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**Social Correlates of Adolescence  
and Subsequent Gang-Related Crime<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

Arrest data covering five years are combined with survey and official records data from early adolescence in this longitudinal study of 432 inner-city minority youth. The youth constitute a population of attending Latino and African-American males in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades enrolled in four Chicago middle schools in 1987. Chicago police data and school records through 1992 are used to identify early adolescent correlates of subsequent gang-related and non-gang-related arrests. In particular, a scale of self-reported gang activity is significantly related to subsequent gang-related arrests. Measures of self-esteem based on family, school, and peers also reveal distinctly different profiles across ethnic groups, arrest history, and whether or not arrests are identified by police as gang-related. These factors are coupled with self-reported data on involvement in school and family activities gathered in early adolescence producing results that make it possible to suggest potentially successful intervention programs that can be pursued by policy makers interested in preventing gang-involvement and delinquency-involvement as early in life as possible.

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This research examines the social processes by which adolescents become involved in gang-related crime. Methodologically, it is a longitudinal study of a population of adolescent minority males from a community that constitutes an at-risk milieu for gang involvement. The study site is a neighborhood on the near northwest side of Chicago. The study population is one upon which cross-sectional analyses have been conducted with some degree of thoroughness (Spergel and Curry, 1990; Curry and Spergel, 1992). Here we explore the social correlates from early adolescence that are associated with subsequent arrest and identification of gang involvement in the official records of the Chicago Police Department.

### **Study Population**

An effort was made to develop and analyze official records histories for 439 adolescent males originally included in the 1988 "Socialization to Gangs Database." The "Socialization to Gangs" data set was constructed in 1987 by surveying all attending male students in the sixth through eighth grades at four middle schools from a low income neighborhood in the near northwest area of Chicago. The selection of schools was made by Chicago Public Schools administration as middle schools with serious gang problems. The motivation for selecting the schools was that the communities surrounding them were marked by disproportionate numbers of gang homicides in Chicago's police records. As shown in Figure 2, the original four schools are in a contiguous neighborhood; each, within nine city blocks of one of the others. The greatest distance between any two schools is a little over one mile. Three of the schools were integrated Latino and African-American, and the fourth (identified as School IV) had a totally African-American student body. The original survey

data set consisted of 139 Latino students and 300 African-American students. Over the course of the study information was lost on three Latino students and four African-American students. The ages of the youths included in the study are shown in Figure 1. The location of the four middle schools and the residence locations of the youths in the study are shown in Figure 2.

Though the potential contribution to our knowledge of a longitudinal follow-up of the "Socialization to Gangs" population is great, there were some limitations built into the initial study. Available research, police data, and community concern, at the time that the data were collected, maintained that males should be the primary focus in attempting to deal with gang problems. Though practitioner and research concerns have changed greatly since the gathering of the 1988 data, the dominant perceptions of the time and limited resources led to the construction of a data base that included only males. Another limitation is an inability to distinguish among Latino subpopulations. Chicago school records do not routinely distinguish between Puerto Rican and Mexican students. From school and census records for the community, it is, however, known that the breakdown between Puerto Rican and Mexican students for the community is approximately fifty-fifty. Latino students were given the option of answering the survey in Spanish or English. This inability to compare Puerto Rican and Mexican research subjects is found in other research on crime in Chicago (Block, 1992).

The conduct of a survey of school children is always subject to the requirements of parental consent and attendance (Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, and Radosevich, 1979). Of the cohort population of 975 males between 11 and 15 years of age, 439 or 45 percent completed our survey instruments. Approximately fifty parents did not give written consent

for their children to participate in the study. The majority of non-participation, though, can, for the most part, be attributed to non-attendance at school. Statistical comparisons of students surveyed with the entire population of students as represented in school and police records showed those not surveyed to have significantly lower achievement scores in math and reading and significantly higher rates of absence from school and contact with the police. Even at the early age targeted by the "Socialization to Gangs" study, there was already a subpopulation of male minority students who did not regularly attend school and who had significantly greater levels of officially recorded delinquent behavior. There are no significant differences between the two groups in average age or grade in school. Thus, we feel safe in assuming that the adolescent population included in our study represents that portion of their cohort, who in early adolescence, were in relative conformity with behavior associated with the hypothetical achievement of middle class conventional goals, i.e. school attendance, little prior contact with police, and higher levels of academic achievement. In this study, we examine what happened to these "conforming" youths after the passage of five years and attempt to explain at least in statistical terms what factors may have contributed to these outcomes. More importantly it is our goal to suggest policies and interventions that might have prevented less desirable outcomes.

