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Abstract | We analysed 39 interviews with former outlaw motorcycle gang (OMCG) members in Queensland to explore how and why they joined OMCGs.

OMCG members were usually recruited through existing social networks. Screening was key to the recruitment process, and typically involved current and aspiring OMCG members getting to know one another and establishing rapport and trust. Recruitment was usually a lengthy process, supported by formal mechanisms including sponsorship by existing members and the enforcement of prospect or nominee periods.

While a handful of more recent recruits were motivated by notoriety and profit, the brotherhood and camaraderie of affiliating with like-minded peers was the dominant motive for joining. Often this intersected with feelings of social isolation and disconnection from other family and peer networks.

Findings highlight the importance of intervening with men early in their recruitment process, targeting high-risk settings for recruitment and reducing the attraction and visibility of OMCGs to prevent recruitment.

Motives and pathways for joining outlaw motorcycle gangs

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Outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs) are exclusive and careful in selecting their members (Lauchs, Bain & Bell 2015). While OMCG recruitment has received limited empirical research, some aspects have been explored in biographical accounts (eg Langton 2018) and media reports (eg Robinson 2009). These accounts suggest that OMCGs recruit through networks of friends and family, and also target men in the community and prisons with a demonstrated aptitude for violence or running relevant businesses, such as tattoo shops and motorcycle mechanics (Langton 2018). Members spend several years passing through an initiation process, referred to as a prospect period (or a nominee period for clubs originating in Australia), before they are given full membership and the right to vote and wear club patches and colours (Lauchs, Bain & Bell 2015). During this time, a prospect or nominee is sponsored by a fully patched member, who acts as his mentor and disciplinarian (Robinson 2009). OMCGs also have 'hangarounds' and 'friends of the club', who can socialise with patched members and attend the clubhouse on a casual basis but who have not expressed the desire or taken steps to become a member (Langton 2018).

Celebrating

50 *years*

While there has been limited research focused on recruitment into OMCGs, there is extensive research on recruitment into other criminal groups, including street gangs and organised crime groups (OCGs). Given the age profile of gang members, who are much younger than OMCG members (Morgan, Dowling & Voce 2020), gang recruitment is usually understood using developmental frameworks (Klein & Maxson 2006) which emphasise the influence of family, school and neighbourhood factors (Dong, Gibson & Krohn 2015; Raby & Jones 2016). Street gang recruitment occurs through immediate social connections in local settings, where gang members and non-members are repeatedly exposed to one another (Densley 2015). Status and notoriety are important in gang recruitment and membership (Wood & Alleyne 2010). The real and perceived advantages of gang membership can include protection, power, status, a sense of identity, friendship, excitement, opportunities to generate illicit profit and access to drugs (Wood & Alleyne 2010). To ensure the trustworthiness of new members, screening of prospective members and having existing members vouch for them are important features of the recruitment process (Densley 2012).

Organised crime research, while not as extensive as gangs research (Calderoni et al. 2022a), is also relevant. Studies on recruitment into organised crime have highlighted several mechanisms, including:

- relationships with friends and family (the latter including cases of intergenerational continuity);
- work settings, which can offer criminal opportunities or allow offenders to congregate;
- leisure activities and locations where people can meet;
- negative life events, such as financial setbacks or debt, which can expose individuals to criminal opportunities; and
- deliberate recruitment by criminal groups (Kleemans & de Poot 2008; Kleemans & van Koppen 2020).

All of these mechanisms reflect the importance of social opportunity structures (Kleemans & de Poot 2008). In forming criminal networks, OCGs must balance the dual need for trust—which may be present in existing ties or be developed over time—and for criminal associates who have the capabilities their illicit enterprise needs (eg inclination for violence and criminal behaviour, competence in specific illegal business activities, the capacity to avoid police detection, and the ability to adhere to a code of silence; Calderoni et al. 2022b, 2020; van Koppen 2013). Financial motives play an important role in an individual's decision to join (Calderoni et al. 2020).

