

Gangs

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Interest in gangs by law enforcement, policymakers and the public has grown over the past three decades. Among the most critical challenges in responding to gangs is arriving at an operational definition that can be implemented and used reliably. Responding to gangs is especially important because of their propensity for violence. Gangs also engage in high levels of drug sales, and possession and use of firearms. As most gang members are in their teens, street gangs are seldom highly organized or disciplined. Structural, group processes and risk-factor explanations hold promise for understanding the causes of gangs and thereby crafting more-effective responses. Gangs are important in prisons as well, exerting control of inmates and the distribution of illegal goods and services. Solid evaluation evidence indicates that coordinated responses to gangs that include both law enforcement and the provision of employment opportunities and training have an impact on reducing gang membership.

INTRODUCTION

Gangs and violence have become interchangeable terms. When the term “gangs” is mentioned in the media or among public audiences, the context typically includes violence. Although gangs are disproportionately involved in violent crime, there is more to gang life than violence. This chapter reviews key points of what is known about gangs, crime, and responses to gangs.

I. DEFINING GANGS

Without the ability to distinguish between gangs and other groups of offenders, it is not possible to gauge the magnitude of the problem, nor to build effective responses to gangs. As with many topics in criminology, gang definitions are complicated. A key methodological issue in the study of gangs has been whether the unit of analysis is the gang, the gang member, or the act (crime) committed by the gang member or members. There is also no consensus on what the definition of a gang crime is or should be. At the federal level, the FBI once offered a sweeping definition of a gang that focused heavily on the

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organizational features¹ and was at odds with how most local law enforcement agencies and researchers understand gangs.

The definitions used by local law enforcement agencies fall into two groups. The first defines a gang crime based on the participation of a gang member in an act (typically a crime), either as a victim or an offender. This is the definition used by Los Angeles and many other cities in California. It is an inclusive definition that depends only on the ability of an officer or investigator to determine whether a victim or offender is a documented gang member. A number of other cities, most prominently Chicago, use a much more restrictive definition, relying instead on the motive for an offense. From this view, an offense that involves a gang member, as either victim or offender, may be classified as gang-related only if the motive furthers the interests of the gang. The offenses may include battles over gang turf, retaliation against rival gangs or gang members, or crimes committed to generate economic gain for the gang. The use of a motive-based definition requires considerably more information and investigation than the use of a member-based definition of gang crime.

The choice of definition greatly influences how many gang members and gang crimes are counted in a jurisdiction.² A comparison of the Los Angeles and Chicago definitions reveals that a member-based definition yields nearly twice as many gang-related homicides as the narrower gang-motive definition.³ Despite this difference in magnitude, the demographic characteristics of the individuals involved (race, age, and gender) and the situational characteristics of homicides (guns, location, and victim-offender relationship) for the two different definitions were the same.

1. See Scott H. Decker, *Youth Gangs and Violent Behavior*, in *THE CAMBRIDGE HANDBOOK OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOR AND AGGRESSION* (Daniel J. Flannery et al. eds., 2007) (quoting FBI definition of gang as “a criminal enterprise having an organizational structure, acting as a continuing criminal conspiracy, which employs violence and any other criminal activity to sustain the enterprise”).

2. Malcolm W. Klein, Cheryl L. Maxson & Lea C. Cunningham, “Crack,” *Street Gangs, and Violence*, 29 *CRIMINOLOGY* 623 (1991); Cheryl L. Maxson & Malcolm W. Klein, *Street Gang Violence: Twice as Great, or Half as Great*, in *GANGS IN AMERICA* 71 (C. Ronald Huff ed., 1990); Cheryl L. Maxson, & Malcolm W. Klein, *Defining Gang Homicide: An Updated Look at Member and Motive Approaches*, in *GANGS IN AMERICA* (C. Ronald Huff ed., 2nd ed. 1996).

3. Maxson & Klein, *Defining Gang Homicide*, *supra* note 2.

In terms of measuring gang membership, self-nomination has proven to be a robust measure that is capable of differentiating gang and non-gang youth.⁴ My colleagues and I have also determined that self-nomination is valid when measuring an individual's disengagement from the gang.⁵

II. GANG HOMICIDE

Homicides involving gangs and gang members attract the most media and law enforcement attention. Because there is no comprehensive national source of gang-crime reporting, the picture regarding gang crime and violence must be constructed by compiling a variety of sources, often based on the work of researchers who use different definitions and whose samples vary. Two law enforcement sources of national gang-crime data (including homicide) are the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) and the Supplemental Homicide Reports (part of the current Uniform Crime Reports). NIBRS is meant to be the next generation of crime data after the UCR, though participation is voluntary.

The most consistent source of gang homicide data has come from the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC), funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). Several conclusions can be drawn this data. First, the trend in gang homicide mirrors that for youth homicide in the United States, with dramatic increases in the early 1990s that leveled off by the end of the 1990s. Despite this pattern, the overall level of gang homicide is considerably higher than for other subcategories of homicide, including domestic homicides and robbery, reinforcing the consistent finding that gang membership is a significant risk factor for involvement in violence, both as a perpetrator and a victim.⁶ Juveniles are also more likely to carry and fire guns than older offenders, and their gun possession and use is strongly related to membership in a gang.⁷

4. Finn-Aage Esbensen et al., *Youth Gangs and Definitional Issues: When is a Gang a Gang, and Why Does it Matter?*, 47 CRIME & DELINQUENCY 105 (2001); Scott H. Decker et al., *Validating Self-Nomination in Gang Research: Assessing Differences in Gang Embeddedness Across Non, Current, and Former Gang Members*, 30 J. QUANTITATIVE CRIMINOLOGY 577 (2014).