### **Study Setting**

Chicago is a city that has been identified as a "chronic" gang city by national-level studies of gang crime problems (Spergel & Curry, 1993). Chronic gang cities are described as those with a long history of gang problems in which these problems have been officially recognized and have been the subject of an institutionalized response prior to 1980. Activity

has been recorded as early as the late 1960's for a number of gangs such as the Vicelords and the Disciples which are still active in Chicago at the time of this study (Perkins, 1987; Monroe & Goldman, 1988; Dawley, 1992). Gangs in chronic gang problem cities are generally assumed to be better organized and involved in more serious violence than gangs in cities where problems are more recent. Jacobs (1977) described how during the early seventies Chicago street gangs were at the same time receiving external funding from federal and foundation sources and organizing the structure of crime within Stateville Prison. Figure 3 shows the geographic distribution of gang-related crime in the study neighborhood from 1987 to 1992.

#### Official Police Records of Arrest and Gang-Involvement

Identification by the police as a gang member is a very conservative outcome measure to use, but we feel that its conservative nature and the seriousness of such an official label enhances rather than detracts from our study. Table 1 shows the arrest outcomes in 1992 for the Chicago youths included in the study. Figures 4 and 5 show the breakdown by arrest and type of arrest for each ethnic group. A greater proportion of the African-American youths

Outcome	Latino		African-American	
	n	%	n	%
No Arrests	95	69.9	143	48.3
Non-Gang Arrest	23	16.9	79	26.7
Gang Arrest	18	13.2	74	25.0

have been arrested -- over half, and a greater proportion of African-American youths who have been arrested, have been identified as offenders in gang-related incidents.

The Chicago Police Department (CPD) definition of what constitutes a gang-related criminal incident is comparatively a conservative one. The Department employs what Maxson and Klein (1990) label a "motive definition". Under a motive definition, a criminal incident is classified as gang-related only if the criminal incident furthers a collective purpose or motive of the gang. Maxson and Klein (p. 77) list as motives "retaliation, territoriality, recruiting, and 'representing' (graffiti, wearing gang colors, shouting gang slogans, . . . )" In contrast, up until recently, Los Angeles County and city law enforcement employed what researchers call a "member definition." Under a member definition, all that is required for a crime incident to be classified as gang-related is that the perpetrator or victim be identified as a gang member. The result of applying the narrower definition of gang motive from Chicago to Los Angeles homicide data led Maxson and Klein to conclude that the Chicago definition "yields about half as many gang homicides as does a member-based definition."

The conservativeness of the Chicago definition makes our findings for our population of "at-risk" youths all the more telling. That 30.1% of the Latino youths were arrested in the five years of the study of which 43.9% were identified as being involved in gang-related incidents and that 51.7% of the African-American youths were arrested of which 48.4% were identified as involved in gang-related incidents attests to the degree to which the study population were indeed "at risk".

Youths ever arrested as offenders in gang related incidents had a greater average number of arrests than youths not so identified. Table 2 shows average number of arrests for

youths not identified as gang-involved by police and those so identified by ethnicity. For both Latinos and African-Americans, the average total number of arrests for youths identified by the police as gang-involved as compared to those not so identified is significantly greater.

Table 2. Average Number of Total Arrests by Ever Offender in Gang-Related Arrest.		
Ethnicity	No Gang-Related Arrest	Gang-Related Arrest
Latino	1.26	6.44
African-American	1.84	5.34

Differences by Gang-Related Arrest Statistically Significant at 0.01 level.  
Differences by Ethnicity Not Statistically Significant.