While OMCGs share similarities with OCGs and other gangs, they are also distinct, and it is not clear which aspects of recruitment into these other groups might be relevant (or not) to OMCGs. In contrast to OMCGs, street gang and OCG membership is comparatively fluid and short-lived, clear hierarchies and formal processes are rare (except in certain groups, like mafias), and individuals drift in and out of the network (Dong, Gibson & Krohn 2015; von Lampe & Blokland 2020). Similar to mafias (Calderoni 2012), OMCGs are defined by rigid, hierarchical structures and clearly defined membership boundaries which enforce commitment to the club and make mobility far more difficult (Lauchs, Bain & Bell 2015). Street gang membership is understood within developmental frameworks because it generally occurs in adolescence (Klein & Maxson 2006), whereas OMCG recruits are adults (Blokland et al. 2019). Criminal background and skills play a key role in recruitment to OCGs (Calderoni et al. 2022b) because these groups exist to commit profit-motivated crime.

Crime by street gangs is more symbolic in nature—it serves to maintain the collective identity of the group, to protect territory, and to build and maintain reputation (von Lampe & Blokland 2020). Not all OMCG members, chapters and clubs are involved in crime (at least recorded crime; Morgan, Dowling & Voce 2020), particularly organised crime (Lauchs 2018), but crime by OMCGs can be either profit-motivated or symbolic in nature (von Lampe & Blokland 2020). For example, serious acts of public violence may serve to maintain the reputation of a club, and that reputation might be necessary to maintain control over a criminal market.

Given the high rates of offending among OMCG members (Morgan, Dowling & Voce 2020) relative to non-OMCG members (Blokland et al. 2019; Morgan, Cubitt & Dowling 2023), particularly among younger members (Voce, Morgan & Dowling 2021), as well as the high rates of co-offending between members (Bright et al. 2022), there are obvious potential benefits in stopping individuals from joining clubs. Noting the differences between OMCGs, other gangs and OCGs, research into recruitment into OMCGs specifically is necessary for the development of programs aimed at preventing or disrupting recruitment.

Method

This study aimed to better understand the pathways through which men are recruited into OMCGs and their motivations for joining.

Sample and interviewing process

In 2014, the Queensland Police Service (QPS) introduced a formal disassociation process for OMCG members, where former members can inform police that they have cut ties with an OMCG and sign a statutory declaration describing their efforts to disengage. When this is supported by intelligence, QPS formally records that the member has disassociated. When police intelligence shows a member has left an OMCG but they have not formally declared this, they are recorded as ex-members. At the commencement of data collection, there were 195 formally disassociated members and over 300 ex-members recorded in the available dataset.

Individuals who had formally disassociated from an OMCG or were recorded as ex-members based on police intelligence were approached by an experienced member of the QPS Organised Crime Gangs Group to participate in a research interview in person or by telephone. For safety reasons, the interviewer was a sworn officer who has extensive knowledge of OMCG culture. The officer was provided with training and support by researchers from the QPS and the Australian Institute of Criminology. Participants were assured that their participation was voluntary, confidential, and not related to any police operation or investigation. Former members were excluded if they had outstanding criminal matters, or if participation in the research would pose a risk to the interviewer or interviewee. The research was approved by the AIC's Human Research Ethics Committee and the QPS Research Committee, and strict security and confidentiality measures were implemented around data collection, storage and analysis procedures.

Seventy-one former OMCG members were invited to participate in an interview. Nineteen declined to participate. While interviews were undertaken with 52 former OMCG members, this study examines the transcripts of 39 participants from 13 clubs who consented to their interview being recorded, de-identified and transcribed. The average age of interview participants was 48 years (range=25–66), while the average age of participants when they first joined an OMCG was 31 (range=19–54). At least seven of the former members had been an office bearer, meaning they had a leadership role in the club (such as president, vice president or treasurer). The average length of time spent in an OMCG was nearly seven years (mean=6.6; median=5.5; range=0.2–17.0 years), with membership periods spanning from the early 1970s to 2020. Importantly, there was a relatively equal distribution of recruitment dates among former members, with eight first joining an OMCG prior to 2001, 16 joining between 2001 and 2010, and 14 joining after 2010.