5. Scott H. Decker, David C. Pyrooz & Richard K. Moule, *Disengagement from Gangs as Role Transitions*, 24 J. RES. ON ADOLESCENCE 268 (2014).

6. SCOTT H. DECKER & BARRIK VAN WINKLE, *LIFE IN THE GANG: FAMILY, FRIENDS AND VIOLENCE* (1996); TERENCE P. THORNBERRY ET AL., *GANGS AND DELINQUENCY IN DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE* (2002).

7. Adam M. Watkins, Beth M. Huebner & Scott H. Decker, *Patterns of Gun Acquisition, Carrying, and Use Among Juvenile and Adult Arrestees: Evidence from a High-Crime City*, 25 JUST. Q. 674 (2008).

And for both victims and perpetrators, gang homicides are exceedingly likely to involve males, racial minorities, and guns. They are also more likely than other homicides to occur outside and include multiple participants.

The NYGC survey data on gang homicide begin with the year 1996, when 1,330 gang homicides were reported by cities with populations over 100,000.⁸ Gang homicides increased in the early part of the new century, an increase that was notable against the backdrop of falling homicide rates for the nation. Historically, Chicago and Los Angeles have stood out for their exceptionally high levels of gang violence, particularly gang homicide. To a large extent, changes in gang-homicide figures for cities over 100,000 population are driven by changes in gang homicide in Chicago and Los Angeles. In 2009, one-half of the homicides in Los Angeles and one-third of the homicides in Chicago were gang-related.⁹ Gangs in Los Angeles and Chicago have been present perhaps for as long as a century. Because of the entrenched nature of gangs in those two cities, they are not good examples for other cities to emulate when they construct law enforcement, prevention, or intervention policies. Many cities over 100,000 population, however, report roughly one-quarter of their homicides were gang-related.¹⁰

It is important to underscore that gang members are overrepresented both as offenders and victims in homicides. Gang members in large U.S. cities have homicide rates nearly 100 times as high as the national average.¹¹ It is also worth noting that communities with the highest concentration of gang members have the highest rates of gun assault.¹² Gang membership has been identified as a risk factor for violent victimization, a fact that in turn leads to a large volume of retaliatory violence. Indeed, an ethnographic study of gang members in St. Louis¹³ found that nearly one-quarter of the 99 members of the initial sample had been murdered within a three-year period following the conclusion of the study. These results underscore the fact that gang violence, particularly homicide, has a distinctive character.

8. G. David Curry, Arlen E. Egley & James C. Howell, *Young Gang Homicide Trends in the National Youth Gang Survey* (2004) (paper presented at the American Society of Criminology Meetings, Nashville, TN).

9. James C. Howell et al., *U.S. Gang Problem Trends and Seriousness, 1996–2009*, NAT'L GANG CTR. BULL. (May 2011), <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/Bulletin-6.pdf>.

10. *Id.*

11. Scott H. Decker & David C. Pyrooz, *On the Validity and Reliability of Gang Homicide: A Comparison of Disparate Sources*, 14 HOMICIDE STUD. 359 (2010).

12. Beth M. Huebner et al., *Dangerous Places: Gang Members and Neighborhood Levels of Gun Assault*, 33 JUST. Q. 836 (2014). For a discussion of gun violence, see Franklin E. Zimring, "Firearms and Violence," in the present Volume.

13. DECKER & VAN WINKLE, *supra* note 6.

III. INSTRUMENTALITIES

There are a number of correlates that distinguish gang crime, particularly violence, from other crime. These include a prior relationship between the victim and the offender, the occurrence of the event outdoors, the involvement of multiple suspects, and the presence of firearms and drugs. Here, I will discuss two of these correlates: firearms and drugs.

A. FIREARMS

The access to and use of firearms in gang violence is well documented in police data and research findings. In an 11-city study of arrestees, Pennell, Caldwell, and I found that self-reported gang members were more likely than other subgroups to report wanting, owning, using, and being victimized by firearms.¹⁴ Similarly, studies by Bjerregaard and Lizotte and by Lizotte and colleagues report that gun ownership remains one of the strongest correlates of gang membership and gang violence.¹⁵ Lizotte et al. report that youths who carry guns for protection are five times as likely to be in a gang as youths who own guns for sporting purposes.¹⁶ The accumulation of firearms can often lead to “arms races” between rival gangs.¹⁷ Firearms are the weapon of choice among gang members, a preference for ownership that has increased over the course of the past four decades.¹⁸ This fact is strongly related to the high levels of violent death in gang-involved populations in ethnographic research.¹⁹ Clearly, an effective response to gangs will need to address the issue of firearms possession and availability.

