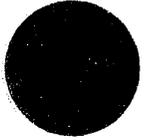


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Youth Gangs: The Problem and the Response

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Youth Gangs: The
Problem and the Response

Prepared for

U.S. Department of Justice

The Office of Juvenile Justice
and Delinquency Prevention

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U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Washington, D.C. 20531

FOREWORD

Youth gangs have been an integral part of urban society in this country since the 19th century. Today's gangs, however, appear to be increasing in size and in the propensity to do violence to the general public. In a survey of five major urban centers in 1976 one-third of the violent juvenile crime was found to be committed by gangs. From 1977 to 1980 the number of gang related homicides in Los Angeles County increased ten percent.

The problem of youth gangs - and particularly gang violence - has emerged as a national juvenile justice priority. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) commissioned this document to increase understanding of youth gangs and the law enforcement and community responses that appear to be most effective. This document defines gangs, describes their characteristics, describes the extent of gang violence, and outlines approaches and programs that appear to be effective in controlling this violence.

A practical combination of research on the causes of gang criminal activity and programs aimed at controlling illegal activities by gangs presented in this document. It is hoped that this combination will add to juvenile justice system personnel's, government officials, and citizen's practical knowledge of gangs. The theories and programs described are not all inclusive. It is hoped that as more effective ways of addressing gangs are implemented we will share experiences and combat the victimization of law-abiding citizens and the destruction of young people's lives by criminally prone youth gangs. It is in this spirit that this document is offered.

Sincerely,

David D. West

David West

Director, Formula Grants and
Technical Assistance Division

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YOUTH GANGS: THE PROBLEM AND THE RESPONSE

YOUTH GANGS: THE PROBLEM

Without a gang, you're an orphan. With a gang you walk in twos, threes, fours. And when your gang is the best, when you're a Jet, buddy boy, you're out in the sun and home free.

- West Side Story (1956)

Long before the Sharks and Jets rumbled on a Broadway stage in the 1950's, youth gangs roamed the streets of urban America. During the 19th century, for example, street gangs were quasi-political organizations affiliated with political machines. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, they became loosely associated groups of youth who resisted socialization and working in factories (Stark, 1981). Although perceived as a neighborhood nuisance, youth gangs were of particular interest to the academic community. The first major book on the topic was The Gang: A Study of 1313 Gangs in Chicago, by Frederic Thrasher. Published in 1923, this study provided an in-depth and comprehensive description of the etiology, characteristics and activities of youth gangs.

As sociological theories of crime and delinquency increased in both number and prominence, so did the study of youth gangs. A second major work, Street Corner Society, by William Whyte, was published in 1943 and examined the Italian youth subculture of "Cornerville" in "Eastern City." This was followed by a succession of influential books, including Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang (Cohen, 1955); The Gang: A Study of Adolescent Behavior (Bloch and Neiderhoffer, 1958); Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960); and The Violent Gang (Yablonsky, 1962); as well as a variety of theories promulgated by such noted sociologists as Sykes and Matza (1957), Merton (1957) and Miller (1958).

After World War II, youth gangs also were "rediscovered" by the media, the police and the community, in general. As symbols of urban violence, youth gangs became the focus of frequent and often sensational newspaper and magazine accounts, speeches and movies. Simultaneously, reporting and attention by law enforcement agencies and concerted delinquency prevention efforts by community organizations further increased the visibility of gangs and the perception that the problem had reached enormous and uncontrollable dimensions (Thrasher, 1981). Yet, accurate data and the development of coordinated, effective responses were limited at best.

Today's renewed focus on youth gangs goes beyond a popularization of gangs or media sensationalism. Youth gangs appear to be increasing in both number and membership in large and small cities alike. However, the major cause for concern is the change in the nature of gang activities. In the past, gang violence was usually associated with the protection of

territory. As a result, the violence was generally controlled by, and limited to, gang members. Some researchers believe that the violence perpetrated by the gangs of today is more uncontrolled than in years past. Guns have become the weapon of choice, due in part to their availability and the value system and increased weight which guns hold with other gangs. Guns have replaced bare fists, switch-blades, bricks, rocks and clubs. As Charles Silberman states in Criminal Violence, Criminal Justice (1978), "...in sheer number as well as in quality and sophistication, the weapons now in the hands of youth gangs and criminally bent individuals far surpass anything the United States has seen before. As a result, there is a fundamental difference between individual and gang violence of today and that of the 1920's or even that of the 1950's, the era glamorized in West Side Story."

Consequently, the problem of youth gangs - and particularly gang violence - has emerged as a national juvenile justice priority. Within this context, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has identified a need for technical assistance to increase the understanding of youth gangs and the law enforcement and community responses that appear to be most effective. Therefore, this report examines the following major issues based on a review of the current literature and interviews with gang programs.

- What is a youth gang?
- What is the extent of youth gangs and gang violence?
- What are the characteristics of youth gangs and gang activities?
- What responses are required, particularly by law enforcement?
- What approaches and programs appear have an effect in controlling, reducing or preventing juvenile gang activities?

DEFINITION

There are many definitions of youth gangs, ranging from benign childhood cliques to working groups organized for crime in which the division of labor is precisely divided (Sutherland & Cressey, 1974). Furthermore, the operational definition of a youth gang within the context of a sociological study may vary from the definition used by law enforcement agencies for apprehension and prosecution purposes. For example, the sociologist, Walter Miller (1975) advanced the following concise definition of juvenile gang:

A gang is a group of recurrently associated individuals with identifiable leadership and internal organization, identifying with or claiming control over territory in the community, and engaging either individually or collectively in violent or other forms of illegal behavior.

