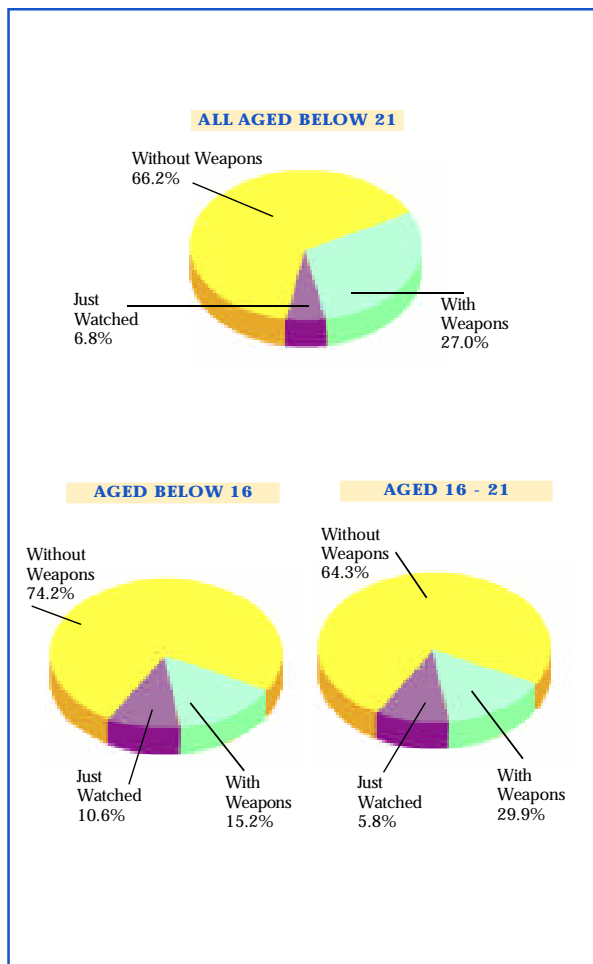
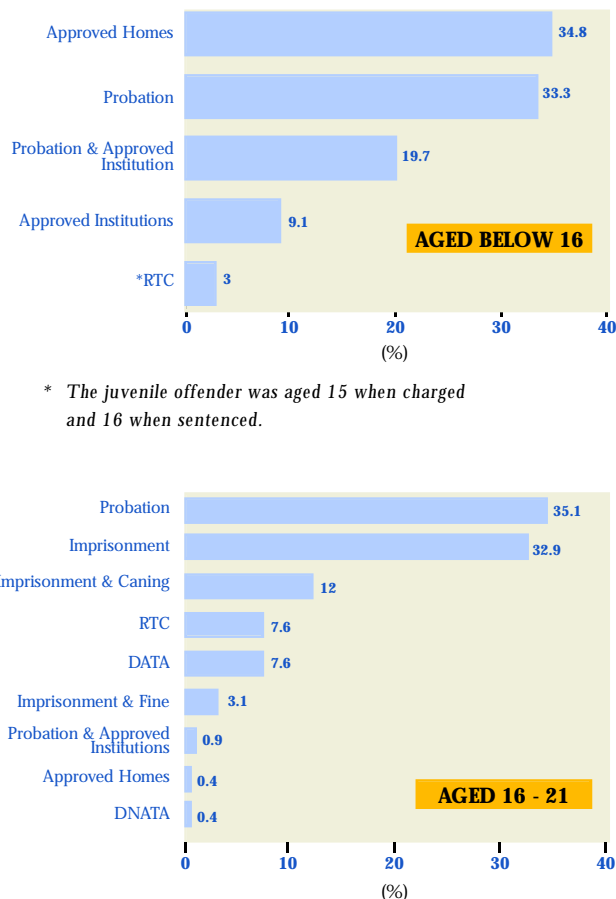


**FIGURE 14**  
**Usage of Weapons in Youth Riots**



**FIGURE 15**  
**Sentencing Patterns for Youth Rioters**



\* The juvenile offender was aged 15 when charged and 16 when sentenced.

**SENTENCING PATTERNS**

One third of the juvenile rioters below 16 years of age were placed on probation. 35% were sent to approved homes and 20% to approved institutions and at the same time placed under probation [Figure 15].

In the case of rioters aged 16-21, 35% were placed on probation. 33% were sentenced to imprisonment, 12% were sentenced to imprisonment and caning, 7.6% were sent to RTC and 3% were sentenced to fine and imprisonment. Overall, 48% of the older rioters were sent to prison.