An ethnography of St. Louis gang members characterizes their lives as under a constant state of threat from rival gangs, one’s own gang, and the police.²⁰ In St. Louis, gang youths are six times as likely to get shot as their non-gang youth counterparts.²¹ Neighborhoods with high concentrations of gang members

14. Scott H. Decker, Susan Pennell & Ami Caldwell, *Illegal Firearms: Access and Use by Arrestees*, NAT’L INST. OF JUSTICE RESEARCH IN BRIEF (Jan. 1997), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/163496.pdf>.

15. Beth Bjerregaard & Alan J. Lizotte, *Gun Ownership and Gang Membership*, 86 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 37 (1995); Alan J. Lizotte et al., *Patterns of Adolescent Firearms Ownership and Use*, 11 JUST. Q. 51 (1994).

16. Lizotte et al., *supra* note 15.

17. Alfred Blumstein, *Youth Violence, Guns, and the Illicit-Drug Industry*, 86 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 10 (1995); Watkins, Huebner & Decker, *supra* note 7.

18. James C. Howell, *Youth Gangs: An Overview*, JUVENILE JUST. BULL. (Aug. 1998), <https://www.ojjdp.gov/jjbulletin/9808/contents.html>.

19. DECKER & VAN WINKLE, *supra* note 6; Decker & Pyrooz, *supra* note 11.

20. DECKER & VAN WINKLE, *supra* note 6.

21. G. David Curry, Scott H. Decker & Arlen Egley Jr., *Gang Involvement and Delinquency in a Middle School Population*, 19 JUST. Q. 275 (2002).

create a potentially volatile situation where members frequently interact with rival gang members, thus increasing the likelihood of gun violence.²²

B. DRUGS

The level of gang participation in the sale of illegal drugs coincided with the widespread availability of crack cocaine in the late 1980s. Howell and I documented the considerable overlap between involvement in drug markets and the use of violence.²³ Neighborhoods were carved into territories “held down” by gangs competing for drug markets.²⁴ Disputes over drug turf were at the heart of a considerable amount of gang violence in the 1990s. Drug use among gang members has also been reported in a host of studies.²⁵

There are two competing views about the role of gangs and gang members in street drug sales. One is that street gangs are well-organized and effective mechanisms for the distribution of illegal drugs and invest drug-sale profits into their gang. A second explanation holds that drug sales by gangs are seldom well-organized, with gang members often selling independently of their gangs. Some research has described gangs as formal-rational organizations with a leadership structure, roles, rules, common goals, and control over members. Others, however, describe gangs as loosely confederated groups that lack internal cohesion or many of the formal characteristics of organization.

Most gang members sell drugs, though the level at which they sell may not be increased by gang membership alone. It is clear that involvement in drug trafficking is a risk factor for becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence. Conflict between gangs is motivated by retaliation far more than involvement in the illegal drug trade. In his work in Indianapolis, Lauger noted that local gangs used violence as

22. Huebner et al., *supra* note 12; Andrew V. Papachristos, David M. Hureau & Anthony A. Braga, *The Corner and the Crew: The Influence of Geography and Social Networks on Gang Violence*, 78 AM. SOC. REV. 417 (2013).

23. James C. Howell & Scott H. Decker, *The Youth Gangs, Drugs, and Violence Connection*, JUVENILE JUST. BULL. (Jan. 1999), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/93920.pdf>.

24. DECKER & VAN WINKLE, *supra* note 6; Papachristos et al., *supra* note 22.

25. Scott H. Decker & Barrik Van Winkle, *Slingin' Dope: The Role of Gangs and Gang Members in Drug Sales*, 11 JUST. Q. 583 (1994); JOHN M. HAGEDORN, *PEOPLE AND FOLKS: GANGS, CRIME AND THE UNDERCLASS IN A RUSTBELT CITY* (1989); Howell & Decker, *supra* note 23.

a source of gaining legitimacy within the gang as well as responding to violence with greater violence to improve their status amongst other gangs.²⁶ Involvement in drug sales is also a primary way that gang members develop a criminal record, something that can hurt their chances for employment.²⁷

IV. WHAT DO GANG MEMBERS LOOK LIKE?

The average age of a gang member in the United States is 17. This means that a large number of gang members are adolescents and their behavior reflects that of typical adolescents.²⁸ They form associations and social relationships with limited information about the consequences of such associations and terminate those relationships as quickly as they form them. In addition, adolescents are not the best money managers or planners. Adolescence is also a time when friends assume greater importance than parents. Most gangs have a strong affiliation with the neighborhood where they live and often take the name of the neighborhood or a prominent street in the name of the gang. Like most adolescents, adolescent gang members engage in a considerable amount of braggadocio and myth-making. Formal roles and responsibilities are not characteristic of the typical adolescent, and that is also true of gangs. The typical “term” in a gang is about two years. Disengagement from a gang is seldom the result of a program or social intervention, rather it seems to come from natural social processes related to maturation. While most gang members are male, females constitute an important component of gangs, perhaps as much as 25% of all gang members.

Older gang members are capable of higher levels of organization. In many cases, that can be attributed to spending time in prison, which enforces discipline. The discipline gang members learn in prison is generally not due to the efforts of the correctional officers and rules; it is a consequence of discipline enforced by prison gangs. Going to prison often enhances the credibility and reputation of a gang member and places them in a position of leadership once they return from incarceration. In many instances, gang membership is entrenched with cultural values, particularly among Hispanic gangs.

