of...” However, if the relationship with the boy ended, the girl would promptly leave the group. In contrast to the majority of other groups, female participants were permitted to join the group on the condition that they were in a relationship with a current group member. In one group, a single young woman assumed a pivotal role. At the age of eighteen, she was not only the oldest member, but she also assumed a leadership position. The modest residence that she lived in with her mother constituted an important gathering point for the group.

In two of the groups, the girls formed their own subgroups, engaging in activities on numerous occasions independently of the boys. The female members of these groups were noteworthy for their proclivity to incite and engage in physical altercations with adults, as well as their tendency to resist the authority of the police. These groups of girls in question play an extraordinary role within the subject of the study, particularly in relation to their active involvement in violent activities.

### Discussion

The interview data suggest that the dynamics of problematic youth groups in Germany differ from those in many other countries. These groups tend to be active only within a narrow temporal window, remain small in size, and show few formal organizational structures beyond loose clusters. Participation in commercialized crime, such as drug dealing or gang-related burglary, does not appear to be a central feature. In this respect, the groups observed in Germany are predominantly compressed groups [1].

Comparative research indicates that patterns across Europe contrast with those in North and Latin America and have shifted noticeably over the past two decades [21]. At the same time, public debate about youth violence is increasingly shaped by prejudice, stereotypes, and sensationalist reporting [22], even though there is little evidence of a substantive increase beyond statistical artifacts—particularly when compared with the early 2000s [23,24]. Political populism in Central Europe has in particular foregrounded youth violence and crime by migrants, often without empirical justification. Against this backdrop, our findings offer several points of relevance to current discourse:

1. The situation with problematic youth groups in Germany is not out of control and is not markedly worse than in earlier periods or compared with other industrialized countries. These groups are not confined to neighborhoods with high proportions of migrants, and no clear ethnic profiles emerge.
2. Nonetheless, problematic youth groups do exist and, during active phases, can pose significant risks of violence - especially to other young people in affected areas. Prevention and intervention efforts in Germany remain poorly coordinated and insufficiently harmonized. Additional research on group dynamics is urgently needed to inform effective strategies.
3. The groups in our sample are increasingly active in central urban locations - transportation hubs, public squares, and shopping streets - rather than being strictly neighborhood-bound. This spatial shift has implications for prevention and intervention design. However, it may also intensify public outrage and the political appetite for punitive responses.

There are few recent empirical studies on youth groups in German-speaking countries, and the research field remains limited. This study represents an initial step; further research is required, particularly on processes of group formation and internal dynamics.

### Limitations

A salient question that must be addressed is that of the material's representativeness. It must be acknowledged that the results of the qualitative study, which included six expert interviews and thirteen interviews with twenty-five seasoned practitioners regarding specific problematic youth groups, may not be representative of the broader situation in Germany. Notwithstanding, the methodology employed in data collection ensures that the data set is unlikely to exhibit significant distortions. The number of groups included in the study was not predetermined; rather, the study incorporated all groups reported in the federal states as part of the survey. In a federal state comprising numerous metropolitan centers and large cities, a coordinator from the Ministry of the Interior aided in disseminating a request to all youth contact officers. Subsequently, the individuals who provided feedback were contacted, and their data was duly recorded. The likelihood of intentional withholding of data, resulting in data set distortion, is low.

It is notable to consider the potential for bias due to the principal investigator's dual role as a researcher and an expert working with adolescents who have committed serious crimes. It was revealed that the principal investigator had previously met in person with individual adolescents from three different groups. While the results of the expert opinion work were not included in the study, transparency requires that this factor be considered.

### Conclusion

The changing dynamics of street crime and troublesome youth groups show that current developments should be closely monitored, especially in the context of qualitative research. Crime statistics alone cannot reflect the current changes. In the future, preventive approaches to combating youth violence should focus more on understanding group dynamics. In order to develop evidence-based intervention strategies, we must better understand both how troublesome youth groups function as complex social networks and the dynamics over time — from the formation of the group, to the peak of deviant behavior, to its dissolution or calming down.

### Ethics Statement

No personal data was collected. As the study consisted exclusively of expert interviews, an ethics vote is not required. The authors declare that they have complied with the ethical standards of the German Association for Social Work (DGSA).

### Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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