Analysis

This study used a phenomenological approach which focused on the lived experiences of the former members and explored their explanations of how and why they became members. The semi-structured interview included questions about how the participant first became involved with their gang, the key members involved in their recruitment, the factors influencing their decision to join, and their broader life circumstances during the process of becoming a member. In this paper we focus primarily on how and why former members joined an OMCG, rather than their views about how or why other members became involved, though we draw attention to emerging trends in recruitment. Interviews were analysed in a principally descriptive manner, with an inductive approach used to identify the most common themes to emerge in the interviews.

Limitations

Several limitations of the data must be acknowledged. While participants were assured that their participation was voluntary, confidential, and not related to any police operation or investigation, some may have withheld information for fear of implicating themselves or others in criminal activity. However, this was mitigated by the trust and rapport built by the police interviewer with participants, in addition to the explicit directive not to mention any criminal activity. The findings may not reflect the views of current members or the views of ex-members who did not agree to participate. As this is a sample of former OMCG members, it may over-represent those with negative perceptions of both their period as members and how OMCGs have changed over time. Young men, especially those recruited into OMCGs in recent years, were not well represented in the sample.

Results

Pathways to recruitment

Social networks

Consistent with the literature on recruitment into street gangs (Densley 2015; Wood & Alleyne 2010) and OCGs (Calderoni et al. 2022b), OMCG recruitment typically occurred through informal social networks. The vast majority of participants were recruited through friends, current and former work colleagues, family members, social motorcycle riding clubs and associates. Some men were recruited by fellow veterans, while others were recruited through the businesses that they regularly attended as customers. These contacts either were OMCG members themselves or introduced the participant to OMCG members.

> I was living with my stepdad at the time, and he had mates who were part of a club that came over all the time, so I hung out with them and it just went from there. (Participant who joined in the early 2010s)

> Long-time friend [recruited me], we'd been in the Veterans together, and he'd joined that club. (Participant who joined in the late 2000s)

> This guy who went to high school with me, his father was a [OMCG name]. I had a little to do with him growing up … So this guy was used to initiate conversation with another friend of mine, who I'm closer with, and do drugs with, and just through friendship really, and that's how he got to me, he was the link between me and the head honcho. (Participant who joined in the mid-2000s)

Once participants came into contact with club members, they typically spent a significant amount of time, sometimes years, establishing a relationship with members of that club. The interviewees were frequently motorcycle enthusiasts who spent time with the club as a 'hangaround', casually joining in social rides and attending clubhouse parties.

> I'd hung around about 2 years before [joining]. (Participant who joined in late 1990s)

> I'd hung around them forever, so [I knew] pretty much all of them … I'd have a beer with them after work all the time. (Participant who joined in the early 2010s)

Rather than accepting membership as soon as the opportunity arose, some participants explained that they remained hangarounds for a significant time so that they could consider the implications of membership or wait for the right time in their life to join.

> I'd been around the club and other clubs for so long … But I'd been hanging around that one for about 20 years … I had people that I knew in the club for many years that had suggested [I join] multiple times over 20 years, and due to circumstances in my life at the time, it just fitted to join. (Participant who joined in the early 2010s)

> It's not a decision you take lightly, you know, you hang around for a while, drink at the bar, and eventually someone says hey, why don't you become a nom, see if you love us and we love you. (Participant who joined in the late 2000s)

In a handful of cases, the participant wished to become a member and actively pursued known members to gain access.

> A [tradesperson] I knew at the time, he was in, so I chased him and tried to join through him. (Participant who joined in the late 2000s)

> It was a guy I looked up through a publication, I had seen these articles and read these stories. (Participant who joined in the early 2000s)

> I met him through the internet. I commented on something he posted, on a page. And he contacted me, and then [name] contacted me and it went from there. (Participant who joined in the early 2010s)

The prospect or nominee period

Consistent with the OMCG literature (Lauchs, Bain & Bell 2015), participants were formally offered a path to OMCG membership through commencing a nominee or prospect period, which ranged from around 12 months to several years. Participants described this trial period as a way for the club to get to know them and vice versa, and to set mutual expectations for membership before making the commitment.