A broader definition of youth gangs would include the following characteristics which are repeatedly identified in the literature:

- Structure -- A youth gang is a loosely knit organization of individuals whose members associate on a continuous basis.
- Membership -- Gang members are usually between 14 and 22 years of age, with a median age of 17-18. Members are typically male, although female participation according to several recent studies, is reportedly increasing.
- Ethnicity -- Youth gangs are usually organized along ethnic lines, (e.g. Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White.)
- Location -- While youth gangs tend to be concentrated in large urban areas, studies indicate that gang activity is increasing in medium and small size population centers as well as suburban and rural areas.
- Identity -- Each gang has a name and claims a territory or neighborhood which it feels obligated to protect. Monikers or nicknames are given to gang members and used in reference to one another.
- Criminal Activities -- The criminal activities of gangs are collective in nature and include violent assaults against other gangs as well as crimes against the overall population. Gang violence represents a growing crime problem in many American cities particularly due to the widespread use of firearms and the severity of the gang related offenses.
- Initiation -- Members being to identify with gangs at an early age of 7 to 9, become locked into the value system of the gang and join a gang around the age of 14 by either committing a crime or undergoing an initiation which tests the courage and fighting ability of the prospective gang member.
- Leadership -- The leadership of a youth gang usually is assumed by the strongest or boldest member who comes from the hard core of the gang and has a reputation for being violent and streetwise. However, gangs may contain more than one leader, based upon the situation at hand and the need for leadership which is not mandated on strength alone.

There are a number of additional characteristics which also describe gang members. These characteristics include:

- Loyalty
- Brotherhood
- Turf-orientation
- Emphasis on Appearances
- Uniform Clothing
- Male Chauvinism
- Issuance of Challenges
- Special Language
- Risk-taking/Adrenalin

While "gang" commonly refers to the groups of youth described above, the term is used most frequently by outsiders rather than the gang members, themselves. For example, in Hispanic communities gang members speak of their barrio, a territory claimed by a gang as well as other residents who live in the area. The word barrio communicates a sense of pride, loyalty, and camaraderie. Other terms used for American gangs include varrio, clique, Klika, and Clika.

To a great extent, juvenile gangs are viewed as a subculture which is characterized by rules, regulations, traditions and expectations. Many gangs have specific clothing styles and even their own vocabulary. For example, terms which imply having a good time include: "party down" and "kick it on down", while "ride", "light up", "make a move" and "mad dog" refer to impending confrontations.

THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

Incidence of Juvenile Gangs

Estimates of the number of juvenile gangs vary widely. A recent survey of 60 police departments by the National Juvenile Justice System Assessment Center found that almost half of the departments experienced youth gang problems; only one-third of these departments were located in urban areas with populations over 500,000. Specifically, 83% of the large population centers with over 1,000,000 in population reported gangs compared to 36% of those with populations between 500,000 and 1,000,000; 50% of cities ranging in population from 250,000 to 500,000; and 39% of the areas with populations ranging from 100,000 to 250,000 (Stapleton, Needle, 1980). An earlier study by Walter Miller (1976) found that 10 of the 15 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S.A. had youth gangs. In particular, estimates of the total number of gangs in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Detroit, and San Francisco, ranged from 760 to 2,700 with affiliated memberships of 28,500 to 81,500. A recent report by the California Attorney General's Youth Gang Task Force, (1981), identified 765 youth gangs with a membership of 52,400 in California alone.

Yet, juvenile gangs are not limited to the United States. A study in Vancouver, Canada, identified four Chinatown gangs which were involved in extortion, shoplifting and drugs (Joe, Robinson, 1980). In Britain, attention has been focused on the Mods and Skinheads, two working class youth gangs (Tanner, 1978). A study from Poland found that 76% of the juvenile delinquents spent their free time in uncontrolled groups compared to 8% of non-delinquents (Kossowska, Mosciskier, 1978). A 1965 survey of 32 countries commissioned by the United Nations identified gangs as a post World War II urban phenomenon, particularly in countries with a high degree of industrialization (Interpol, 1967). Similarly, "Bandes Jeunes" have been analyzed in Montreal (Legendre, Menard, 1973), and "Rockers" have been identified in West Germany (Wolf, Wolter, 1974). Youth gangs also have been studied in Denmark (Bernsten, 1979), Norway (Hauge, 1970), Scotland (Patrick, 1973), France (Robert, Lascoumes, 1974), and the Netherlands (Van Dijk, 1977).

Although gang members typically represent a very small proportion of a community, the attitude toward gangs, gang members and their activities is usually one of dismay tinged with fear. However, many residents may be unaware that individual youth whom they know are actually gang members. Similarly, residents are rarely aware of the names or the territorial boundaries of the gangs.

Incidence of Gang Violence

In some areas, the incidence of gang related violence has reached alarming proportions. In Los Angeles County, gang related homicides increased from 168 in 1977 to 351 in 1980. Between 1978 and 1979 overall gang violence in Los Angeles increased by 50% (Bernstein, 1980), although the most recent Los Angeles law enforcement statistics exhibit declines in gang related homicides, attempted homicides and assaults. Between 1970 and 1974 in New York City, gangs were responsible for 109 homicides in addition to sex crimes, robbery, burglary, extortion and shakedowns (Torchia et al, 1980).

In the cities of New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Detroit, and San Francisco; one-third of the violent juvenile crime was found to be committed by gangs (Miller, 1976). Additionally, 50% of the thirteen cities surveyed in the Assessment Center study stated that violent crimes including assaults, robberies, and muggings, constituted the most serious problem of juvenile gang activities (Stapleton, Needle, 1980). Nevertheless, it is difficult to identify precisely the extent of gang related crime due in part to the reluctance of gang, and even rival gang, members to report one another. Only in recent years have law enforcement agencies in major cities systematically attempted to collect and isolate such statistics.

Characteristics of Gang Violence

Youth gang violence can range from revenge for a perceived wrongdoing to competition for control over a particular criminal activity. Yet, this violence has increasingly involved sophisticated weapons, and particularly firearms including handguns, automatic weapons, and sawed-off shotguns.

The typical gang attack involves hitting with fists or blunt objects; cutting with a knife or other sharp object; shooting at an unoccupied car or a home; and shooting at a group or a specific individual. The severity of the attack is controlled. If a gang wants to warn or scare a rival gang, it may select a less damaging alternative. However, as the fighting becomes progressively more violent, the severity of the attacks increase in turn. Attacks frequently occur when the participants are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. To "build up their courage," gang members often engage in such activities as a group before an attack.

