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Culture, identity and Samoan youth gangs in New Zealand

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Original, ground-breaking research by [Dr Moses Faleolo](#), a registered social worker and lecturer at Massey University, explores why Samoan youth gangs have formed in New Zealand, why some young Samoan males are attracted to these gangs, and the extent to which Samoan cultural values and practices have shaped gang culture and life choices.

Why are youth gangs so attractive?

Samoan young people are attracted to youth gangs for a number of reasons, including family breakdown, poor schooling, bullying, lack of traditional support networks, poverty, lack of confidence, and conflicting cultural expectations. Identity status also plays an important role in influencing Samoan young people's decisions to join gangs, with protection, popularity and pride major contributing factors.

Rationale for research

It is important to understand what socio-cultural issues contribute to Samoan youth gang culture, and the role Samoan families, communities, churches and cultural practices can play in building successful strategies to minimize and eliminate the attraction of youth gangs. Insights into Samoan youth gang culture can help to formulate effective and responsive social work and social policy initiatives in this area, and help young men make positive life choices.

Policy recommendations

Early intervention and a multi-faceted approach that includes families, schools, churches and communities is a vital part of minimizing the attraction of youth gangs. Development of social policy initiatives focusing on education retention, anti-bullying programmes, student-teacher-community relationships, job creation opportunities (apprenticeships, cadetships, scholarships, etc), and youth development courses for social workers are highly recommended.

"[This] study provides essential information for policymakers, social workers, community and government providers, managers and chief executive officers, researchers, the Pacific community here in New Zealand and worldwide, and anyone else who has a vested interest in ethnic minority youth gangs." (Dr Moses Faleolo)

For more information go to the [PRPC website](#) or contact [Litea Meo-Sewabu](#).

Key Points:

- Samoan young people are attracted to youth gangs for a myriad of reasons, including negative cultural and social experiences
- It is important to understand how socio-cultural dynamics influence the formation of and participation in Samoan youth gangs in New Zealand
- Early intervention and a multi-faceted approach is vital for minimising the attraction of youth gangs and formulating effective social policy initiatives in this area