**Probation Period**

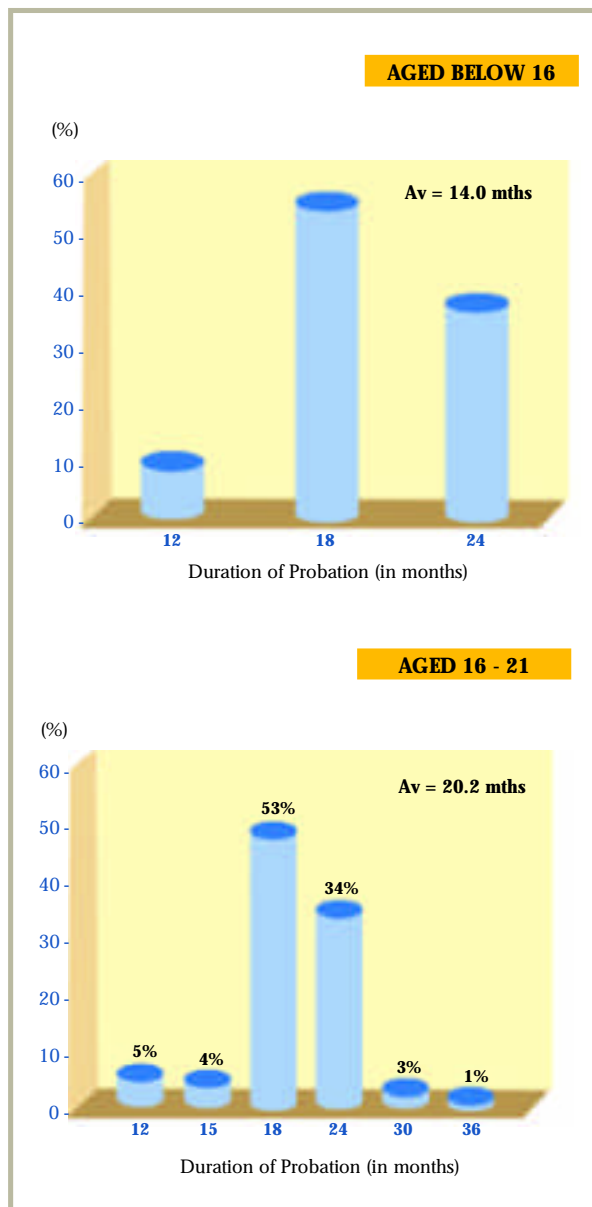
Slightly more than half (55%) of the juvenile rioters who were given a probation sentence were placed on probation for 18 months. This is followed by 36% who were placed on probation for 24 months.

As for rioters aged 16-21, 53% were placed on 18 months probation and 34% on 24 months. The maximum period of probation imposed on these rioters was 36 months and the minimum 12 months.

The average period of probation for juvenile rioters was 14 months, lower than the corresponding average for rioters aged 16-21, which recorded at 20.2 months [Figure 16].



**FIGURE 16**  
**Duration of Probation for Youth Rioters**



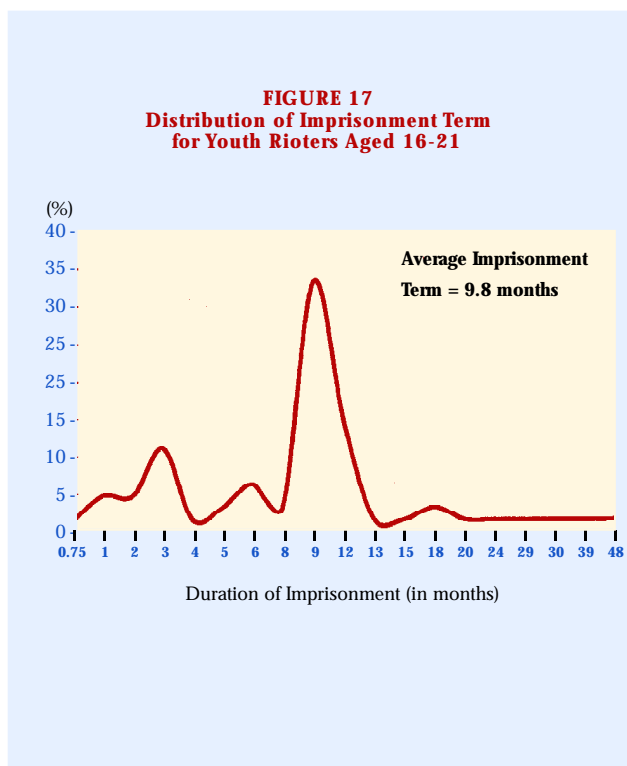
### Approved Homes

Majority (73%) of the juvenile rioters sentenced to the approved homes were placed there for a period of 24 months. This is followed by 18% for 30 months and 9% for 36 months. The average period of detention at the approved homes for juvenile rioters was 26.2 months.