One of the most frequent violent crimes committed by youth gangs is the "drive-by shooting" when members from one gang drive by the homes, vehicles, or hangouts of the rival gang and shoot at its members. The assailants yell out their gang name or slogan so that the rival knows who is responsible. Although the gangs appear to seek notoriety, in many cases the attack is never reported to police agencies.

In addition, feuding is a primary concern of gangs. The members consider it a duty to protect their territory from outsiders, typically rival gang members. The territory may range from a few square blocks to over a square mile. Encroachment on the territory is considered a provocation and can lead to a full fledged gang war. Gang territories are identified through graffiti on the walls which often includes the name or initials of the gang in a script which is difficult for non-members to decipher. When another gang crosses out and replaces the graffiti with its own, a renewal of the feuding can readily occur. Furthermore, protecting the gang's honor and maintaining or expanding its territory frequently involves the commission of crimes against property and persons, as well as the possession and concealment of weapons.

To better understand such feuding it is useful to think of gangs as representing separate jurisdictions. Some jurisdictions are fighting with one another, others are on friendly terms, and still others are neutral. The nature of the feuds varies and may involve a long tradition of antagonism. They often escalate in conjunction with a personal disagreement and then subside when there is a sense that the score has been evened. However, the underlying animosity frequently lingers and a relatively small incident can set off the violence once again.

Gangs also do provide social activities which, to a certain degree, fill a vacuum left by the lack of family involvement and success in school and employment. Beneath the bravado of many gang members, they are frequently underachievers, doing very poorly in school, with no marketable job skills, no goal orientation and a poor self image. Not all gangs are violent and many, gang activities are primarily social in nature.

Patterns of Gang Violence in a Major Western City

Los Angeles represents a metropolitan area with a long history of youth gang problems and a number of recently established programs designed to combat youth gang violence. According to local law enforcement officials, current gang fighting is characterized by the dramatic escalation of violence tied to the availability of firearms, including "44 mags", sawed-off shotguns, hand-guns, shotguns, and rifles. Confiscated gang materials also have included military manuals describing squad tactics and other combat techniques. Each year in Los Angeles County, the large majority of gang related deaths results from the use of firearms. Conversely, combined deaths from the use of knives, beatings, and vehicles consistently represent about one-quarter of gang related deaths.

Youth gang violence in Los Angeles County is primarily intra-racial in nature. Incidents of gang violence also exhibit monthly variation; police reports consistently indicate that gang violence is heaviest in July and August. This pattern appears to be associated with the warmer weather and the consequent increase in street activity.

About two-thirds of the violence is still gang versus gang. The remaining violence can be categorized as follows: gang versus non-gang, whereby innocent third parties and bystanders are the victims; and non-gang versus gang, whereby gang members are the targets of others. Substantial porportions of gang-related crime also are directed against the property of the general public.

Much of the gang violence is spontaneous and accompanied by substance abuse. The increasing use of PCP has elicited particular concern. Gang related violence is also accompanied by a sense of martyrdom. Gang members take risks and part of the impetus for such risks is the associated martyrdom.

It is also important to note that, the County and the City of Los Angeles have emphasized collaborative responses to the youth gang problem through aggressive joint efforts between the Police Departments, the District Attorney and Probation. Through such interagency cooperation, a consensus has developed around a common goal: to remove the hard core violent gang members from the population and put them behind bars.

Over the past few years, the City of Los Angeles has noted some positive trends with respect to violent gang activities, attributable in part to improved interagency cooperation. For example, gang related homicides in Los Angeles have declined from 195 in 1980; to 167 in 1981; to 103 in 1982, a 38% reduction in the last year alone. This focus on reducing gang violence also is reflected in the decline in attempted murders from 353 in 1981 to 326 in 1982, a decrease of 7.6%. Similarly, gang related felony assaults decreased from 1982 in 1981 to 1697 in 1982, a decline of 14%. These trends have reinforced the local commitment to continue the collaborative activities of the individual justice agencies.

Four Los Angeles gang programs -- Operation Safe Streets, Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums (CRASH), Operation Hard Core and Specialized Gang Supervision -- are discussed in part III; Justice System Programs.

CHARACTERISTICS OF JUVENILE GANGS

Organization and Structure

The organization of a youth gang can range from a loose coalition of individuals that fit the criteria of a gang to a more formal organization with a strong leader or ruling body. The members forming the gang know one another and frequently will have committed crimes together. As the gang coalesces, it begins to abide by unwritten rules and procedures and to develop specified expectations for the behavior of its members. The development of rules strengthens the gang's position in the community helps to assure the continued existence of the gang.

Structurally, gangs are loosely organized and composed of a number of members who interact or "hang-out" together. Generally they have grown up together, lived near one another, and are friends. The members

tend to form internal groupings based on age. The youngest members, 12 to 15 years old, are the "kids". The oldest are young men in their early to mid-twenties who may be referred to as "veteranos". Fellow gang members are called "home boys". When a young person joins a gang, he usually assumes a moniker, adopts the gang dress, and participates in some type of initiation involving physical punishment. Moreover, it is extremely difficult for a young, active member to exit the gang since membership tends to develop a momentum of its own. To safely leave, members must physically move out of the territory. Even so, the lingering possibility of reprisals from rival gangs is an ongoing concern, both perceived and real, of former gang members.

Incentives

The motivation for joining gangs is varied. One incentive is the identity and recognition derived from gang membership which allows the member to achieve a level of status within the gang culture. A related impetus is the fellowship provided. For many youth, the gang is the major source of companionship which is reinforced by the fact that other family members and friends belong to the same gang.

An additional incentive for gang membership is protection. Youth join gangs because they live in a gang area, and are subject to violence by rival gangs. Membership provides protection in the event of attack and a basis for subsequent retaliation. A related motivation for gang membership is intimidation. Some gang members are forced into joining by associates and their peer group through physical intimidation and extortion. Finally, youth join gangs for the excitement, the risks and the challenges.