26. TIMOTHY R. LAUGER, *REAL GANGSTAS: LEGITIMACY, REPUTATION, AND VIOLENCE IN THE INTEGRATING ENVIRONMENT* (2012).

27. See generally Gabriel J. Chin, “Collateral Consequences of Criminal Conviction,” in Volume 4 of the present Report.

28. For a discussion of juvenile offenders, see Barry C. Feld, “Juvenile Justice,” in the present Volume.

V. WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF GANGS?

Understanding the causes and correlates of gangs should lend insights into appropriate responses to the gang problem. Three predominant explanations for the presence of gangs exist. These focus on (1) community-level explanations, (2) the role of social processes, or (3) risk factors. Community-level explanations underscore the role of neighborhood structure and other social variables, including measures of community social control, in the generation of patterns and trends in homicide. Such explanations typically include measures of racial composition, concentrated poverty, gun availability, and the presence of drug markets and drug use in the neighborhood or city as the unit of analysis.²⁹ Such approaches often use spatial analysis.³⁰ Explanations that emphasize collective behavior point to the role of social processes, such as contagion and retaliation, and depend more often on ethnographic or case study materials. The former approach emphasizes the spatial distribution of individual and neighborhood characteristics, whereas the latter highlights dynamic social processes and often uses the group as its level of analysis. Risk-factor approaches, on the other hand, focus on individuals and pay attention to the challenges they have or negative life experiences.

A. STRUCTURAL EXPLANATIONS

A study in Chicago found that gang homicides have a significantly different ecological pattern than do non-gang homicides and conform to classic models of social disorganization and poverty.³¹ They argue that analyzing gang groups as a function of mobility patterns is a productive conceptual means of understanding gang homicides.³² Social disorganization was found in neighborhoods undergoing shifts in population composition, overall mobility, and economic change. This disorganization was subsequently linked to gang homicide and other forms of gang crime, particularly violence. This conclusion was reached by examining a host of structural variables, including race/ethnicity and poverty. Social disorganization is problematic because it interrupts the natural socializing processes of family, employment, school and adult supervision.

29. Richard Rosenfeld, Timothy M. Bray & Arlen Egley, *Facilitating Violence: A Comparison of Gang-Motivated, Gang-Affiliated, and Nongang Youth Homicides*, 15 J. QUANTITATIVE CRIMINOLOGY 495 (1999); Huebner et al., *supra* note 12.

30. Alfred Blumstein et al., *Diffusion Processes in Homicide* (Nat'l Crim. Just. Ref. Serv. July 17, 1999), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/193425.pdf>; Jacqueline Cohen & George Tita, *Diffusion in Homicide: Exploring a General Method for Detecting Spatial Diffusion Processes*, 15 J. QUANTITATIVE CRIMINOLOGY 451 (1999).

31. G. David Curry & Irving A. Spergel, *Gang Homicide, Delinquency, and Community*, 26 CRIMINOLOGY 381 (1988).

32. *Id.*

Neighborhoods with high levels of gangs display strong spatial concentrations of crime, particularly in neighborhoods with high levels of poverty and social change.³³ Spatial concentrations of gang members also create higher levels of gun violence.³⁴ Neighborhoods with high concentrations of gang membership are characterized by high levels of gun violence and social disorganization.

B. SOCIAL PROCESSES AND GANG VIOLENCE

Studies of the social processes involved in the generation of gang violence focus on group processes.³⁵ The dynamics of interactions that lead to both initial and retaliatory acts of gang violence are key to such analysis. Such analyses underscore the role of group process and social-psychological variables in the understanding of gangs and gang activities. In 1996, I observed spikes in gang violence over time that were often quite dramatic in magnitude.³⁶ My study underscored the role of “threat” in the explanation of gang violence, particularly retaliatory violence. An assault could initiate a sequence of retaliatory violence that moves beyond an individual neighborhood and its original participants.³⁷

This approach emphasizes the dynamic social processes of collective behavior that lead to retaliatory violence among gangs. It is important to note in this context the role that offending plays in victimization, particularly for gang members³⁸ where offending and victimization are linked in a series of inter-relationships. In this context, Klein and Maxson identified the role of social processes in the escalation of violence.³⁹ Pizzaro and McGloin provided

33. Carolyn Rebecca Block & Richard Block, *Street Gang Crime in Chicago*, NAT'L INST. OF JUSTICE RESEARCH IN BRIEF (Dec. 1993); David Kennedy, Anthony Braga & Anne Piehl, *The (Un)Known Universe: Mapping Gangs and Gang Violence in Boston*, in CRIME MAPPING AND CRIME PREVENTION 219 (David L. Weisburd & J. Thomas McEwen eds., 1997); Rosenfeld, Bray & Egley, *supra* note 29.

