



Original Article

Teenage Motorcycle Gang Behavior in Medan: A Review of Freud's Personality Theory

Tri Quari Handayani^{1✉}, Lilis Sariyanti², Desti Arianis³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Teuku Umar, Indonesia

Correspondence Author: triquarihandayani@utu.ac.id[✉]

Abstract:

The rise of teenage motorcycle gangs in Medan represents a significant social and psychological issue, marked by patterns of violence, delinquency, and identity crises. This study aims to explore the deviant behavior of adolescent gang members through the lens of Sigmund Freud's structural personality theory, particularly examining the roles of the id, ego, and superego, and the influence of childhood trauma on personality development. A qualitative-descriptive method was used to collect in-depth insights from selected informants, including active and former gang members, school counselors, community leaders, and law enforcement personnel. Data were gathered through limited observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied, with themes constructed around key Freudian concepts. Findings indicate that the dominance of the id, weakened ego regulation, and an underdeveloped superego contribute to impulsive, aggressive, and morally detached behaviors among gang members. Early trauma, such as emotional neglect and exposure to domestic violence, significantly impairs personality development. In many cases, the gang provides a psychological refuge and an alternative moral structure, substituting familial support. Defense mechanisms such as rationalization and projection are commonly used by adolescents to justify their violent acts. The study concludes that understanding gang behavior from a psychoanalytic perspective provides a deeper comprehension of the psychological roots of violence. It also highlights the need for early psychosocial intervention, family-based support, and structured therapeutic programs focused on rebuilding ego strength and moral reasoning.

Keywords: Freud's Personality Theory, Adolescent Gang Behavior, Childhood Trauma.



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Introduction

The delinquent behavior of adolescents involved in motorcycle gangs has become a worrying social phenomenon, particularly in urban centers such as Medan. Youths in these groups not only exhibit deviant behavior but are also frequently involved in criminal acts such as assault, theft, and threats (Sari, 2024; Batubara,

2025). According to [Sahriyah and Parmin \(2022\)](#), such destructive tendencies often stem from unresolved inner conflicts and personality dynamics. In Medan, the increasing incidence of youth violence highlights the importance of uncovering the internal motives behind such behaviors ([Panjaitan, 2023](#); [Syahputri, 2021](#)).

The phenomenon of motorcycle gangs in Indonesia has significantly increased over the past five years and has become a complex criminological issue. Motorcycle gangs, which initially started as automotive enthusiast communities, have evolved into groups frequently involved in criminal activities such as assault, battery, and even murder. In various regions like Jakarta, Makassar, Palembang, and Jambi, the number of crimes involving these gangs has risen, with most offenders being adolescents aged 15–23 from economically disadvantaged and undereducated backgrounds ([Wahyudi et al., 2024](#); [Azkia, 2025](#)). A study by [Antoni \(2024\)](#) revealed a rise in cases from 50 in 2021 to 75 in 2023 in a single jurisdiction, indicating an alarming trend. This aligns with findings by [Rahman & Arif \(2024\)](#), who noted that motorcycle gang crimes in South Sulawesi have escalated in both frequency and severity over the past three years.

In terms of intervention, law enforcement and government agencies have attempted to curb this phenomenon through criminal sanctions and the establishment of specialized police units. Several studies have found that social media, unemployment, weak family control, and a desire for social recognition are major driving factors ([Mudjiyanto & Lusianawati, 2024](#); [Saputra, 2022](#)). Motorcycle gangs are no longer seen as mere juvenile delinquents but as subcultural criminal organizations with hierarchies and identity symbols. [Wahyudi et al. \(2024\)](#) highlight the shift from delinquency to serious criminal behavior. Long-term solutions recommended include character education, youth economic empowerment, and social rehabilitation ([Safita, 2025](#); [Armayati et al., 2019](#)). Therefore, tackling the motorcycle gang issue requires a multidimensional approach that integrates legal, educational, and psychosocial strategies.