> I did 2 years as a nom, I earned my patch … I mean, it's a timely process. It had just been suggested, but the same as everybody else, there's that initiation period that gives you and them the chance to consider membership. So I thought I've got a foot in the door pretty quickly, but joining was a drawn out process. (Participant who joined in the late 2000s)

> When you're a prospect, it's a chance for the club to look at you and for you to look at the club, and if you don't like it you can leave as a prospect on good standing, but after that it becomes tougher. (Participant who joined in the late 2000s)

During this time, nominees or prospects were mentored by the full member who nominated them for membership. It was the role of the full member who sponsored the nomination to ensure the prospective member understood the values, traditions and expectations of the OMCG. One participant, when asked who recruited him, said:

> A work colleague, and he became my sponsor. You need to have been a full patch member for 5 years to sponsor. (Participant who joined in late 2000s)

Another participant described his experience as follows:

> I shit you not, I walked into the clubhouse one day, by myself, and I just went back every Friday after that, [a current member] liked me from the get-go, and then me and him became inseparable, from that I started spending time at the bike shop, when I wasn't working, and it just went from there. Then one day he offered me to prospect up, offered to be my sponsor. (Participant who joined in late 2000s)

Sponsors also served as disciplinarians who enforced club rules.

> The way they do it, is two people vote you in and they sponsor you, they call them your mum and dad, so if you fuck up you're gonna get your ass kicked by mum and dad, usually mum worse than dad. (Participant who joined in the early 2000s)

Alternative recruitment pathways

Several other scenarios emerged as pathways to membership. Some participants did not have to undertake a prospect or nominee period because they had previously been a fully patched member of another club.

> Over two years I was treated as a guest by the club, didn't even have to prospect 'cause I had a patch from my last club. Just slipped into it. (Participant who joined in the late 2000s)

In a few rare instances, participants were given full membership immediately without the requirement to undergo any nominee period, or were offered membership after only just meeting the OMCG members. While participants suggested these fast-tracked processes with relaxed recruitment standards were generally targeted at younger, newer members (see also Dowling et al. 2021), there was often an indirect relationship (ie club members knew the recruit through someone else), so there was likely still some way for clubs to assess the new member's trustworthiness.

> Got my colours [membership] straight away … Only just met [the man who recruited me], he was the Vice President but met him through a guy I'd known for 20 years. (Participant who joined in the early 2010s)

In some cases, participants were actively pursued by the club for recruitment because of their reputation. Deliberate recruitment is also a feature of OCGs (Kleemans & de Poot 2008).

> I followed my [family member] … he was already a member. Apparently they were looking for me. They had been looking for me for about three months prior to him telling me … because the sergeant-at-arms knew who I was and what type of fella I was. He was looking for a fighter, someone who could stand their ground. (Participant who joined in the mid-2010s)

Related to this, it was common for those who had left a club to be approached by other clubs as potential recruits. Contrary to the perception of strict loyalty to one club for life, there were examples of clubs working proactively to recruit former members who had left other clubs on the basis of their reputation, skills and connections.

> I was in another one previously … had a two-year gap and joined the last one … Some club hopper wannabee, he was a friend of mine, he got me into both clubs. (Participant who joined in the mid-2000s)

> I actually joined back up in jail … [an old friend] held a national position in the club, so he said when you get out I'll make sure you've got colours waiting for you again. (Participant who joined in the mid-2000s)

Several former members in the sample had been recruited while in prison. Prison was recognised as a common setting for recruiting new members (see also Dowling et al. 2021 for further discussion).

> I mean some of the clubs, are throwing colours out there. The modern clubs coming in now, are trying to grow, and are just throwing colours out there, you don't earn them, and they're the ones that will be trouble, 'cause there's a lot of recruiting in prison. (Participant who joined in the mid-2000s)

> Like prison rec yards are a breeding ground. (Participant who joined in the early 2010s)

Motives for joining

Brotherhood and camaraderie

When former members were asked about the factors that influenced their decision to join, the most common reason was their perception that the club would be a brotherhood of like-minded men who had similar interests in riding motorcycles and socialising and having parties.