### Imprisonment Term

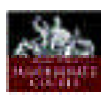
Among the rioters aged 16-21 who were sentenced to imprisonment only, one third received an imprisonment term of 9 months, followed by 14% of 12 months imprisonment term and 11% of 3 months. The minimum imprisonment term was 3 weeks and maximum 48 months. The average imprisonment term for rioters aged 16-21 was 9.8 months [Figure 17].

**FIGURE 17**  
**Distribution of Imprisonment Term for Youth Rioters Aged 16-21**

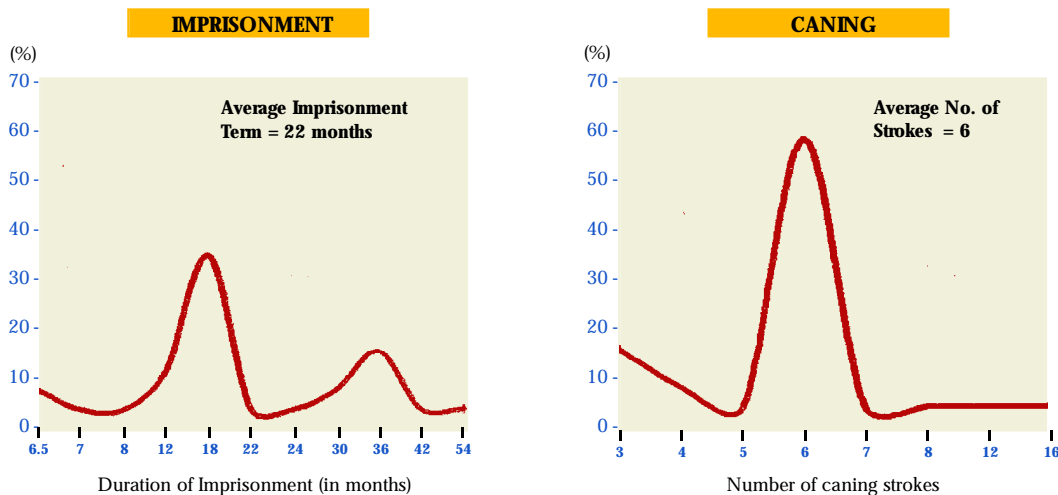


### Imprisonment & Caning

Out of the 26 rioters aged 16-21 who were sentenced to imprisonment with caning, 58% or 15 youths received 6 strokes of caning each, followed by 15% with 3 strokes. The average imprisonment term for this group of youth rioters sentenced to imprisonment and caning was 22 months, longer than those who were sentenced to an imprisonment term only [Figure 18].



**FIGURE 18**  
**Youth Rioters Aged 16-21 Sentenced to Imprisonment & Caning**



**PROGRAMMES TO ATTEND**

In some of the cases, youth rioters had been ordered by the court or recommended by the probation officers to attend one or more programmes. Some 55% or 35 juvenile rioters and 28% or 67 rioters aged 16-21 were required to attend some form of rehabilitation programmes.

Almost two thirds of the 35 juvenile rioters were ordered to attend talks on secret society. Prison visit ranked second with 46% and 34% to the Smoking Cessation Clinic. 11% were also ordered to do community service.

As for the older cohort of rioters, 4 in 10 were ordered to attend Secret Society talks, one third to do community service and about a quarter to visit the prison. Among programmes recommended by the probation officers, parent sessions and counselling programmes were common [Figure 19].

**FIGURE 19**  
**Types of Programmes to Attend**

PROGRAMMES TO ATTEND	AGED (%)	
	BELOW 16	16-21
Secret Society Talk	62.9	40.3
Prison Visit	45.7	23.9
Community Service	11.4	32.8
Smoking Cessation Clinic Programmes	34.3	14.9
Streetwise Programme	5.7	1.5
Parent Session	28.6	35.8
Counselling	25.7	14.9
Counselling at Family Service Centre	0	3
Group Work Sessions for Working Adults	0	6
BEST Class	2.9	4.5
Activities by Probation Department/ Probation Aftercare Service	5.7	34.3
Other Support Group programmes	0	1.5

Note : Each offender could be recommended to attend more than one programme.