Participation

Gang participation includes several levels of involvement. The hard core members are those who are involved in the full scope of gang activities. This hard core generally includes the leaders, and the most violent and street wise members. These individuals are also the most liked and respected members within the gang. The associates are those who participate in the gang for status and recognition. Peripheral involvement is based on level of interest in specific activities.

Activities

Gang activities are primarily social and include getting together, drinking, and taking drugs. However, since activities such as loitering, drinking under age, the possession of drugs, and disturbing the peace are illegal activities, they involve the potential for law enforcement intervention. Substance abuse appears to be particularly widespread among gang members. Beer, wine, and various forms of drugs, including barbiturates, are the most commonly abused substances.

As discussed, the criminal activities of gangs frequently involve assault against other gangs or against the general public in addition to numerous crimes against property. A gang related crime is any crime committed by a gang member. The crime may have been committed by an

individual or in concert with other gang members or associates. While some gang members may work, the most active rarely have an apparent means of support. This suggests that engaging in illegal and violent activities is also a means for acquiring money.

Development

The development of a gang progresses through several stages. During the formative stage the basic identity of the gang emerges, but does not reach a level of self-perpetuation. It fails to attract new members by recruitment. When key leadership and active members are arrested, the remaining members join other gangs or cease gang activities. Consequently, the formative gang is likely to disappear altogether. For example, some gangs will be in a formative stage when their graffiti first emerges. The disappearance of the graffiti usually implies that the gang no longer exists. If, at a later stage, a different group adopts the same name and symbols, a new gang is formed.

The transitory gang stage implies that the gang has developed and is involved in gang activities and crimes. However, if leaders and active members are arrested, the remaining members temporarily cease gang activities and the gang's graffiti will cease to appear. When the leadership and key members of the gang are released from incarceration and return to their neighborhood, the gang may become active again.

A gang has reached the hard core developmental stage when it is well established in the community, in local juvenile halls, county jails, and in state youth and adult correctional institutions. Communications between different gang members, the community and the various institutions constantly take place. The hard core gangs have the greatest sense of tradition and are self-perpetuating.

Prison Gang Influence

There is increasing concern about the extent to which youth gang members are associated with, influenced, or recruited by prison gangs. In recent years, state adult correctional institutions have experienced increasing prison gang activities. Simultaneously, some prison gangs have begun recruiting youthful offenders in county jails who are facing commitment to a state institution as well as youth within the community. These new members then transmit prison gang information via mail, visitors, telephone calls, and messengers.

When the gang members enter a correctional institution, they segregate themselves from the facility's general population and profess the philosophies and beliefs consistent with their gang identity. Despite correctional institution attempts to prevent inmate power groups, gangs develop and remain a part of the institutional environment.

When prison gang members are paroled, they generally return to their old neighborhoods where they are emulated by the youth gangs. Kinship reinforces the tie between juvenile and prison gangs since the members of one family may include both youth gang and prison gang members.

IDENTIFICATION OF JUVENILE GANGS

There are a number of ways to identify the formation of youth gangs within a jurisdiction. The most prominent identifier is the appearance of graffiti. Other examples in California include hand signals, tattoos, colored bandanas, headgear, and use of gang slang. Within this context, several studies on gang identification conducted for the California Youth Authority are particularly informative. (Castenada, 1982; Torrez 1978- 1981).

Graffiti is the marking of names or symbols in public areas. To the youth gang member graffiti represents more than vandalism or a prank: graffiti is a clear definition of territorial boundaries and serves as a warning and challenge to rival gangs. Graffiti supports the gang and communicates messages between gangs, but not to the general public. A youth gang uses the graffiti for a number of purposes: to identify the existence of the gang; to mark gang territory; to identify heavily involved gang members; to make membership lists; to advertise gang exploits; to challenge other gangs; and occasionally, to announce future actions to other gangs. For example, when a gang name appears within the territory of a rival gang, or another gang's name is crossed out, the graffiti serves as a challenge.

Moreover, graffiti may have its origin in a completely different city since hard core gang members retain their gang identity when they travel. This identity is displayed by placing graffiti in their new location. Graffiti is typically coded so that the message being communicated requires translation. The uncoding of graffiti can help law enforcement officials to identify pending gang conflicts or other gang activities.

Hand signals are an important form of non-verbal gang communication. These signals enable gang members to acknowledge their own gang, to challenge rival gangs, or to indicate pending gang violence. The signals are made by forming letters or numbers with the hands and fingers to depict the gang symbol or initials.

Tattoos also identify individuals as members of a particular youth gang. The tattoo frequently includes the name, initials, or symbols of the gang, as well as the member's moniker. Such tattoos vary greatly in number, size, and ornateness.

Colored bandanas are sometimes worn by gang members. The bandana color and the manner in which it is worn indicates gang affiliation.

Headgear also facilitates gang identification. A variety of hats and caps are associated with different gangs. These include conventional baseball and golf caps, leather floppies, pork pie hats, and knit caps.

Gang slang may have different meanings in different geographic areas, as well as different connotations from one gang to another. New words are be devised over time to reflect changing slang concepts.

Frequently, lowriders are considered synonymous with youth gangs. However, the term "lowrider" describes a modified motor vehicle which has been lowered to a few inches off the ground. The vehicle usually has special items such as a small steering wheel, and "mag" wheel rims. While many gang members drive lowrider vehicles, lowrider car clubs are not necessarily involved with gangs or gang-related incidents.

THEORIES OF JUVENILE GANGS

Since the 1920s, youth gangs have been the subject of extensive research, primarily by sociologists and cultural anthropologists. Such gang characteristics as the formation of subcultures, the urban locations, the high degree of ethnic and lower socio-economic class participation, and the apparent isolation from mainstream society provides a useful context for examining collective behavior and the impact of social structure, practices, and cultural themes. While numerous theories of crime and delinquency are applicable to youth gangs, those discussed below have exerted a major influence on the understanding of gang formation, dynamics and activities.