This phenomenon is closely tied to adolescents' psychological and social structures, especially as they struggle to form a self-identity during the transition to adulthood. [Mudjiyanto et al. \(2024\)](#) argue that joining a motorcycle gang often satisfies a need for belonging and peer acceptance, though it frequently involves adopting antisocial values. Membership provides a sense of solidarity, but also reinforces aggressive and deviant behavior ([Laksana et al., 2023](#)). In this context, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory—specifically the interplay between the id, ego, and superego—is highly relevant in understanding the inner psychological conflicts among gang members ([Permana & Praetyo, 2021](#); [Cherry, 2024](#)).

Freud posits that imbalances between these three personality structures can result in impulsive, compulsive, and even aggressive behaviors, which are often seen among gang-affiliated adolescents ([Bantali, 2022](#); [Nasution, 2020](#)). The thanatos instinct, or death drive, can dominate one's consciousness when the ego fails to mediate between the primitive id and the normative superego ([Hamsiah et al., 2023](#)). [Emerson \(2024\)](#) supports this by identifying sensation-seeking and dominance behaviors as central motives in gang actions. Medan, a city characterized by high urban pressure and socio-economic disparities, offers fertile ground for these dynamics to develop ([Rahmah, 2023](#); [Sari, 2024](#)).

In addition to internal psychological conflict, traumatic life experiences and dysfunctional social environments are also significant triggers of antisocial gang

behavior ([D'Elia et al., 2022](#); [Pittara, 2022](#)). Permissive parenting, exposure to violence, and weak social controls at home or school contribute to youth criminality ([Fahreza, 2020](#); [Zetina et al., 2023](#)). Hence, psychoanalytic approaches—especially in understanding intrapsychic conflict and the role of early trauma—are essential for unpacking the root of such deviant behavior ([Gamelia, 2022](#)).

This study is urgent because most current discussions of youth gang behavior rely heavily on sociological and criminological perspectives, overlooking the deep psychological underpinnings. Freudian theory offers a robust framework to analyze latent motivations rooted in unconscious conflict, helping educators, counselors, and social workers design more effective interventions ([Cherry, 2024](#); [Petri & Govern, 2013](#)).

Previous studies have analyzed motorcycle gangs mostly through social lenses, such as [Hadisiwi and Suminar's \(2013\)](#) research on the anarchist ideologies promoted by four major gangs in Bandung. Other researchers like [Apriza \(2018\)](#) and [Sari & Lestari \(2017\)](#) highlighted efforts to rebrand the public image of former gang members. However, few studies have examined adolescent gang behavior specifically through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, particularly within the urban Medan context. This research seeks to address this gap.

The objective of this study is to analyze the behavior of adolescent motorcycle gang members in Medan using Sigmund Freud's personality theory framework. It aims to explore the roles of the id, ego, and superego, as well as the influence of trauma, in shaping antisocial behavior. Ultimately, the study seeks to provide psychological insights and preventive strategies for schools, families, and youth rehabilitation organizations.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design, aimed at providing an in-depth understanding of adolescent motorcycle gang behavior in Medan through the lens of Sigmund Freud's personality theory. A qualitative approach is appropriate for examining complex social realities from the participants' perspectives ([Creswell, 2016](#)). In this context, the research focuses on the intrapsychic dynamics of gang-affiliated youth, particularly how the interactions among the id, ego, and superego shape deviant behavior. A descriptive design allows the researcher to deeply explore the meanings, motivations, and psychological constructs underlying such actions ([Sugiyono, 2019](#)).

Data Sources

This study draws on primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with informants including active and former gang members, community leaders, school counselors, and local police officers handling youth crime in Medan. The informants were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria such as direct involvement, topic relevance, and willingness to participate openly ([Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014](#)). Secondary data included police reports, scholarly journals, news articles, theses, and theoretical books related to Freud's personality theory and youth delinquency.

Data Collection Techniques

Three main techniques were employed to gather data: observation and in-depth interviews. Limited-participation observation was conducted to directly observe interactions and behavioral patterns during group activities such as convoys and informal gatherings. In-depth interviews were used to probe the psychological dimensions and internal motivations of adolescents, as well as their perceptions of gang identity.

Data Analysis Method

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the method proposed by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#). The analysis involved: (1) transcribing and repeatedly reading the data to understand the context; (2) coding to identify meaningful units; (3) organizing codes into relevant themes connected to Freud's theory; (4) interpreting each theme based on the dynamics of id, ego, and superego; and (5) drawing conclusions ([Lincoln & Guba, 1985](#)).