> … friendship, riding motorcycles, group of guys having a good time, and knowing a group of guys had your back. (Participant who joined in the mid-2000s)

> I made the decision to join, went to a few parties, couple of people I went to school with joined clubs, and I was into bikes, and hung out at the club house for a bit of fun … Fun, just wanted to get on a bike, ride with the boys. (Participant who joined in the early 2000s)

Participants often described their chapters as being like a family and said that the club made them feel respected or valued. Many interviewees had developed strong friendships with other club members, characterised by trust and loyalty, and several sustained those friendships even after leaving the club. This supports the findings from Harris' (2015) interviews with Australian OMCG members, which emphasised belonging, support and attachment.

> … the brotherhood, a family-like atmosphere, having parties … you get together and laugh, joke, have barbecues. (Participant who joined in the late 2000s)

> I was looking for camaraderie, brotherhood. (Participant who joined in the mid-2000s)

For some, a negative life event like a relationship breakdown led to their decision to seek out brotherhood and social connection in the club.

> Due to circumstances in my life at the time, it just fitted to join [the club] … the so-called brotherhood and family, I'd lost both my parents, had no family in Australia, and felt quite isolated. (Participant who joined in the mid-2010s)

> At the time I had no friends to ride around with … The major thing was my father, he used to beat us up all the time, and that got to me a little bit, I still carry it with me, and I became a bit of an introvert, and then I met these guys, and it seemed like the club was like a group of brothers, and it sucked me in, I had nothing else in my life, I was going through a bad marriage, so yeah. (Participant who joined in the mid-2000s)

For others, the desire for social connection reflected longer term feelings of isolation and rejection arising out of childhood experiences of abuse and neglect.

> I used to be a street kid. I wasn't looking for family, but these guys turned out to be like a family, they talked me into it, and put some pressure on me, until I came around. I didn't know how to ride a bike before I joined, they taught me how (Participant who joined in the mid-1990s)

> I was looking for a family, some good mates I could hang it, ride with. I felt lost and like this is where I needed to be … I was the black sheep in my family. My father made me feel that way. (Participant who joined in the mid-2000s)

> Just my history, childhood history. I was abused from the age of 5 or 6 …That went right through to later on in years. A lot of things happened that made me anti-establishment. (Participant who joined in the mid-1990s)

Conflict and protection

For a smaller number of participants, joining an OMCG offered them protection, either in prison or in the community, usually from rival OMCGs. One participant explained that he had been long-term friends with members of an OMCG, who stuck up for him when a rival OMCG started bullying his social motorcycle club. Similarly, another participant explained that he needed backing from an OMCG when a rival gang was harassing him.

> One of the guys that I known that had been in the club for about 20 years. And I also had a good rapport with a couple of the other guys … We had a social bike club. And that social club was being pushed around by the one percenters, being told to stop doing shows and rides and stuff. And basically we thumbed our nose at them. This one club decided to take another club out, who was giving that social club a hard time, I thought well, I'm into this … I just got sick and tired of these bikies, thugs, trying to lord it over women and social clubs. (Participant who joined in the early 2010s)

> At the time I was going through some troubles with another club. They offered some assistance. Basically I'd just closed a business, 'cause another club was harassing me … and I just thought nah, this is gonna be easier if I'm in another club, and they're just not gonna come near me. (Participant who joined in the early 2010s)

Another participant joined an OMCG while incarcerated in response to being threatened by a rival gang. While he had familial connections to an OMCG, he was reluctant to join but did so to protect his business (which he later lost on being kicked out of the club).

> Through my whole career I was like, don't join them … then while I was in prison, the club came in and said we're taking your [business] off you. And I didn't know what to do … some guys in another club, and it was the same club I worked for a while before over in [another state], and they came to me and said join up with us, we'll make sure you don't lose your [business] … So I felt like I had no other choice. (Participant who joined in the early 2010s)

Offers of protection are not unique to OMCGs, also occurring in street gangs (Esbensen, Deschenes & Winfree 1999). It is one way in which clubs coerce men to join and stay in the club and can act as leverage through which newer members can be exploited.

Notoriety, money and outlaw lifestyles

Participants identified notoriety, status and illicit financial profit as common motivations for new recruits (see Dowling et al. 2021). Newer members were described as chasing a lavish lifestyle, with expensive cars, jewellery, parties and women, which is how some current members portray themselves.