The two most influential early studies of juvenile gangs were more descriptive than theoretical. Thrasher (1923) focused on the relationship between gangs and the consequences of urbanization (e.g., social disorganization, immigration, and the failure of the family and social institutions to control and satisfy youth). Long before labeling theory, Thrasher also noted that society's perception of, and reaction to, gangs reinforced their formation and isolation. Conversely, in Street Corner Society, Whyte (1943) found that the Italian ghetto called Cornerville was characterized by a high degree of social organization augmented by history and tradition. Gangs were, in fact, a part of the organizational stucture.

The 1950s were characterized by a proliferation of theories on delinquency, in general, and gangs, in particular. Cohen (1955) advanced the theory that lower and working class male youth were unable to gain access to legitimate means to succeed and experienced a sense of injustice and alienation. This led to the formation of delinquent subcultures epitomized by juvenile gangs. Because rejection of the dominant values and culture elicited feelings of guilt, the youth exhibited the defense mechanism known as reaction formation. This further intensified their alienation from society. Walter Miller (1958), on the other hand, hypothesized that juvenile gangs were consistent with the values and integrity of lower class culture, rather than a manifestation of conflict with the middle class. The development of delinquent subcultures was reinforced by inadequate socialization.

Another major theory, propounded by Bloch and Neiderhoffer (1958), implied that the formation of youth gangs was age-linked rather than class-linked and more prevalent than previously believed. Specifically, Bloch and Neiderhoffer hypothesized that the gang was an adaptive response to the conflicts and confusion of adolescence, and particularly the inadequate way in which society prepares adolescents for adulthood.

One of the most influential theories from both a theoretical and policy perspective was advanced by Cloward and Ohlin in Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs (1960). Building on the earlier theories of delinquent subculture set forth by Cohen (1955) and Merton (1957), the opportunity theory postulates that lower class male adolescents internalize the conventional goals of society but have limited opportunities to obtain these goals by socially approved means. Within this context, gangs are motivated by actual or anticipated failure to legitimately achieve success. An emphasis on democracy which is not accompanied by equal opportunity gives rise to feelings of injustice and discrimination. This encourages youth to seek support from one another, resulting in the formation of a delinquent subculture and gangs. Within this subculture, the rules for delinquency and attainment of status are defined by the gang's orientation. Based on analysis of gangs in a number of urban cities, Cloward and Ohlin categorized these orientations as follows:

- The criminal orientation;
- The conflict and violence orientation; and
- Gangs oriented to the use of drugs.

Influential theory derived from actual observation of juvenile gangs was set forth in The Violent Gang by Lewis Yablonsky (1962). In a departure from the cultural emphasis of his predecessors, Yablonsky hypothesized that a variety of negative sociocultural forces in the community result in defective socialization which in turn produces sociopathic personalities. The loosely organized gangs led by and composed of sociopaths are primarily oriented toward violent behavior. Another major contribution to the knowledge of gangs, Group Process and Gang Delinquency presented the results of a massive research project conducted by Short and Strodtbeck (1965). The authors compared the differences between gang and non-gang groups and found:

- A high degree of heterogeneity between and within gangs;
- The absence of any truly criminal gangs; and
- A change in the adaptations and orientations by individual gangs.

The research also described a variety of gang characteristics including leadership, values, and dynamics.

The research described briefly above, represents a range of theoretical perspectives that have addressed the phenomenon of youth gangs. In addition to enhancing the general understanding of youth gang formation, dynamics and behavior, these theories and others have exerted a major influence on the development of both policies and programs.

SUMMARY

Many communities have a long history of juvenile gang activity. In addition, juvenile gangs have been the focus of extensive research and theories since the early 1900s. Yet, the problem is generating increasing concern nationwide. The number of gangs and gang members have increased and the level of gang-related violence appears to be escalating.

Despite some variations, youth gangs throughout America share a number of characteristics. In many ways, gangs constitute a culture apart from mainstream society and have limited contact with traditional institutions. The gang is comprised of friends and acquaintances called "home boys", who are bound together by a strong sense of loyalty.

Gang members have a strong sense of neighborhood pride and control specific territories which may range from a few square blocks to over a square mile. Gangs can be readily identified by their graffiti, clothing, tattoos, and slang. Their activities are primarily social in nature: getting together, talking, drinking, and taking drugs. However, the members often become involved in illegal activities which subject them to arrest. Because the most active gang members rarely have an apparent means of support, illegal and sometimes violent activities also are necessary to acquire money. Illegal activities typically include loitering, drinking under age, the use and possession of drugs, disturbing the peace, and offenses such as burglary, robbery and assault.

YOUTH GANGS: THE RESPONSE

Officer Krupke, you're really a slob
This boy don't need a doctor, just a good,
honest job,
Society's played him a terrible trick
And sociologically, he's sick.

Eek!

Officer Krupke, you've done it again,
This boy don't need a job, he needs a year
in the pen.
It ain't just a question of misunderstood
Deep down inside him, he's no good.

- West Side Story (1956)

Over the years, the community response to juvenile gangs has alternately reflected the two perspectives presented to Officer Krupke: the rehabilitation/prevention model and the social control model. Social service agencies, influenced strongly by sociological and cultural anthropological theories of delinquency, primarily devoted their efforts to preventing unaffiliated youth from joining gangs and preventing marginally affiliated youth from escalated gang participation.

Recognizing the relationships between gang involvement, educational problems, and truancy, schools also focused on the "at risk" youth, often through remedial education programs. However, since many active gang members already had dropped out or been expelled, school efforts were de facto limited to early identification and prevention.

The early programs such as the Cincinnati Social Experiment (1916), the Chicago Area Project (1930s-1950s) and New York's Mobilization for Youth (1957-mid-1960s) represented community involvement programs designed to prevent delinquency in general. During the 1950s, the New York City Youth Board, the Roxbury Project in Boston, and Our Lady's Youth Center in El Paso specifically attempted to diminish the level of gang involvement. The methods ranged from "detached workers" who involved gang members in social and recreational activities (New York) or provided psychotherapy (Boston) to the energetic efforts of an El Paso priest to improve communications with gang members and find them jobs (Quicker, 1981).