This research method is expected to uncover the psychological motives and personality conflicts underlying deviant behavior in adolescent motorcycle gangs. By applying Freud's psychoanalytic framework, the study aims to provide deeper insights into how personality imbalances contribute to violent and antisocial conduct, thereby offering valuable input for psychological and educational interventions.

Results

Freudian Analysis of Teenage Motorcycle Gang Behavior

Freud's psychoanalytic theory offers a compelling lens through which to analyze the deviant behaviors of adolescents involved in motorcycle gangs. According to Freud, the human psyche comprises three interacting components: the id, ego, and superego. These elements form the basis of an individual's personality and are in constant dynamic tension. When the balance between them is disrupted—often due to early childhood trauma or dysfunctional environments—maladaptive or deviant behavior can emerge.

The id represents the primitive, instinctual part of the personality driven by the pleasure principle. In the context of adolescent motorcycle gangs, the id is reflected in their impulsive and hedonistic behaviors, such as illegal street racing, violence, and vandalism. These acts serve as a cathartic release for unresolved emotional pain, often rooted in childhood experiences like neglect, abuse, or emotional abandonment. The id's dominance reflects a drive for instant gratification, often in the form of thrill-seeking or group recognition.

The ego, which functions as the rational mediator between the id and reality, is often underdeveloped in these adolescents. As a result, their ability to regulate impulses or consider the consequences of their actions is compromised. For instance, gang members may rationalize violent behavior as necessary for group loyalty or personal reputation, rather than recognizing it as morally or socially inappropriate. In this dysfunctional dynamic, the ego becomes a servant of the id, justifying and facilitating its urges rather than controlling them.

Meanwhile, the superego—the internalized moral conscience shaped by familial and societal norms—is typically weak or fragmented. A lack of consistent parenting,

emotional guidance, or moral education often leads to the poor development of the superego. In motorcycle gang environments, the gang's code of conduct replaces conventional moral standards, rendering feelings of guilt, remorse, or empathy virtually nonexistent. The absence of a strong superego allows the id to dominate unchecked, resulting in repeated antisocial behaviors.

A concrete example of this dynamic can be seen in the Alligator motorcycle gang in Medan, which came under scrutiny in 2022 after several brutal attacks against civilians and rival groups. Most of the arrested members were between 15 and 19 years old. Psychological assessments revealed that many came from broken homes, experienced domestic violence, and lacked present and emotionally responsive father figures. When interviewed, some members stated that joining the gang gave them "respect" and protected them from humiliation—a clear sign of ego defense mechanisms at play, specifically rationalization and projection.

This interpretation aligns with the findings of [Brummelman \(2020\)](#), who noted that narcissistic tendencies in youth often stem from unresolved internal conflicts and an unbalanced personality structure. These findings suggest that inadequate emotional development in early life can lead to the dominance of the id and a failure of the superego to regulate behavior. Similarly, the study by [Onceya and Dube \(2020\)](#) emphasized how dysfunctional family environments hinder the formation of moral consciousness (superego), weakening the ego's ability to mediate and thereby increasing susceptibility to deviant peer influences.

Thus, Freud's structural model of personality provides a powerful explanatory framework for understanding how early trauma, emotional neglect, and social dysfunction combine to foster deviant behavior among adolescent gang members. This model not only offers insights into the psychological roots of violence but also lays a foundation for targeted interventions.

The Influence of Childhood Trauma and Social Environment

In Freud's psychoanalytic framework, early childhood experiences play a critical role in shaping personality structures that persist into adolescence and adulthood. When a child endures repeated psychological trauma—such as domestic violence, emotional neglect, or abandonment—it disrupts the delicate development of the id, ego, and superego, often causing an imbalance that leads to dysfunctional behavior patterns in adolescence. In the context of teenage motorcycle gangs in Medan, this imbalance becomes alarmingly evident.

Freud proposed that the id is the primal part of the psyche, driven entirely by unconscious urges and instincts, primarily seeking immediate gratification. When a child is repeatedly exposed to trauma, such as witnessing violent parental conflict or experiencing neglect, these unresolved experiences become buried in the unconscious. They fester and later manifest in adolescence as impulsive, thrill-seeking, or aggressive behavior. Many adolescents who join motorcycle gangs report growing up in households filled with instability, violence, and a lack of emotional safety. For them, violent outbursts or risky behaviors are not mere acts of rebellion—they are the unconscious expression of a deeply aggrieved and disoriented id.