34. Huebner et al., *supra* note 12.

35. Colin Loftin, *Assaultive Violence as a Contagious Social Process*, 62 BULL. N.Y. ACAD. MED. 550 (1984).

36. Scott H. Decker, *Collective and Normative Features of Gang Violence*, 13 JUST. Q. 243 (1996).

37. Andrew V. Papachristos, *Murder by Structure: Dominance Relations and the Social Structure of Gang Homicide*, 115 AM. J. SOC. 74 (2009); Cohen & Tita, *supra* note 30; Decker, *supra* note 36.

38. David C. Pyrooz, Scott H. Decker & Richard K. Moule, *The Contribution of Gang Membership to the Victim-Offender Overlap*, 51 J. RES. CRIME & DELINQ. 315 (2014).

39. Malcolm W. Klein & Cheryl L. Maxson, *Street Gang Violence*, in VIOLENT CRIME, VIOLENT CRIMINALS 189, 219 (Neil A. Weiner & Marvin E. Wolfgang eds., 1989); Cheryl L. Maxson, *Gang Homicide: A Review and Extension of the Literature*, in HOMICIDE: A SOURCEBOOK OF SOCIAL RESEARCH 239 (M. Dwayne Smith & Margaret A. Zahn eds., 1999).

additional support for this approach with data from Newark.⁴⁰ Such approaches typically point to the lack of structural control in gangs,⁴¹ particularly the weak control that gangs have over their members, and the role that rivalries can play in leading to violence within and between gangs. These studies reinforce the notion that gangs lack the ability to control the behavior of their members. This process is enhanced by the widespread availability of social media. As the “digital divide”⁴² has shrunk and gang members more frequently engage in the use of social media to fan the flames of violence,⁴³ there is a new medium for keeping conflicts alive. Social media also helps to spread violence to new groups and potentially involve new victims. Addressing the group processes in gangs will require inserting conventional relationships and activities in the lives of gang members.

C. RISK FACTORS

A third approach to explanations of gang membership and behavior is found in approaches that emphasize risk factors. This work largely comes from school-based panel studies of youth that identify gang members and isolate characteristics that distinguish them from non-gang members. Five domains have been examined in this context: (1) individual, (2) family, (3) school, (4) peer group, and (5) community. Risks in these domains are associated with an increased probability of affiliating with a gang. Maxson identified five specific risk factors that received the most empirical support.⁴⁴ These include: (1) experiencing a critical life event such as loss of a parent or divorce, (2) showing a propensity for risk-taking and impulsivity, (3) having pro-delinquent attitudes, (4) having low levels of parental supervision, and (5) associating with delinquent peers. Research also shows that involvement in gangs increases when those factors are more intense, begin earlier, are greater in number, and span longer periods of time. There is, however, a caveat to add: These are the same risk factors for delinquent involvement. As a consequence, it is not easy to differentiate gang risk factors from delinquent risk factors. A strength of

40. Jesenia M. Pizarroa & Jean Marie McGloin, *Explaining Gang Homicides in Newark, New Jersey: Collective Behavior or Social Disorganization?*, 34 J. CRIM. JUST. 195 (2006).

41. Scott H. Decker & G. David Curry, *Gangs, Gang Homicide and Gang Loyalty: Organized Crimes or Disorganized Criminals?*, 30 J. CRIM. JUST. 343 (2002).

42. David C. Pyrooz, Richard K. Moule & Scott H. Decker, *Criminal and Routine Activities in Online Settings: Gangs, Offenders, and the Internet*, 32 JUST. Q. 471 (2015).

43. Pyrooz, Decker & Moule, *supra* note 38; Desmond Upton Patton, Robert D. Eschmann & Dirk A. Butler, *Internet Banging: New Trends in Social Media, Gang Violence, Masculinity and Hip Hop*, 29 COMPUTERS IN HUM. BEHAV. A54 (2014).

44. Cheryl Maxon, *Street Gangs*, in CRIME AND PUBLIC POLICY 158 (James Q. Wilson & Joan Petersilia eds., 2011).

the risk-factor approach is that it allows for interventions to target the social deficits created by the presence of a risk factor. Another strength is that there is strong convergence between the risk factors for gang membership and those for involvement in delinquency. This strongly suggests that general delinquency interventions should be appropriate for dealing with gang members. Several of the Colorado Blueprint programs (Functional Family Therapy and Multi-Systemic Therapy in particular) that are demonstrated as effective in dealing with delinquency may be applied to gang involvement.

VI. PRISON GANGS

Because of their heavy involvement in crime, a large number of gang members are imprisoned. One group estimated that up to 40% of juveniles in secure confinement claim gang membership.⁴⁵ Adult gang members also constitute a sizable part of the prison population,⁴⁶ which has increased dramatically since the 1990s. Gang members can be found in all forms of incarceration in the United States, including prisons, jails, detention centers, and pre-release centers. It is estimated that gang members comprise roughly 13% of jail populations,⁴⁷ 12% to 17% of state prison populations,⁴⁸ and 9% of the federal prison population.⁴⁹

Prison gangs are more structured than street gangs and have much more effective control over their members.⁵⁰ The rank-and-file membership often has several distinct levels of membership. In this sense, prison gangs resemble organized-crime groups, because of their level of organization and emphasis on profits. Prison gangs are heavily involved in prison violence and rule infractions. By some estimates, as much as half of all violence in prison is

45. DALE PARENT ET AL., U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, CONDITIONS OF CONFINEMENT: JUVENILE DETENTION AND CORRECTIONS FACILITIES (1994).