With the assistance of government and private funding, a number of action programs were developed in the 1960s. The Chicago Youth Development Project focused on serious delinquents, including gang members. Extension workers (a variation of the detached worker theme) worked directly with the youth and, more importantly, worked on behalf of the youth as intermediaries with the schools, law enforcement and potential employers.

The Group Guidance Project of the Los Angeles County Probation Department utilized Group Guidance Workers to intervene with gang members while the Los Angeles Ladino Hills Project attempted to reduce gang cohesiveness and delinquency and ultimately dissolve the gang through increasing youth opportunities (Quicker, 1981) in employment and other constructive activities.

These efforts, however, rarely reached the hard core gang members. In addition, some of these activities may have contributed to delinquency by increasing youth contacts with delinquents and delinquent behavior patterns (Sutherland, 1974).

The role of the justice system, on the other hand, has continued to emphasize apprehension, prosecution and either rehabilitation or punishment, depending on the predominant correctional philosophy of the time. Yet, the lack of coordinated and systematic justice system strategies and the popular but relatively limited social service prevention efforts did not permit a particularly effective response to the problem of juvenile gangs.

In recent years, however, the apparent proliferation of gangs and increases in gang violence have focused attention and resources on improving the response of the justice system in general, and law enforcement in particular. While recognizing the potential role of community agencies, the next two sections of the report focus on law enforcement strategies, approaches and programs directed toward the control and reduction of juvenile gangs.

LAW ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM ORGANIZATION

There are three common organizational approaches used by police departments to address youth gang problems:

- Youth Service Program: Police personnel, typically the Youth Division or Youth Service Bureau, are responsible for gang control in addition to other departmental functions.
- Gang Detail: One or more officers, usually from the youth or detective units, handle youth gangs. This detail typically maintains an exclusive focus on gang control.
- Gang Unit: A specialized police unit is established to deal exclusively with gang problems. The gang unit usually incorporates full time intelligence capabilities.

Police departments find it increasingly necessary to coordinate and informally exchange information with other police agencies and government and community agencies to facilitate coordinated responses to gang problems. Within the context of this collaborative approach, enforcement

personnel strive to incapacitate gang leaders and the most visible gang members. This strategy is directed towards the gang itself rather than individual members. Special control strategies generally focus on incarceration, aggressive prosecution, and stiff sentencing with an emphasis placed on punishment and incapacitation rather than diversion and release.

Collaborative approaches also involve increasing youth gang awareness of police surveillance, encouraging community members to introduce police to youth gangs, and encouraging youth gangs to communicate with the police regarding their problems.

YOUTH GANG CONTROL FUNCTION

Youth gang control by police departments encompasses, and may go beyond, the traditional law enforcement responsibilities of intelligence, enforcement, investigation, and apprehension.

Intelligence involves gathering, filing, retrieving, and analyzing information on youth gangs and individual members as well as gang activities. Enforcement includes such traditional police practices as street patrol and direct surveillance. The strategies most frequently used to apprehend gang members suspected of crimes are rapid patrol response during, and immediately subsequent to the commission of crimes, immediate follow-up investigation by patrol officers or specialized gang personnel, and more traditional follow-up investigation. Generally, apprehension is followed by referral to the juvenile court, or where statutorily possible and appropriate, waiver to adult court.

Police gang control strategies may also focus on deterrence through prevention. These programs typically include recreational and informational activities such as police athletic leagues; neighborhood and parent meetings to help identify, counsel, and refer troubled youth; school-based programs comprised of counseling and crime prevention work; improving police-youth relations; and informing students about employment and social service opportunities. Gang prevention can also include direct interaction between youth workers and gang leaders; providing opportunities for leaders of competing gangs to talk and mediate problems; joint police and gang leader mediation efforts; and the removal of gang leaders through arrest and prosecution. Preventive patrol and street work represent more traditional options. Prevention is frequently a community endeavor involving social service agencies and private organizations in addition to the police.

C. COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY GANG CONTROL

According to the National Juvenile Justice System Assessment Center, "a comprehensive community gang control program is the preferred method in dealing with youth gang problems" (Stapleton, Needle, 1982). Organized on a county-wide basis, this effort ideally involves all municipal- and county-based organizations concerned with actual or potential gang

members. Although activities are directed toward common goals, the autonomy of individual agencies is not impaired. Police participation and leadership is considered essential; the inclusion of prosecutors, judges, probation and parole agencies, and social service agencies enhances the overall effectiveness of the program.

The Center specifically recommends that such programs be given formal status backing and financial support by key community officials. To overcome the common programmatic problems of fragmentation and absence of fixed responsibility, the program would:

- Determine the extent of the community's gang problem;
- Analyze the characteristics of the gang members;
- Establish community and individual agency objectives with respect to gang control;
- Formulate specific programmatic responses;
- Mobilize the necessary resources to implement the strategies selected;
- Evaluate program results; and
- Train program participants.

YOUTH GANG PROGRAMS

OPERATION SAFE STREETS: Los Angeles County Sheriff

Operation Safe Streets
Los Angeles County Sheriff
211 W. Temple, #701
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 974-5016
Contact: Chuck Bradley

The first Sheriff's Department Gang Detail was created in 1939; forty years later Operation Safe Streets (OSS) was established through a \$650,000 Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) grant with second year funding of \$484,000. This program represents an LEAA project which was assumed and expanded through local funding by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office.

OSS operates out of nine selected police stations in areas of Los Angeles County with significant juvenile gang activity. The Sheriff's Department presently estimates that 405 active youth gangs exist within Los Angeles County. These gangs vary in size; the smaller gangs have 10 to 20 members while some of the larger gangs have as many as 1200 members. In each of the nine police stations the OSS unit is staffed by one sergeant and three deputies. These OSS operations maintain a "high profile" by emphasizing community relations and visibility in the neighborhoods in which they work. The units become involved in any Sheriff Department case involving gangs, including gang victims or suspected gang members.

Presently 39 Sheriff's Deputies are assigned to OSS on a permanent basis. The selection criteria are stringent and emphasize interpersonal skills. Within the Sheriff's Office the group is viewed as an elite unit and over 200 officers have applied for the available positions.

