

# RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR WEAPON CARRYING AMONG SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH IN BC



A 2018 BC ADOLESCENT HEALTH SURVEY FACT SHEET



This fact sheet uses data from McCreary Centre Society's BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). The most recent BC AHS was completed in 2018 by over 38,000 youth aged 12–19. To learn more about the survey and view other fact sheets and reports, please visit [mcs.bc.ca](http://mcs.bc.ca).

This fact sheet was prepared by Rajanpreet Shinger following a practicum placement.

In BC, 8% of the population identify as South Asian, but account for 25% of victims of gang-related homicides (Statistics Canada, 2017; Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit, 2015). Entering high school has been identified as a high-risk time for gang recruitment (Brar, 2017; Tyakoff, 2003).

## RISK FACTORS FOR GANG INVOLVEMENT

It has been argued that South Asian gangs are a direct response to racism (Dunbar, 2017; SARF, 2019). Also, experiencing racism at school may lead to students losing interest in academics, engaging in fighting, and being labeled delinquent (Frost, 2010; Tyakoff, 2003; Wortley & Tanner, 2006).

A lack of parental supervision has also been associated with gang involvement. Many South Asian parents work long hours to support their families; which can leave youth unsupervised and without parental involvement in their activities (Peterson & Morgan, 2014; Maxson, 2011; Tyakoff, 2003; Wortley & Tanner, 2006). Rebelling against the pressure to conform to traditional values has also been associated with South Asian youth gang involvement, as has the pressure to achieve the symbolic manifestations of success and wealth (Brar, 2017; Tyakoff, 2003).

## RISK FACTORS FOR WEAPON CARRYING

Other risk factors associated with South Asian youth gang involvement include the normalization of violence (Brar, 2017; Tyakoff, 2003); weapon carrying (Kaloti, 2009); living in impoverished, high crime, or high violence areas (Sersli, Salazar, & Lozano, 2010; Dunbar, 2017; Tyakoff, 2003; Wortley & Tanner, 2006); low self-esteem; and lack of educational aspirations (Dunbar, 2017; Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). Money has not been found to be a motivating factor for getting involved in gang activity but has been linked to South Asian youth staying involved in a gang (Kane & Smart, 2019; Tyakoff, 2003; Kaloti, 2009; Dunbar, 2017).

The BC AHS did not ask about gang involvement but did ask if youth had carried a weapon to school in the past month. As weapon carrying is associated with gang involvement, this fact sheet considers risk and protective factors associated with weapon carrying among South Asian youth.

In 2018, 11% of BC AHS participants identified as South Asian. Most South Asian youth never carried a weapon to school (96%). However, 3% sometimes carried a weapon and 1% always did.

### Experienced racism

In the past 12 months, 25% of South Asian youth reported they had experienced discrimination as a result of their race, ethnicity, or skin colour (vs. 13% of non-South Asian students). Students who experienced this type of racism were more likely to have carried a weapon to school than those who did not have this experience (7% vs. 3%).

### Felt pressure

Over a quarter of South Asian students (27%) felt quite a bit or extremely stressed or pressured in the past month (vs. 37% of non-South Asian students). South Asian students who experienced this type of pressure were more likely to carry a weapon than those who experienced less pressure (5% vs. 3%).

### Lacked parental supervision

Around 1 in 10 (9%) South Asian students reported that their parents rarely or never knew what they were doing with their spare time (vs. 12% of non-South Asian students), and 29% rarely or never knew what the youth were doing online (vs. 38% of non-South Asian youth). Youth were more likely to carry a weapon if their parents did not know what they were doing in their spare time (9% vs. 2% whose parents usually or always knew what they were doing) or online (7% vs. 2%).

### Missed class because of bullying

Similar to other youth, 3% of South Asian youth had missed class due to bullying in the past month. These youth were more likely to carry a weapon than youth who did not miss class for this reason.

### **Experienced physical abuse**

Around 1 in 10 (11%) South Asian youth had ever been physically abused (vs. 15% of non-South Asian youth). Students who had been physically abused were more likely to carry a weapon than those who had never been abused (7% vs. 3%).

### **Lacked prosocial friends**

Similar to other youth, 63% of South Asian youth had friends who would be upset with them if they beat someone up. Youth who did not have these type of friendships were more likely to carry a weapon (8% vs. 2% of youth whose friends would be upset for this reason).

### **Felt unsafe in their neighborhood**

Similar to other youth, 15% of South Asian youth rarely or never felt safe in their neighbourhood at night. These youth were twice as likely to carry a weapon as those who often or always felt safe (6% vs. 3%).

### **Experienced deprivation**

The more items youth felt deprived of that their peers had (such as money to spend on themselves or a smartphone), the more likely they were to have carried a weapon to school in the past month. For example, 12% of South Asian students who were deprived of three or more items carried a weapon to school, compared to 4% who felt deprived of one item.