> I think the older blokes tell the younger ones about the glory and action, they brainwash these kids into thinking they'll have women throwing themselves at them, they'll get looked after and get to drink all the time, they get told a lot of bullshit, and these kids just go for it. (Participant who joined in the mid-2000s)

> It's the ultimate ego stroke. It's just a bunch of guys who haven't grown up … And, I mean, you walk into pubs and people, are like, afraid, but then you smile at them and they want to buy you a drink. So it's just a massive ego stroke … (Participant who joined in the mid-2000s)

This, one participant argued, was an important focus for efforts to prevent recruitment into OMCGs.

> Kill the Rockstar image. If you kill the Rockstar image you'll kill it. (Participant who joined in the early 2000s)

Only a few of the participants explicitly stated that these were motivating factors in their own decision to join. It is noteworthy that most of these former members were recruited to OMCGs in the last decade.

> Just the party lifestyle, the women, the drugs, the bikes, the gold, it all just looked good … (Participant who joined in the mid-2010s)

> I never had anything to do with [the club] until I started hanging round the pub and they were, you know, they had the bar to themselves, free drinks, no one going near them, women hanging off them, you just see the good side of them. (Participant who joined in the late 2000s)

> … yeah just the family, I didn't have a family, and it was just about being accepted and having a family. And the benefits of income without having to work for it … I was kidnapped by a rival club … so after that my family were afraid of repercussions from that club, so they cut ties with me to protect themselves, and left me on my own, so I looked for a club for a brotherhood, and to be with people like me. (Participant who joined in the mid-2010s)

This final example illustrates the fact that former members had often joined for more than one reason—whether that was the attraction of the brotherhood, significant life events and personal circumstances, a need for protection, or the appeal of the outlaw lifestyle.

Discussion

Based on interviews with former OMCG members in Queensland, this paper has highlighted motives for joining and pathways into OMCGs that are common across clubs. This research has shown that, while there are elements of both street gang and OCG recruitment which are similar, neither is fully consistent with OMCGs, meaning that we can draw upon—but not rely on—evidence from these areas when considering how to prevent recruitment.

Findings from this study reflect the important role of social ties, which is consistent with recruitment into OCGs and street gangs (Kleemans & van Koppen 2020). OMCG recruitment often occurs through existing social networks, with many participants explaining that they met the club through established networks of men with similar interests, and casually spent time with club members on social rides and attending clubhouse events before they became members themselves. While there were examples of individuals pursuing clubs and known members, and members pursuing potential recruits on the basis of their reputation or history in other clubs, most former members described a process that was largely opportunistic. Initial contact occurred in a variety of settings, including private residences, work settings, licensed premises and, in some cases, prison. Prison has emerged as a common setting for recruiting newer members—perhaps unsurprisingly given that up to half of OMCG members have served time in prison (Morgan, Cubitt & Dowling 2023).

The findings reflect the importance of selection processes that help build trust and loyalty. The lengthy, drawn out process described by interview participants is consistent with the perception that OMCGs are traditionally highly selective. The rigid, hierarchical structures and clearly defined membership boundaries that characterise OMCGs (Lauchs, Bain & Bell 2015), which differentiates them from OCGs and street gangs, mean that joining an OMCG takes, on average, substantially longer than joining other criminal groups—longer, for example, than the average of two years youths spend in total as members of street gangs (Pyrooz 2014). The amount of time spent as hangarounds, and then as prospects or nominees, provides an opportunity for the club to screen potential members. The prospect or nominee period is designed to ensure the trustworthiness, suitability and quality of potential new members, with sponsors vouching for them and shouldering some responsibility for their recruitment (Densley 2012). There were cases where these requirements were relaxed, including for people who had previously left other clubs, largely because these individuals offered resources or capabilities that would benefit the club. This reflects the balance between trust and capability in choosing members, as with OCGs (see van Koppen 2013). It was also evident that, for many, the decision to join an OMCG was a considered one, preceded by an extended period of building rapport, trust and friendship with existing members.