### Self-Reported Gang-Involvement in Early Adolescence

A major concern of the original study was the development of scales that could be used as early indicators of gang-involvement and that might serve as predictors of subsequent more serious gang-involvement. Table 3 shows the items included in the scale. The scale is described in more detail by Curry and Spergel (1992). Table 4 shows that we can only partially be pleased with the capacity of the early adolescent scale to predict subsequent more serious gang involvement. While the difference in average gang-involvement scores for the youths with at least one gang-related arrest and the youths with no arrests are statistically significant for youths from both ethnic populations, the differences between average gang-involvement scores for youths who have been arrested without gang identification are not significantly different from either of the other two groups. So what we have is a measure of early adolescent gang-involvement that can distinguish gang-related offenders from non-offenders, but the measure does not distinguish between non-gang offenders and non-

offenders or gang-involved offenders. There are statistically significant relationships between the gang-involvement scale scores and total number of arrests for youths in each ethnic population.

Item	Latino		African-American	
	n	%	n	%
Wear Gang Colors	43	30.9	82	27.3
Advantage in Membership	37	26.6	104	34.7
Hangout with Gang Members	38	27.3	112	37.3
Deviancy with Gang Members	22	15.8	66	22.0
Gang Member Friends	22	15.8	46	15.3
Flash Gang Signs	11	7.9	54	18.0
Attacked in Gang Fight	1	0.7	20	6.7
Attacker in Gang Fight	4	2.9	11	3.7
Item Separable Reliability	.93		.97	

Arrest Status	Latino	African-American
No Arrests	1.08	1.08
No Gang-Related Arrest	1.57	1.37
Gang-Related Arrest	2.06	1.69

Differences between Gang-Related Arrest Group and No Arrest Group are statistically significant at 0.05 level using Scheffe's test for differences across multiple groups. Differences between Arrests without Gang Identification is not statistically different from either of the other two groups.

### **Additional Factors Associated with Arrest and Gang-Involvement**

In earlier analyses of the "Socialization to Gangs" data base, structural equations models of self-reported gang-involvement and delinquency were constructed. We have not yet completed the model-building process on these longitudinal data. We do, however, have some preliminary results. For either ethnic population, age is not statistically related to being arrested, being arrested in a gang-related incident, or total number of arrests. One variable, self-esteem, has been given a great deal of attention in recent gang intervention program literature. It has been observed, however, (Spergel, 1990) that existing research on gang-involvement is either insubstantial or contradictory. In the "Socialization to Gangs" survey, the Hare self-esteem scale that treats "self-esteem" as having three components -- family, school, and peer group -- was employed. The results of comparing the three groups that emerge from our longitudinal study on the multiple-component self-esteem measure are interesting and may have policy implications for increased focus on self-esteem among practitioners. For the Latino population, the major difference between youths with gang arrests and youths with no arrests is in terms of school-based self-esteem. For the African-American population, the significant difference is in family-based self-esteem. Table 5 shows these differences.

Table 5. Average Self-Esteem Score by Source by Arrest and Gang-Involvement Outcomes.			
Latinos			
Arrest Status	Family	School *	Peer
No Arrests	3.22	2.80	2.74
No Gang-Related Arrest	3.17	2.83	2.67
Gang-Related Arrest	2.96	2.56	2.83
African-Americans			
Arrest Status	Family *	School	Peer
No Arrests	3.38	2.87	2.83
No Gang-Related Arrest	3.26	2.81	2.80
Gang-Related Arrest	3.10	2.83	2.77
Differences between Gang-Related Arrest Group and No Arrest Group are statistically significant at 0.05 level.			

### Conclusions

At this point, the analysis of longitudinal arrest data on the "Socialization to Gangs" population is continuing. Preliminary findings already provide some pieces of information relevant to policy. First, it is possible to identify at-risk populations of youths based on the social ecology of the neighborhoods in which they reside and attend school. In this case, the Chicago Public Schools were able to select an at-risk population. Second, for the population under study, youths identified by the police as offenders in gang-related crimes have on the average a greater number of offenses than youths not so identified. Third, it is possible to use gang-involvement prediction measures applied in early adolescence to successfully distinguish between youths less likely to be arrested in subsequent years from those more likely to be arrested as offenders in gang-related incidents. Such scales have not, however,