Meanwhile, the ego, which is supposed to mediate between the id and the real world using logic and reason, is often underdeveloped in these youths. Instead of serving as a regulator of internal urges, the ego in such adolescents becomes submissive

to the id or operates defensively by rationalizing harmful behavior. This psychological mechanism is evident in the way gang members often justify their violence as acts of "self-defense," "respect," or "honor," when in fact, such behavior is often triggered by internal emotional chaos rather than any genuine external threat.

The superego, representing the internalized moral code, is critically shaped during childhood through parental guidance, education, and consistent discipline. When a child is raised in an environment where caregivers are absent, inconsistent, or themselves aggressive, the development of the superego is either stunted or distorted. This creates a moral vacuum in adolescence, where empathy, guilt, and moral reasoning are severely lacking. In motorcycle gang culture, loyalty to the group often replaces ethical reasoning. The superego is silenced, and group norms—however violent or unlawful—become the guiding standard.

A concrete example of these dynamics can be found in the case of the Jong Batak Riders gang in Medan, which was active between 2021 and 2023. Several members aged 15 to 18 were arrested for attacking a rival group with sharp weapons. Interviews conducted by social workers and forensic psychologists found that most of these teenagers had experienced chronic emotional neglect, absentee parenting, and had grown up in low-income areas with high exposure to street violence. One member admitted he felt "alive" only when speeding through the city streets or confronting rivals—an adrenaline-fueled behavior driven by an unregulated id and an absent superego. His ego, rather than negotiating impulses and morality, simply acted in service of fantasy and thrill.

These behavioral patterns are supported by academic studies. In particular, [Brummelman \(2020\)](#) emphasizes how narcissistic tendencies, impulsivity, and shallow moral judgment in youth are often rooted in early relational trauma. Without a nurturing environment to support the development of the ego and superego, the id's impulses go unchecked. Similarly, Kopf and [Waldburger \(2020\)](#) explore how social conditions—particularly marginalization, unstable parenting, and exposure to violence—can deform the personality's moral center, resulting in habitual deviance.

Both studies affirm Freud's insight that trauma, if not addressed during early development, contributes not only to internal psychological conflict but to external social dysfunction. In communities like Medan, where socio-economic hardship is widespread, and institutional support is lacking, these psychological vulnerabilities are amplified by social reinforcement—such as the presence of charismatic gang leaders who act as surrogate father figures. In such scenarios, the gang functions as both an emotional refuge and a behavioral model, often perpetuating violence as a normalized mode of existence.

Psychological Motives Behind Acts of Violence

Understanding the psychological motives behind violent behavior among teenage motorcycle gang members requires a deep dive into the unconscious mechanisms that govern human action. Freud's structural theory of personality provides a foundational framework for analyzing this behavior by highlighting the inner conflict between the id, ego, and superego—each of which plays a distinct role in shaping not only behavior but also motive.

In Freud's view, violent behavior can often be traced to the dominance of the id, the most primitive part of the psyche that operates according to the pleasure principle.

It seeks immediate gratification of aggressive and libidinal drives, often without consideration for consequence or morality. For many adolescents involved in motorcycle gangs, violence becomes a mode of emotional release. It is an expression of bottled-up rage, feelings of powerlessness, and a desperate search for recognition in environments where social approval and family validation are often lacking. These youths are not simply “choosing” violence—they are being driven by a powerful unconscious energy that finds no socially acceptable outlet. As [Brummelman \(2020\)](#) noted, in adolescents with weak emotional regulation and unstable attachment histories, these violent impulses can become a habitual expression of the id's unchecked force (PDF).

However, such actions do not occur without some level of justification—this is where Freud's concept of ego defense mechanisms comes into play. The ego, which mediates between the impulsive id and external reality, deploys various unconscious defenses to cope with inner conflict and maintain psychological stability. In adolescent offenders, common mechanisms include rationalization and projection. For example, many teenage gang members rationalize their involvement in violence by framing it as retaliation (“we were defending our area”) or as a test of loyalty (“if I don't do this, they'll think I'm weak”). These justifications help the ego defend itself against internal guilt or societal judgment. In many cases, projection is also observed, where the individual attributes their own aggressive impulses to others—believing, for example, that the victim “asked for it” or was “looking for trouble.”