## BREACH CASES

Out of the 300 youth rioters studied, only 8 breached as at end Jan 1998, among whom only 1 reoffended. This gives a breach rate of 3% and reoffending rate of 0.3%. As these youths were convicted only in 1997, their breach rate and reoffending rate is expected to be low in the first year.

All 8 youth rioters who breached were Singaporean males - 4 were juveniles and 4 aged 16-21. 3 out of 8 of those who breached were 17 years old. The average age of a youth rioter who had breached was 15.4 years. 63% of these youths were studying and the remaining 37% were neither working, studying nor serving national service. Compared to all youth rioters, those who breached recorded a higher proportion who came from broken families - 38% of their parents were divorced. Those whose parents were widowed accounted for 25% and married 38%.

Among the 8 youth rioters who breached, 7 breached the home conditions and 1 reoffended (for assault). Half of the youth rioters who breached had previous criminal records, higher than the 30% recorded for all youth rioters. Harsher sentences were meted out to those who breached (Figure 20).

## FEMALE RIOTERS

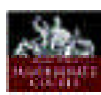
This section aims to analyse the profile of the 46 female youth rioters and to examine any trend or phenomenon that is peculiar to them. Female youth rioters were mainly Chinese - 8 in 10 were Chinese. A higher proportion of Malays was recorded for the juvenile female rioters (26%) compared to those aged 16-21 (11%). Slightly more than half (54%) were in the age group of 15-16. The youngest was 12 years old and the oldest 19 years old. All except one were Singaporeans. 55% were still schooling when they were charged and 21% were working. The remaining 24% were neither working nor studying.

In contrast to the overall group of youth rioters, a smaller proportion of the female youth rioters came from broken families - 18% compared to 22% for all youth rioters. Female rioters who came from the lower income families (<\$2,000 per month) accounted for 37% and 29% for those with a family income of between \$2,000 to \$3,000. About one third of the female youth rioters came from families with a household income of more than the national average<sup>2</sup>. This is higher than 23% recorded for the overall group of youth rioters.

**FIGURE 20**  
**Sentences Meted Out for Youth Rioters who Breach**

OFFENDER S/NO.	SENTENCE FOR RIOTING	SENTENCE AFTER BREACH
1 (juvenile)	SBH (2 yrs)	RTC
2 (juvenile)	SBH (2 yrs)	YOS (33 mths) [Reoffended]
3 & 4 (juveniles)	Probation	SBH (2 yrs)
5 (Aged 16-21)	Probation (18 mths)	Imprisonment (3 mths)
6 (Aged 16-21)	Probation (15 mths)	Imprisonment (12 mths) & Caning (4 stokes)
7 (Aged 16-21)	Probation (24 mths)	Imprisonment (3 mths)
8 (Aged 16-21)	Probation (24 mths)	More Stringent Time Restriction for the same probation sentence

<sup>2</sup> According to the 1995 general household survey, the median monthly income from work of a resident private household in 1995 was \$3,135.



Visiting entertainment outlets formed the most popular leisure activities of the female youth rioters. A third of them usually galavanted or loitered around shopping complexes or void decks. Most of them usually mixed with their schoolmates or ex-schoolmates. Only 14% constantly hanged around with their gang friends.

A large proportion (74%) of the female youth rioters did not have any previous criminal records. This proportion was even higher for juvenile female rioters (94%). In most of the cases, the rioting occurred in the open streets, carparks or HDB common indoor areas. Places of entertainment ranked third with 26%. In 94% of the cases, no weapons were used during the riot and 2% just watched. The most prominent proximate cause that triggered the riot in their case was mainly trivial

matters like "an uncalled for remark, a rumour or a staring incident". Most of these female youth rioters faced only a single charge of rioting, unlike their male counterparts who were also charged and convicted at the same time for other serious offences such as theft, causing serious hurt and robbery.

As for signs of delinquent traits, female youth rioters tended to show a higher proportion of substance abuse. More female youth rioters aged 16-21 smoked and consumed alcohol compared to all youth rioters.

Most of the female rioters (63%) were placed on probation. Only 6 or 13% were imprisoned. The female youth rioters were generally more remorseful compared to the males. The study showed that parental negligence, poor parenting and also negative peer influence were the major implicit causes for their delinquent behaviour.