The OSS program is designed to provide selective enforcement to eliminate the criminal activities of hard core gangs and to discourage gang followers from continuing such activities. After an incident of youth gang violence, the appropriate OSS unit immediately launches the investigation. This includes identifying the gang members involved and locating appropriate witnesses in addition to contacts with community residents, school officials, informants, peripheral gang members, and relatives.

The OSS units are not merely reactive, but place a strong emphasis on prevention and deterrence. Emphasis is also placed on daily intelligence gathering to reduce gang crimes more effectively and identify unreported gang activity as well as reported incidents.

Successful prosecution of gang members is one of the most important enforcement tasks. OSS members work with victims and witnesses who fear reprisal by the gangs to encourage their cooperation and to assure them that enforcement actions will be taken. These actions include removal of the hard core gang leadership who organize gang activities, thereby reducing gang violence and recruitment.

To enhance their community identity OSS investigators wear "soft clothes", rather than conspicuous uniforms and use undercover vehicles to secure the cooperation of street contacts and make on-site arrests.

To combat the underlying problem of gang violence, the OSS units emphasize the enforcement of laws against criminal activity, including substance abuse. OSS deputies stress that if the law is broken, the gang member should expect to go to jail. This enforcement does not reflect anything "personal" between the OSS deputy and individual gang members. In fact, in their day-to-day enforcement activities, OSS deputies emphasize developing a sense of fairness in dealing with gang members. Since the units were formed in 1979, only one assault on a deputy has been reported.

In summary, OSS is a decentralized program consisting of nine teams working out of police stations in areas of high gang activity. OSS deputies do not wear a Sheriff's uniform and strive to maintain ongoing communications with gang members. Although law enforcement is a major component of the program, prevention is considered a key measurement of success. According to the program staff, the recent reduction of gang related incidences reflects the impact of the combined prevention and enforcement activities.

CRASH: LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT

CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums)
Los Angeles Police Department
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Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 485-2501
Contact: Bob Ruchhoft

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) also operates a gang unit called CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums). The LAPD is organized into four bureaus; CRASH programs are located in three of the bureaus with partial coverage in the fourth. The lieutenant in charge of the program in each district works closely with unit supervisors and officers.

CRASH is a proactive program, with an emphasis on prevention and immediate response to all gang related calls. The officers working in the CRASH program are expected to become familiar with youth gang activities in their area, known gang hangouts and members, and gang habits, (e.g., where gang cruising takes place). The officers respond to any calls that involve gang related incidents and gather information to identify gang members. CRASH police officers are also responsible for coordinating appropriate responses to gang violence. Following a drive-by shooting, for example, police personnel may saturate the area to avoid a "payback" incident.

The CRASH units emphasize law enforcement specialization and decentralization. The positions are viewed as a prestigious assignment and the participating officers develop a specialization and identity consistent with focus on gang activities. For example, they are not expected to respond to routine radio calls, and are allowed to wear a combination of uniforms and plain clothes, depending on the requirements of the situation. The prestige of the assignment derives from the opportunity to become more specialized and knowledgeable in a specific area rather than from additional pay. The CRASH units are flexible, and can deploy officers immediately to the location of a problem.

Within each of the CRASH units, the lieutenant in charge supervises between 35 and 45 officers. The staffing includes both uniformed and detective personnel who collaborate on both types of assignments. The large staff reflects the seriousness of gang related problems; at least 110 gangs have been identified within the City of Los Angeles. Approximately 12,000 gang members are known to the police and an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 additional gang members have not been identified.

According to the LAPD, the patterns of gang-related activities are changing: some of the more serious gang related crimes such as murder, felony, and assault, have decreased while other offenses such as robbery

and theft, have increased. In addition, motorcycle gangs represent a more sophisticated and organized type of gang and appear to be extensively involved in large scale commercial operations including narcotics trafficking and extortion of legitimate businesses. Gang violence and particularly the use of firearms is another increasing law enforcement problem.

SPECIALIZED GANG SUPERVISION PROGRAM: PROBATION

Specialized Gang Supervision Program
Los Angeles County Probation Department
144 S. Fetterly Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90022
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Contact: Miguel Duran

The Specialized Gang Supervision Program (SGSP) was founded in 1980 in response to growing public concern over juvenile gang violence. Supported primarily through county probation funds, the SGSP has several objectives: reducing the rate of homicides committed by gang members who are under probation supervision and reducing the incidence of other gang related violence by probationers through improved probation control and surveillance. An emphasis is placed on compliance with all probation conditions and the prompt handling of probation violations by returning offenders to court for appropriate disposition. The SGSP consists of five decentralized units which geographically concentrate staff in neighborhoods with the highest incidence of gang activity. These areas are characterized by a large youth population, substandard housing and a high unemployment rate. Offenders are referred to the SGSP from various sources including regular probation officers, police, schools, parents, and the courts. Each unit supervises up to 400 gang-oriented offenders and consists of one supervising deputy probation officer, eight deputy probation officers, and clerical and administrative support. The maximum case load maintained by individual officers is 50, significantly lower than regular probation caseloads which can exceed 200 offenders. The SGSP caseloads consist of both adult and juvenile offenders, with the age range concentrated between 14 to 25 years. Approximately 70% of the offenders on an individual caseload are juveniles with the remaining 30% comprised of adults.

The units maintain close communication with law enforcement agencies as well as the District Attorney, the courts and corrections. The SGSP deputy probation officers also work closely with schools and other community-based agencies. The officers are expected to become well-known in their communities and spend a significant portion of their time in the field providing extended supervision (e.g. nights and weekends). The supervising probation officers are responsible for coordination with other special gang programs and become involved in extraordinary cases which might attract attention by the media or other agencies.

Staff assigned to the program undergo specialized training on a continuous basis. This training has included review of penal codes, conversation spanish, street gang dynamics and counseling skills. A small research and monitoring component regularly compiles statistics for quantitative assessments of program effectiveness and an audit team conducts qualitative evaluations.