46. GEORGE M. CAMP & CAMILLE GRAHAM CAMP, U.S. DEP'T OF JUSTICE, PRISON GANGS: THEIR EXTENT, NATURE, AND IMPACT ON PRISONS (1985); Paige H. Ralph & James W. Marquart, *Gang Violence in Texas Prisons*, 71 PRISON J. 38 (1991).

47. Rick Ruddell, Scott H. Decker & Arlen Egley, *Gang Interventions in Jails: A National Analysis*, 31 CRIM. JUST. REV. 33 (2006).

48. Marie L. Griffin & J. R. Hepburn, *The Effect of Gang Affiliation on Violent Misconduct Among Inmates During the Early Years of Confinement*, 33 CRIM. JUST. & BEHAV. 419 (2006); Jessie L. Kreinert & Mark S. Fleisher, *Gang Membership as a Proxy for Social Deficiencies: A Study of Nebraska Inmates*, 3 CORRECTIONS MGMT. Q. 47 (2001).

49. Gerald G. Gaes et al., *The Influence of Prison Gang Affiliation on Violence and Other Prison Misconduct*, 82 PRISON J. 359 (2002).

50. David Pyrooz, Scott H. Decker & M. Fleisher, *From the Street to the Prison, from the Prison to the Street: Understanding and Responding to Prison Gangs*, 3 J. AGGRESSION CONFLICT & PEACE RES. 12 (2001).

attributable to prison gangs.⁵¹ Prison gangs exert strong control over drug sales, gambling, and prostitution in institutions.⁵² Prison also provides an impetus to join a gang for many individuals who seek protection. Incarceration plays a role in maintaining the inmate code, which values illegal activities that create profits.⁵³ Moreover, going to prison provides gang members with additional status when they return to the street. Little is known about how gang members fare when they are released from prison and whether their re-entry is more difficult than that of other inmates.

VII. RESPONDING TO GANGS

Many high-profile, high-cost interventions targeting gangs have not been adequately evaluated. We do not have a good sense of whether police crackdowns on gangs produce reductions in crime, nor do we fully understand the impact of gang truces on violence and gang recruitment. Civil Gang Injunctions have been used extensively in California. Despite their popularity and expense, we don't know enough about their short- and long-term impact. The programming and research literature on prison gangs and re-entry efforts among prison gang members also has large gaps. Given the high cost of responding to gangs wrapped up in policing and prisons, this is not an acceptable situation. Clearly it is imperative that careful evaluations be conducted.

Good evaluations must begin with clear definitions of problems and interventions. Some efforts to curb gangs are targeted at individual gang members while others target gangs themselves. The evidence supports targeting individuals rather than the gang itself.⁵⁴ Interventions that target the gang itself often give recognition and resources that strengthen their organizational structure as well as their position in the community. Another key element in gang interventions is the match between the level of criminal involvement and the scope of an intervention. It is important to distinguish individuals who are at broad risk for gang involvement from those who are actively engaged in serious gang crime. Clearly, a different response is needed for active offenders. The gang programming and evaluation literature identifies primary prevention

51. Barton L. Ingraham & Charles F. Wellford, *The Totality of Conditions Test in Eighth-Amendment Litigation, in AMERICA'S CORRECTIONAL CRISIS: PRISON POPULATIONS AND PUBLIC POLICY* (Stephen D. Gottfredson & Sean McConville eds., 1987); CAMP & CAMP, *supra* note 46.

52. MARK S. FLEISHER, *WAREHOUSING VIOLENCE* (1989).

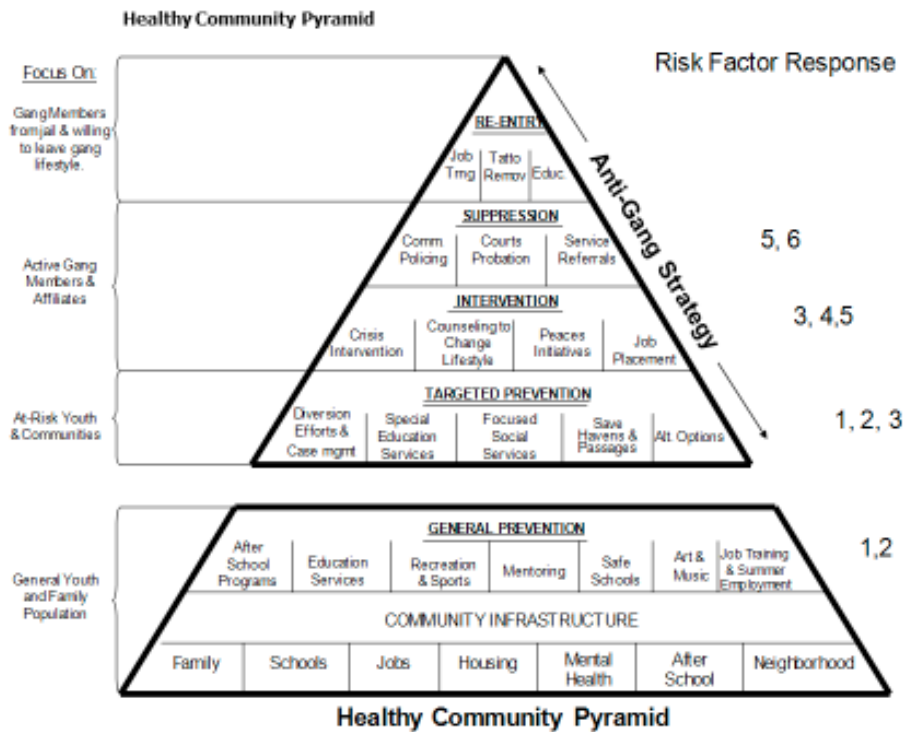
53. Meghan M. Mitchell et al., *Criminal Crews, Codes, and Contexts: Differences and Similarities Across the Code of the Street, Convict Code, Street Gangs, and Prison Gangs*, *DEVIAN'T BEHAV.* 1 (2016).