**FIGURE 21**  
**Summary Characteristics of Female Rioters**

**TOTAL NUMBER OF FEMALE YOUTH RIOTERS STUDIED = 46**

- Proportionately more Chinese (83%).
- 54% of ages 15-16.
- All except one were Singaporean.
- 55% still studying.
- Proportionately less (18%) from broken families.
- Higher proportion (34%) from well-to-do families (household income of >\$3,000).
- Major leisure activities were entertainment and galavanting.
- Constant companions - schoolmates.
- 74% with no previous criminal records.
- Riot occurred mainly in open streets, carparks and HDB common indoor areas.
- Proximate Cause of Riot – trivial matters such as "uncalled for remarks, rumour or staring incident".
- Mostly faced single charge of rioting.
- 63% placed on probation., 13% were imprisoned.



## CONCLUSION

The ethnic distribution of youth rioters were 67% Chinese, 24% Malays and 5.7% Indians. The findings showed that proportionately more juvenile rioters were Malays. The mean age of a youth rioter was 16.9 years. Half of them were still schooling when they were caught rioting. 22% came from broken homes. 80% recorded a below average household income. 7 in 10 of the youth rioters had previous antecedents. 8 in 10 were involved in secret society activities. The use of weapons in rioting remained low - only 30% of youth rioters used weapons.

A trivial matter such as an uncalled for remark, a rumour or the use of vulgar languages tended to be the main proximate cause that triggered a riot among juveniles for a non-SS related case. As for the older cohort, they tended to resort to violence to settle personal disputes. This reflects a lack of tolerance among these youths. Although the reasons for such violence are not examined in this project, studies in the United States have shown that higher levels of viewing violence on television are correlated with increased acceptance of aggressive attitudes and increased aggressive behaviour<sup>3</sup>. Certain primary prevention programmes, such as social perspective taking, alternative solution generation, and peer negotiating skills could perhaps be implemented. These programmes have proven to exert the greatest impact on violent behaviour among youth<sup>3</sup>.

This study has also shown that most rioting cases involved the secret society. The primary attraction of these gangs is their ability to respond to the needs of the youths that are not otherwise being met. Youths

who joined gangs usually experienced a sense of alienation, powerlessness and low self-esteem because of a lack of traditional support structures such as the family and school. This can lead to feelings of frustration and anger and a desire to obtain support outside the traditional institutions. Youths turned to gang membership as it provides them with a sense of family, belonging and acceptance otherwise lacking in their own lives or which are not met in the traditional family.

The proximate causes that triggered off riots in the SS related cases were usually associated with the gang culture. The control of turf is essential to the well-being of the gang. Force is often used to control territory and members. Recruitment of new members and expansion of territory are essential if the gang is to remain strong and powerful. Hence both "willing" and "unwilling" members are drawn into gangs to feed the need for more resources and gang members. By engaging in violence in the company of one another, the gang causes its members to feel that their violence is normal, creating a subcultural dynamic that takes on a momentum of its own. It is in a gang's culture to amplify violence as a way to solve problems and as a display of machoism, courage, heroism, personal power and vengeance. Youth rioters with a secret society background tend to have a higher incidence of antecedents. The influence of the gang could have a longlasting effect on the youth.

The profile of female youth rioters showed that proportionately more female Chinese were involved in rioting. Many came from well-to-do families and only 18% came from broken homes. 74% do not have any antecedents and almost all faced only single

<sup>3</sup> American Psychological Association Commission on Youth and Violence, 1993.



charges of rioting. Their delinquent behaviour was mainly attributed to parental negligence, poor parenting and negative peer pressure.

In the United States, poverty, discrimination and lack of opportunities or education and employment are important risk factors for violence among youth. These risk factors, however, are not evident in the case of the Singapore youth. In Singapore's case, the lack of positive parental guidance, lack of common grounds between the offenders and their parents and negative peer influence seems to be the risk factors for the youths' violent delinquent behaviour. While spending time with negative peers, the youth had also picked up bad habits like smoking, alcohol consumption and drugs.

These case studies show that the family structure and socio-economic status of the family have little impact on the youth's moral values and delinquent behaviour. The emphasis is really on the importance of the family unit and in the parental practices. Only positive parenting can lead to a stronger attachment of youth to their family. This will also lower the likelihood of the offender associating with negative peers.

In general, the sentences meted out by the Courts mainly on the juvenile rioters were rehabilitative in nature. In most cases, youth rioters were remorseful of their offending acts, except for a few hardcore cases in which the offenders were not repentful and even justified that their victims deserved to be beaten up. Tougher sentences had been meted out to these offenders. To date the breach rate of these youth rioters are low.