An emerging program priority is collaborative programming with youth on probation caseloads. This involves leadership and responsibility workshops as well as involvement with community-based agencies. These efforts, supported financially by the community, are designed to aid in rehabilitating willing probationers.

OPERATION HARD CORE: DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Deputy District Attorney
Hard Core Gang Division
18000 Criminal Courts Building
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Los Angeles, CA 90012
Contact: Peter S. Berman

Operation Hard Core was established through an LEAA grant of \$327,011 and began operations in January 1979. Second year LEAA funding of \$352,248 was received. As with several other gang programs in Los Angeles, subsequent funding was provided by the County. The unit has grown from an original staff of seven attorneys to a current total of 20.

Operation Hard Core emphasizes selective prosecutorial efforts and coordination with law enforcement. The District Attorney's Office vigorously prosecutes suspected gang members and provides legal support for gang enforcement efforts. This includes legal advice to the police, particularly regarding search warrants. Operation Hard Core attorneys also are expected occasionally to ride with police officers to enhance their understanding of gangs in the community.

To ensure the effectiveness of the selective, targeted prosecution, gang cases are regarded as high priority and are assigned to specially trained attorneys. These attorneys have access to additional resources such as investigative support and reduced caseloads which permit increased formalization of discovery, written follow-up investigations, and legal research as well as assisting witnesses. The concept of vertical prosecution similar to that found in career criminal prosecution programs is also emphasized. Consequently, Operation Hard Core attorneys are responsible for their cases from beginning to end and the same deputy prosecutes both juveniles and adults suspected of the same crime.

In addition, the attorneys are involved in case preparation from the earliest stages. Through close collaboration with law enforcement, the District Attorney's office can help them to obtain necessary search warrants for gang safe houses, armories where gang weapons are stored, and other locations where gang members congregate. Attorneys from the unit may accompany the police to execute these warrants. For example, the Operation Safe Streets program operated by the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department has received District Attorney support to search over 600 houses which resulted in the confiscation of numerous weapons.

The activities of Operation Hard Core were specifically designed in response to a number of gang related prosecution problems. A major problem is the collection of evidence due to the collective nature of gang crimes. The criminal justice system generally deals with individuals who are arrested and adjudicated for individual criminal

acts. However, multiple defendant cases represent a unique set of logistical problems, particularly due to the potential for time delays. Other problems include the prosecution of juveniles and adults who are involved in the same case, but must be tried in different courts and the difficulties inherent in successfully prosecuting accomplices and accompanying individuals who participate in gang crimes.

Witnesses represent an especially important issue for selective gang prosecution. Witnesses are hesitant to become involved in these prosecutions for many reasons. Because witnesses are often from areas controlled by gangs they are vulnerable to, and fearful of, gang retaliation. By maintaining small case loads, Operation Hard Core staff are able to work with important witnesses early, spend sufficient time and maintain continuous contact to cultivate their support. Operation Hard Core attorneys also attempt to develop rapport with witnesses by visiting with them in their homes and neighborhoods to reinforce the importance of witness cooperation. Securing sworn statements and taped interviews from witnesses early in the prosecution process helps to reduce witness intimidation as well. Funds are available to cover witness relocation expenses when this is required. Assistance in finding new employment and new living quarters is provided, as well.

A draft evaluation of Operation Hard Core indicates that the program's selective prosecution of youth gang members has been effective. The evaluation assessed the extent to which Operation Hard Core has improved the performance of the Criminal Justice System by addressing identified prosecution problems associated with serious gang-related cases. Specifically, the evaluation focused on the performance of the program with gang homicide cases and defendants in three areas: dispositions, strength of convictions and sentencing. The methodology compared cases handled by Operation Hard Core to cases handled by the District Attorney prior to the program and cases handled through regular prosecution channels.

With respect to dispositions, the evaluation found an increase in the conviction rates of offenders prosecuted by Operation Hard Core, a decrease in dismissal rates and an increase in trial convictions rates. Operation Hard Core had little effect on plea rates and trial rates. In terms of convictions, Operation Hard Core resulted in an increase in the rate of convictions, the rate of pleas and the rate of trial convictions on the most serious charge, including enhancements. For the Operation Hard Core cases, the sentences exhibited an increase in incarceration rates and a higher rate of commitment to state prison compared to commitment to the California Youth Authority.

CRISIS INTERVENTION NETWORK, INC.

1415 North 4th Street
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Contact: Benny J. Swans, Jr.

By the mid-1970s, increasing youth gang violence in Philadelphia had become a widely publicized source of concern. In response to this problem, the Crisis Intervention Network, Inc. (CIN) was formed.

CIN is a non-profit organization comprised of 30 gang counselors who prevent gang violence by mediating conflicts. These counselors are carefully recruited and many are ex-gang members. They are responsible for patrolling five main sections in Philadelphia in cars equipped with two-way radios.

Each of the teams consists of six members with one member designated as the team captain. A probation officer is also assigned to each CIN unit. Typically, the team members reside in the neighborhoods where they work. Through the radio system, the teams maintain contact with a 24-hour central communication center. Team members are continually watching for signs of neighborhood gang tension and violence. They try to diffuse explosive situations and report the results back to the central switchboard. This central switchboard in turn maintains contact with the city police, schools, probation, and other agencies. The center has access to the police radio frequency and parents and other community residents also are encouraged to phone the center with rumors or concerns regarding gang confrontations. As a result, the switchboard can provide timely information to the CIN teams regarding potential gang confrontations.

The primary focus of the program is direct prevention of gang violence through crisis intervention. Members of the CIN team work with the community to prevent minor incidents from escalating into violent confrontations and gang retaliations. The CIN teams are not police units and carry no weapons. The emphasis is placed on active, indigenous neighborhood efforts and the immediate dispatch of mobile gang counselors to the scene of an impending dispute. CIN works cooperatively with other city departments in accordance with a directive issued from the mayor's office.

The program has broadened its activities beyond gang related crisis intervention to cultivate grassroots support from parents, schools, and community organizations. It also serves as a community referral agency seeking to connect youth with various city employment and social programs.

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