### **Low self-esteem**

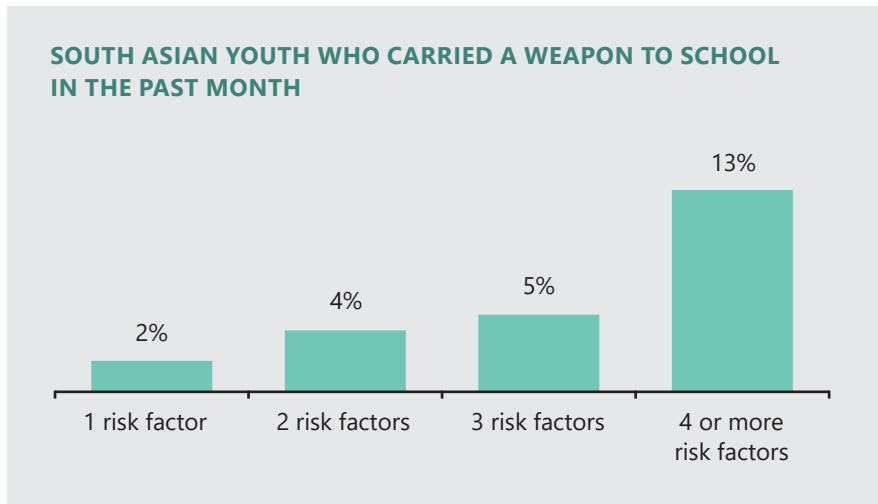
Fifteen percent of South Asian students reported not feeling good about themselves. This did not appear to be related to weapon carrying.

### **Low academic aspirations**

In total, 1% of South Asian youth did not expect to graduate from high school, and 2% expected to graduate from high school but did not plan to go on to post-secondary education. Youth who planned to end their education at the high school level were more likely to carry a weapon to school than youth who expected to pursue post-secondary.

## YOUTH WITH MULTIPLE RISK FACTORS

Experiencing racism, feeling stress or pressure, lack of parental supervision, skipping school due to bullying, being physically abused, a lack of prosocial friends, feeling unsafe in their neighbourhood at night, experiencing deprivation, and not planning to finish high school or pursue post-secondary were all risk factors for weapon carrying. Generally, the more of these risk factors youth had, the more likely they were to carry a weapon.

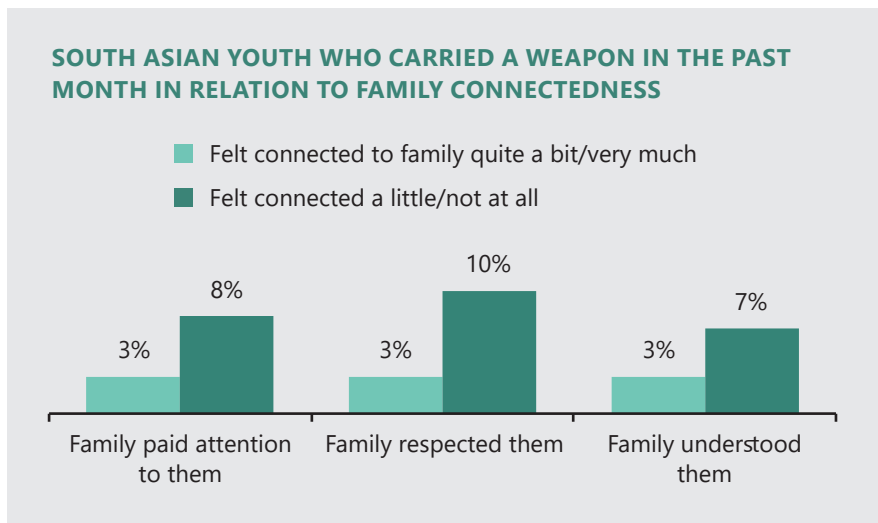


Note: 2 risk factors was not significantly different from 1 risk factor or 3 risk factors.

## PROTECTIVE FACTORS

South Asian youth were less likely to carry a weapon to school when they:

- Felt connected to family (e.g., felt their family paid attention to them, understood them, and respected them).
- Had an adult in their family they could talk to about their problems (3% vs. 6% of those who did not have this type of support).
- Felt safe at school (2% vs. 15% of those who did not feel this way).
- Felt like a part of their school (3% vs. 10% of those who did not feel this way).
- Felt like part of their community (3% of those who felt quite a bit or very much connected vs. 6% of those who felt not at all or a little connected).



## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This fact sheet focused on weapon carrying because of its known association with gang involvement. Other risk factors for gang involvement such as experiencing racism were also associated with weapon carrying among South Asian youth in BC. This highlights the need to address racism and other types of discrimination, particularly as South Asian youth were almost twice as likely to have been discriminated against because of their race, ethnicity, or skin colour than other youth in BC (25% vs. 13%).