54. MALCOLM W. KLEIN & CHERYL L. MAXSON, *STREET GANG PATTERNS AND POLICIES* (2006); DAVID G. CURRY, SCOTT H. DECKER & DAVID C. PYROOZ, *CONFRONTING GANGS: CRIME AND COMMUNITY* (2014).

as an appropriate response to the general population of youths and families who live in areas of high risk for gang involvement. Primary prevention is a less expensive and less invasive “dose” than targeted (also known as secondary) prevention. As such, primary prevention seeks to address the needs of individuals at risk for involvement in gang or delinquent activities. School-based prevention programs are a good example of primary prevention. For example, the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program has been identified as an effective primary-prevention program. Expanding the use of this prevention strategy would be a good start at gang prevention. On the other hand, targeted prevention is designed to provide a higher level of “dose” to children and adolescents at high risk for gang involvement, perhaps because of the neighborhood they live in or the involvement of other family members in gang activity. Interventions such as job training or counseling are best used with individuals who are gang members but not yet at high levels of involvement. This is a more intrusive intervention, with higher costs than either form of prevention. Suppression—arrest, prosecution, imprisonment—is reserved for those most involved in crime, particularly long-term gang members or individuals who serve as leaders of gangs.

A key to this model, referred to as the Gang Response Pyramid, is the match between level of criminal involvement and response. Finding the right match can be enhanced by assessing individuals for the risk factors associated with gang membership.

Diagram 1



A growing body of research has examined the process of disengaging from gangs.⁵⁵ Most importantly, this research finds that the majority of gang members leave their gangs, often without negative consequences. The exit process is helped along most often by family and maturational reform. It is important for agencies, police, and friends and relatives to recognize and abet, not impede, the exit process from gangs. When opportunities for desistance present themselves (pregnancy, injury, employment, marriage), their effects should be encouraged and enhanced.

55. Scott H. Decker, David C. Pyrooz & Richard Moule Jr., *Disengagement from Gangs as Role Transitions*, 24 J. RES. ADOLESCENCE 268 (2014); Dena C. Carson, Dana Peterson & Finn-Aage Esbensen, *Youth Gang Desistance: An Examination of Different Operational Definitions of Desistance on the Motivations, Methods, and Consequences Associated with Leaving the Gang*, 38 CRIM. JUST. REV. 510 (2014).

Some of the more notable gang interventions include the Comprehensive Gang Strategy, Boston Ceasefire, and the Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) strategy. The Comprehensive Gang Strategy involves a wide variety of interventions such as the Community Wide Approach to Gang Reduction (Mesa, Riverside, San Antonio, Bloomington-Normal and Tucson),⁵⁶ Safe Futures (St. Louis, Imperial Valley, Boston, Seattle, Fort Belknap and Contra Costa),⁵⁷ and the Little Village Project. All of these interventions are united by their adherence to the Comprehensive Gang Strategy developed by Dr. Irving Spergel. These efforts combined prevention, intervention and suppression. The results of external evaluations demonstrate that the model is extremely difficult to implement, but that when implemented fully, some reductions in gang crime are produced. Boston Ceasefire was a response to youth violence and homicide in Boston.⁵⁸ It was a “smart” intervention in the sense that the operational staff (law enforcement, probation, outreach workers, ministers and youth workers) was guided by the research team. The research team (David Kennedy and Anthony Braga) used mapping, network analysis, and other social-science analytical tools to identify patterns, places and motivations for violence (including gang violence). Significant reductions in youth homicide were observed, though there is ongoing debate about the long-term effectiveness of the intervention. The lasting takeaway for gang intervention, however, is that Boston Ceasefire demonstrated that it is possible to form a coalition of law-enforcement, social-service, clergy, and probation efforts to address a problem. Chicago Ceasefire was a related program that was built on public-health principles of violence prevention and depended heavily on outreach workers to act as “violence interrupters.” Finally, GRYD is notable because it represented a political triumph over territoriality on the part of politicians and social-service agencies. GRYD emerged from the reform efforts of the Los Angeles mayor and City Council to combine all of the existing funding for gang prevention and intervention programs into a single initiative. GRYD used research (mapping, police data, school data, and youth surveys) to identify risk areas, risk factors, and concentrations of gang crime. The evaluation showed some reductions, but not consistently across the city.