Overall, recruitment was driven by a combination of different factors. Brotherhood, camaraderie, a shared passion for motorcycles and other mutual interests were the most commonly cited factors enticing men into OMCG membership. Some participants described how joining a club was motivated by personal circumstances (recent or historical) which exacerbated their feelings of isolation and need for group belonging. Wider gang research has similarly emphasised the importance of developmental factors (Dong, Gibson & Krohn 2015; Thornberry et al. 2003), while both gang and OCG research has highlighted the role of stressful life events (Eitle, Gunkel & Van Gundy 2004; van Koppen 2013). Threats and intimidation from rival gangs were less common factors compelling participants to seek protection through OMCG membership. As is the case with gang research (Densley 2015), motives can be understood as being a combination of push and pull factors. Certain factors might lead an individual to seek belonging in some sort of group, while other factors will make that group—in this case, an OMCG—an attractive option. Both are relevant to understanding and preventing recruitment.

Less common among former members was the desire for notoriety or profit. This is despite these same individuals having provided evidence of shifting OMCG membership practices in Australian clubs, characterised by higher turnover, faster recruitment and relaxed entry requirements and membership standards, as part of a broader cultural shift within some clubs (Dowling et al. 2021). This may be because former members were unwilling to disclose their criminal motives or criminal networks in an interview, or because they tended to be older, more traditional members. It may also be because, like many individuals who have desisted from offending, they have forged a new identity and narrative about their involvement in OMCGs that focuses less on their violent, antisocial or criminal behaviour (Bersani & Doherty 2018). It is also plausible that, while brotherhood and camaraderie is the dominant motive for joining, aspects of the outlaw lifestyle are still desirable (and these elements are probably interrelated).

These findings highlight several opportunities to prevent men from joining OMCGs. Street gang prevention programs, which often focus on school or family-based interventions and aim to intervene early to prevent young people becoming involved in gangs (Howell 2010), may have little immediate relevance to OMCGs because of the very different age profiles of new members. Prevention programs like these may help to prevent some young people from joining clubs when they are older, but it would be difficult to ensure they are appropriately targeted at prospective gang members. A recent study showed that OMCG members accounted for just one percent of 12,000 male offenders in New South Wales proceeded against for the first time in a particular 12-month period (Morgan, Cubitt & Dowling 2023). That said, age-appropriate interventions which address the push factors underlying some members' decision to join an OMCG, targeted at individuals at risk of joining, may have some effect.

As camaraderie and brotherhood is a common motive for recruitment, anti-recruitment campaigns could show the reality of gangs, which have shifted from loyal groups of like-minded men with shared values to groups of self-interested individuals looking to use the club to build their own status and profit financially (Densley 2015; Dowling et al. 2021). These programs could also counter the perceived attraction of OMCGs by drawing attention to the negative consequences of membership, such as imprisonment, family conflict and neglect, the loss of external friendships, mental health issues and barriers to finding or retaining employment (Boland et al. 2021). Enforcement activity targeting senior members of OMCGs, where they are involved in directing serious crime, may also undermine the appeal of clubs and reduce recruitment (Calderoni et al. 2022b).

Irrespective of the approach adopted, resources should be targeted at those men who are already part of the wider social network of OMCGs, such as their friends, families, associates and work colleagues. A recent study estimated there were fewer than 6,000 members nationally (Morgan, Dowling & Voce 2020). Only a proportion of these men are recruited in any given year, meaning that the pool of men who are at risk of being recruited into OMCGs is relatively small, though likely to be concentrated in certain areas and groups. Given the status of OMCGs as priority targets, and the significant investment in task forces targeting OMCGs, club members are well known to law enforcement, as are nominees and, to a lesser extent, hangarounds (Cubitt & Morgan 2022). While the opportunistic nature of social networks makes identifying high-risk settings in the community challenging, it may be possible to disrupt efforts of known members to recruit in prison, which former members identified as a setting for active, expedited recruitment to rebuild member numbers.

Finally, the length of time it takes nominees to become OMCG members provides a window within which police or other agencies may intervene to dissuade them from joining. This might involve targeting these individuals as early as possible with anti-recruitment messages. Alternatively, it might mean assisting them with the types of services provided as part of the new OMCG Exit Program in Queensland, which offers tailored job skills programs, mentoring, employment opportunities and health services for former members wanting to end their involvement with OMCGs (see Boland et al. 2021). This may help discourage young men from taking the next step in the pathway to become a fully patched member, particularly when they are weighing up the decision to join.

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