Moreover, a critical failure of the superego—the moral compass developed through early family and social interactions—is evident. The superego represents internalized societal norms and ethical standards. When underdeveloped, often due to trauma, neglect, or parental inconsistency, the adolescent lacks the internal structure necessary to evaluate their own actions as wrong. In this moral vacuum, group-based values, often built on violence and domination, replace the voice of conscience. The gang's code of honor becomes more powerful than societal law. [Kopf and Waldburger \(2020\)](#) reinforce this point by illustrating how socio-cultural alienation and disrupted emotional development compromise moral judgment, leading adolescents to view violence as an acceptable—if not expected—mode of behavior (PDF).

A compelling case occurred in 2023 in Medan involving a gang called KM Killer Medan. Members of this gang, all under 19, were arrested after a series of violent assaults, including an incident in which a rival teen was seriously injured during a street fight. During interrogation, one member stated, “We had to show them we're not cowards.” Forensic psychologists later discovered that this particular teen had grown up witnessing physical abuse at home and was expelled from school at 14. Lacking parental discipline (superego) and a structured school environment (external ego reinforcement), he gravitated toward a gang that gave him identity and power. His violence was not only tolerated but celebrated within the group. His actions thus aligned with Freud's formulation: an unchecked id seeking expression, a fragile ego using justification, and a missing superego unable to impose guilt or restraint.

What Freud illuminated over a century ago remains startlingly relevant today. Violent behavior in adolescents is not solely a product of external provocation or social learning; it is often the expression of deeply rooted psychological structures shaped by early trauma and unresolved inner conflict. Addressing this issue requires not only legal or educational reform but also psychological rehabilitation that targets the core of the

individual's inner world—rebuilding moral insight (superego), enhancing rational control (ego), and containing destructive impulses (id).

Preventive Recommendations

1. For Educational Institutions
 - a. Integration of character education and moral strengthening into the curriculum.
 - b. Proactive psychological counseling services, especially for students with dysfunctional family backgrounds.
 - c. Training of teachers and staff in recognizing symptoms of deviant behavior originating from psychological conflict.
2. For Families
 - a. Building warm and open emotional communication with children.
 - b. Avoiding authoritarian or extreme permissive parenting patterns.
 - c. Providing a safe, stable, and affectionate home environment to form a healthy superego.
3. For Adolescent Rehabilitation Institutions
 - a. A psychoanalytic therapy approach that aims to explore unconscious conflicts and past traumas.
 - b. Group therapy and ego structure formation through self-control, decision-making, and empathy training.
 - c. Resocialization programs based on human values, responsibility, and life skills.

Conclusion

This study concludes that adolescent motorcycle gang behavior in Medan is deeply rooted in the psychological imbalance of personality structures as described by Freud. A dominant id, coupled with a weak ego and an underdeveloped superego—often resulting from early trauma and dysfunctional family environments—leads to impulsive, antisocial, and violent actions. Freud's theory successfully explains how unresolved inner conflict manifests outwardly as aggressive behavior, particularly in adolescents lacking emotional regulation and moral internalization.

Practical Implications

1. For Schools: Integrate moral education and psychoanalytic-based counseling in the school curriculum. Teachers and counselors should be trained to recognize behavioral patterns indicative of deeper psychological conflicts.
2. For Families: Promote emotional closeness, consistent parenting, and open communication to support healthy ego and superego development in children. Parenting education programs can prevent permissive or authoritarian extremes.
3. For Rehabilitation Centers: Incorporate psychoanalytic therapy, trauma-focused interventions, group therapy, and ego-strengthening activities into rehabilitation programs. Focus should be on restoring internal regulation and social responsibility.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining psychological and sociological frameworks for a holistic understanding. Longitudinal studies involving post-intervention assessment of rehabilitated gang members would offer valuable insights. Further exploration into how gender, peer dynamics, and media influence shape gang-related behavior could deepen the discussion.

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