On a final note, a young person is only a few years away from starting his/her own family. The way in which the young person perceives relationships and appropriate behaviour will determine our next generation. If the young person's undesirable values and erroneous methods of solving his/her problems are not corrected early, there will be dire consequences.

*Prepared By  
Research & Statistics Unit  
Subordinate Courts*

## **ANNEX 1**

### **COMPARISON OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH GANGS IN SINGAPORE AND THE UNITED STATES**

This annex provides a comparison of the similarities and differences between the characteristics of youth gangs in Singapore and the United States. In making the comparison, one has to bear in mind the differences in the social and cultural background of youths in both countries.

There is no single, accepted definition of a youth gang, but it generally encompasses six main characteristics:

- A gang name
- Recognizable symbols
- Identifiable leadership
- Geographic territory
- Regular meeting pattern
- Collective actions to carry out illegal activities



US YOUTH GANG	SINGAPORE YOUTH GANG
<b>Gang Name</b>	
<p>US gangs appear to align with 4 major city gangs which have names such as Crips (Los Angeles), Bloods (Los Angeles), Folk Nation (Chicago) and People Nation (Chicago).</p>	<p>Singapore gangs usually adopt Chinese Hokkien names such as "Sa Lak Kau (369)" or "Ang Soon Tong", or "Sio Ji Ho". Some uses numeric names such as "24" or "16".</p>
<b>Recognisable Symbols</b>	
<p>"Colours" is a slang term for identifiable symbols of gang such as tattoos, brands, certain hairstyles &amp; clothing, imprints or logos of gang's name. A gang's identity and activities could also be established through the graffiti writing on the city walls.</p>	<p>Singapore gangs are often identifiable by their secret passwords, tattoo, hand signals and languages used.</p>
<b>Identifiable Leadership</b>	
<p>There is usually one leader or a group of leaders to lead the gang in its activities. Group leader(s) issue orders and reap the fruits of the gang's activities.</p>	<p>There is usually one leader to lead the gang. The gang leader usually issues order and some others will take on the position of a fighter for the gang.</p>
<b>Geographic Territory</b>	
<p>Gangs can either be identified with a large city gang or remain locally turf oriented. They usually operate within their neighbourhoods, marking out their territories with graffiti.</p>	<p>Gangs usually operate in different neighbourhood or housing estates of Singapore such as Bishan, Bedok and Toa Payoh.</p>
<b>Regular Meetings</b>	
<p>Gangs hold regular set meetings in which they often discuss gang business and read from their "books" which contain gang rules and gang history. Gang members must also memorize these books.</p>	<p>Gangs hold regular meetings usually at coffeeshops where they chitchat, smoke and drink for hours. Emergency meetings are also held depending on whether they have a fight with another rival gang or a dispute to settle.</p>
<b>Collective Actions to carry out Illegal Activities</b>	
<p>Gang often break the law mainly for 3 reasons :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 To provide funding for gang activities.</li> <li>2 To further the gang's reputation on the streets (e.g. fighting a challenge issued by another gang) and</li> <li>3 To initiate a new member into a gang. The new member has to commit a crime in order to prove his worth.</li> </ol>	<p>Gangs often break the law mainly for the following reasons :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 To retaliate from an earlier dispute</li> <li>2 To further/protect the gang's reputation (e.g. fighting a challenge or fighting because of a rumour, spread by others on the gang).</li> <li>3 To initiate a new member into a gang. The new member has to commit a crime in order to prove his worth.</li> </ol>
<b>Age Range of Youth Gangs</b>	
<p>In the US, most youth gang members are young adults. The age range is between 12-24. Membership is expanding at the top and bottom of the age range, but mainly at the top.</p>	<p>In Singapore, the youth gang members are mainly aged 16-17. The age range is between 12-21. Membership appears to be expanding in the middle range, i.e. 15-18.</p>
<b>Racial &amp; Ethnic Composition</b>	
<p>According to a recent national law enforcement survey, 48% of gang members are black, 43% are Hispanic, 5% are white and 4% are Asian<sup>4</sup>.</p>	<p>In Singapore, Chinese still formed that majority in youth gangs. However, there were proportionately more Malays compared to the national population. They accounted for 24%, followed by 6% for Indians and 3% of the other ethnic groups.</p>

<sup>4</sup> Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) World Wide Web page.