56. JAMES C. HOWELL, OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE & DELINQUENCY PROGRAMS, U.S. DEP’T. OF JUSTICE, YOUTH GANG PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES 34-37 (2000), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/171154.pdf>.

57. ELAINE MORLEY ET AL., OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE & DELINQUENCY PROGRAMS, U.S. DEP’T. OF JUSTICE, COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSES TO YOUTH AT RISK: INTERIM FINDINGS FROM THE SAFE FUTURE INITIATIVE (2000), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/183841.pdf>.

58. *Program Profile: Operation Ceasefire (Boston, Mass.)*, NAT’L INST. OF JUSTICE, <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=207>.

The state of research and practice in responding to gangs has not advanced to the point where it is possible to identify “best” practices, something akin to what is available in outlets such as the University of Colorado Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development. There are many resources available, including a guidebook on prevention by the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institute of Justice as well as a *Strategies to Prevent Gang Crime* published by the Office of Community Oriented Policing.⁵⁹ That said, the state of knowledge does support the following generalizations. First, no single response to gangs is likely to be successful, because the problem of gangs, gang members and gang behavior is complex and requires multiple responses. Second, the dose must match the magnitude of the problem. That is to say, where the gang problem is deeply entrenched (for example, cities like Chicago and Los Angeles), multifaceted, long-term strategies must be initiated. In other cities, where the gang problem is emergent, a lower level of intervention may be necessary. Third, the response must be tailored to the individual level of gang involvement. Serious and chronic gang members who engage in high levels of violent crime will require the suppression activities of the criminal justice system. Youths who live in neighborhoods plagued by gang violence who have not joined gangs will need substantial prevention and perhaps intervention services. Fourth, every intervention needs a well-defined problem statement, a carefully articulated intervention, and must be evaluated with a rigorous research design. Finally, while more complex to design and implement, comprehensive interventions are most likely to produce positive outcomes. Such interventions must involve law enforcement, community, education, juvenile justice, NGO, and the private sector.

The gang problem did not emerge overnight and won’t be solved with quick-fix responses. Communities must adopt long-term strategies to respond to the multiple layers of gang problems while addressing the more proximate or immediate output of gangs, such as gun violence, drug sales and threats to the socializing power of families, employment and schools.

CONCLUSION

What does the future hold for gangs? There is widespread media speculation that many gang members are radicalized, especially in prison. At this point, there is little credible evidence to support this assertion rather than anecdotal evidence. The lack of ideological beliefs and political motivations seem to be the major reasons why this is the case.⁶⁰ The Internet also presents opportunities

59. SCOTT H. DECKER, OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ORIENTATED POLICING SERVICES, U.S. DEP’T OF JUSTICE, *STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS GANG CRIME: A GUIDEBOOK FOR LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT* (2008).

60. Scott H. Decker & David Pyrooz, *Gangs, Terrorism, and Radicalization*, 4 J. STRATEGIC SECURITY 151 (2011).

for criminal involvement on the part of gangs. Gang members are usually teenagers and use the Internet for social media and for symbolic reasons rather than instrumental reasons.⁶¹ Finally, as marijuana becomes more socially and legally accepted, it will be interesting to see how gang members who deal drugs will respond to those legal changes. As legal marijuana begins to saturate the market, it is possible that violence will break out for limited profits or dealers will begin to push harder drugs.

While concentrated economic and social disadvantage are associated with the presence of gang crime, social processes also play an important role in such events. A large proportion of gang violence involves retaliation and often has a contagious character to it. The links between street gangs and prison gangs are important and many incidents in prison are linked to the street. The role of prison gangs has especially important consequences for current re-entry initiatives. Involvement in prison gangs may thwart community re-integration and make transition to the community more difficult for such individuals. The problems of youth gangs and violent behavior are no longer confined to the United States. The prospect of youth gangs becoming an entrenched part of global youth culture is enhanced by the Internet and social media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Collaborative efforts and comprehensive strategies are needed to better understand gangs and minimize the threats they pose.

1. **Build a strong information network.** Multiple sources of information (law enforcement, school, prison, community, gang members) are needed to develop a solid knowledge of gangs and their members.
2. **Take a comprehensive approach.** Effective responses to gangs involve multiple agencies and different activities. Examples are outlined in the Healthy Community Pyramid in this chapter, and in the Comprehensive Gang Strategy.⁶² Maintaining partnerships among different agencies can be difficult, but it is essential.
3. **Expand the focus of law enforcement.** Gangs are opportunistic and involved in a variety of offenses, particularly drug sales and violence. Thus a focus on a single offense type by police and prosecutors is likely to be ineffective.

61. Pyrooz, Moule & Decker, *supra* note 42.

62. *OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model*, NAT'L GANG CENTER, <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Comprehensive-Gang-Model>.

4. **Intervene early.** Because the risk factors for delinquency and gang membership overlap so strongly, delinquency interventions offer great promise. Multiple intervention points should be utilized, including family, school, social service, recreation, and employment.
5. **Closely monitor the reentry process:** As a large number of gang members go to prison, their reentry is important to community safety. Often gang members return to the community no better—or even worse—than when they left for prison. Gang members returning from prison need close supervision and high-intensity levels of programming.