Other risk factors for gang involvement, such as lacking post-secondary educational goals, feeling pressure, feeling unsafe in their neighbourhood, having been physically abused, and lack of parental supervision were associated with a greater likelihood of weapon carrying among South Asian youth in BC. However, South Asian youth were less likely than other youth to experience these risks, and most reported parental supervision and did not experience extreme pressure. Additionally, South Asian students who had low self-esteem were no more likely to carry a weapon to school than students who felt good about themselves.

The more risk factors reported by South Asian youth, the more likely they were to carry a weapon to school. However, the presence of protective factors such as feeling like their family paid attention to them, respected them, and understood them; having an adult to turn to; feeling safe at school; feeling like a part of their school and community; and having educational aspirations were all associated with students being less likely to have carried a weapon to school.

It is hoped this fact sheet can be used to support South Asian youth who may be at risk for weapon carrying and potential gang involvement.

## RESOURCES

### **Options Community Services' South Asian Family Strengthening Team (SAFST)**

is an outreach program targeting immigrant and refugee families. The program deploys culturally competent counsellors with knowledge of immigrant backgrounds to support families with at-risk or gang-involved youth. Phone: 604-596-4321  
Email: [youthservices.intake@options.bc.ca](mailto:youthservices.intake@options.bc.ca)

### **Archway Community Services' South Asian Community**

**Resource Office (SACRO)** aims to disrupt youth's flow into organized crime. The program provides outreach, counselling, youth groups, and other services to at-risk youth ages 11–24 and their families in Abbotsford. Phone: 604-859-7544, ext. 222.  
Email: [Manpreet.sarai@archway.ca](mailto:Manpreet.sarai@archway.ca)

### **The Gang Intervention Team**

is a BC wide team that works with people engaged with gangs or "at-risk" of engaging in gang activities. The group provides outreach services and supports gang intervention. If you know someone at risk or involved in gangs, you can contact the Gang Intervention Team at 604-897-6023 or [gangintervention@cfseu.bc.ca](mailto:gangintervention@cfseu.bc.ca).

## REFERENCES

- Brar, G. (2017). *Under the Hood: Understanding pathways in and out of gang life from the point of view of gang members' experience*. Unpublished Master's thesis, University of the Fraser Valley.
- Combined Special Forces Unit. (2015, May 4). About CFSEU-BC Retrieved from <https://www.cfseu.bc.ca/en/about-cfseu-bc>
- Dunbar, L. K. (2017, May 3). *Youth gangs in Canada: A review of current topics and issues*. Public Safety Canada / Sécurité publique Canada. <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/2017-r001/index-en.aspx>
- Frost, H. (2010). Being "Brown" in a Canadian Suburb. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 8(2), 212–232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2010.480880>
- Kaloti, N., & University of the Fraser Valley. (2009). *Community perceptions of Indo-Canadian gang violence in the Lower Mainland*. Abbotsford: University of the Fraser Valley.
- Kane, L., & Smart, A. (2019, August 26). *The unusual suspects: How B.C.'s middle-class gangs are unlike any other in North America*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-middle-class-gang-problem-surrey-1.5259790>
- Maxson, C. L. (2011). Street Gangs. J. Q. Wilson & J. Petersilia (Eds.), *Crime and public policy* (pp. 158–182). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Peterson, D., & Morgan, K. A. (2014, January 02). Sex differences and the overlap in youths' risk factors for onset of violence and gang involvement. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 37(1), 129–154.
- Sersli, S., Salazar, J., & Lozano, N. (2010). *Gang prevention for new immigrant and refugee youth in BC*. <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/crimeprevention/community-crime-prevention/publications/gang-prevention-immigrant-refugee.pdf>
- South Asian Fellowship Report. (2019). *Developing strategies on: Violence Prevention and Community Safety in Abbotsford, BC*. University of the Fraser Valley (UFV.ca). [https://www.ufv.ca/media/assets/sasi/\(Aug-29\)-SARF-REPORT-2019--print.pdf](https://www.ufv.ca/media/assets/sasi/(Aug-29)-SARF-REPORT-2019--print.pdf)
- Statistics Canada. (2019, June 18). *Census profile, 2016 census*. Statistics Canada: Canada's national statistical agency / Statistique Canada: Organisme statistique national du Canada. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>
- Tyakoff, A. (2004). *South Asian-based group crime in British Columbia*, Gatineau, Quebec: Department of Canadian Heritage, Strategic Research and Analysis. <https://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item?id=2002-529-e&op=pdf&app=Library>
- Wortley, S., & Tanner, J. (2005). *Criminal organizations or social groups? An exploration of the myths and realities of youth gangs in Toronto*. First Draft. Unpublished Manuscript.

### Thank you to the advisory committee for this project:

- Anurada Amarasekera – BPsych student at SFU
- Jas Hunjan – Aviation student at UFW
- Harpo Mander, MA – Founder of Brown Girl GUILT
- Ronita Nath, PhD – Managing Director at Stigma and Resilience among Vulnerable Youth Centre (SARAVYC)
- Monica Rana, PhD – Postdoctoral Research Fellow at SARAVYC
- Jas Shergill – BA student at SFU