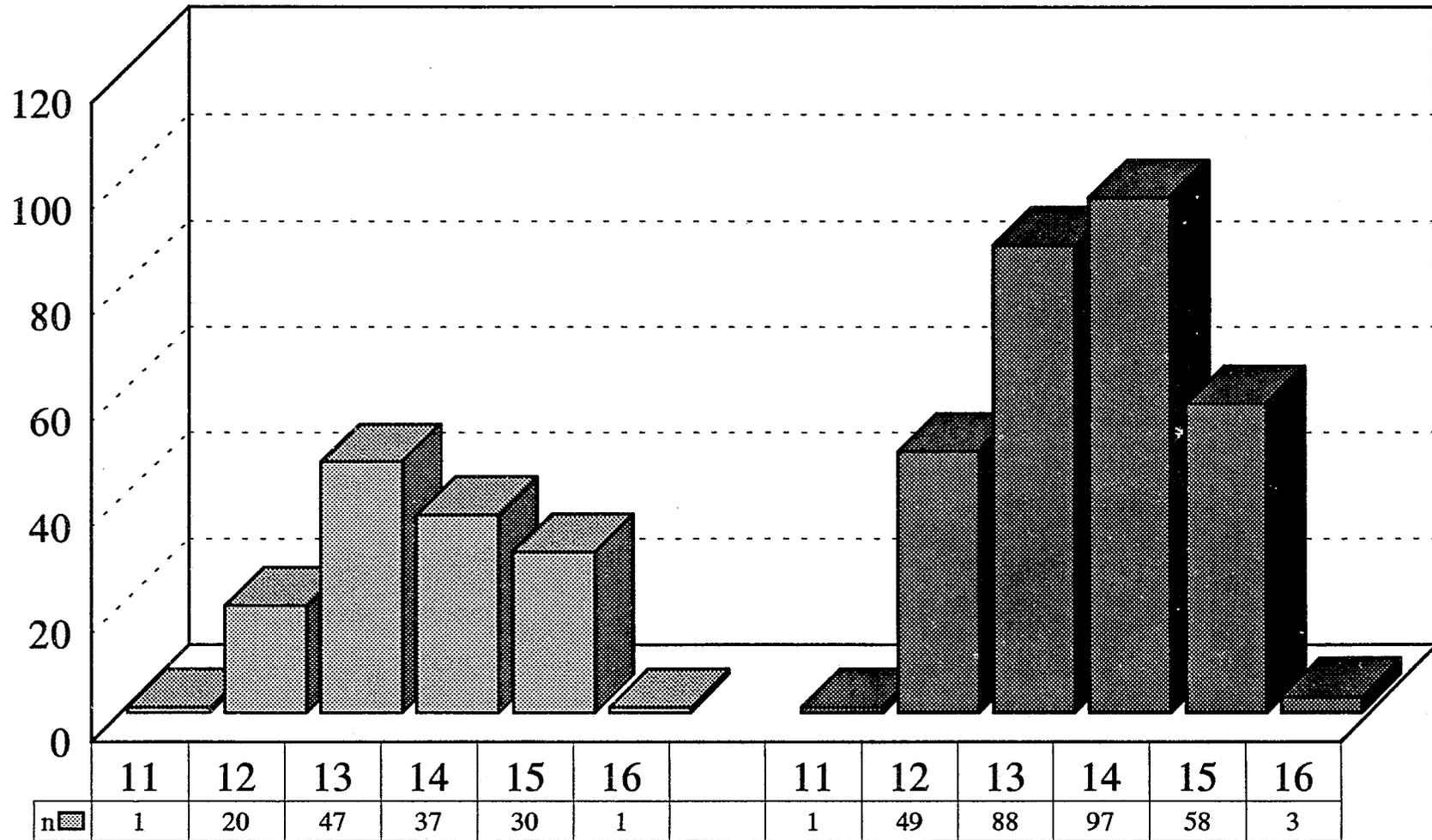
been refined to the degree that they can distinguish between gang and non-gang delinquents and non-gang delinquents and non-delinquents. There are social correlates of gang-related crime that must be taken into account in developing gang-involvement prevention programs. Such factors should be given particular consideration in the development of programs such as the Family Youth Service Bureau's current "gang-proofing" initiative.

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# Study Participants by Age (1 Jan 1988)

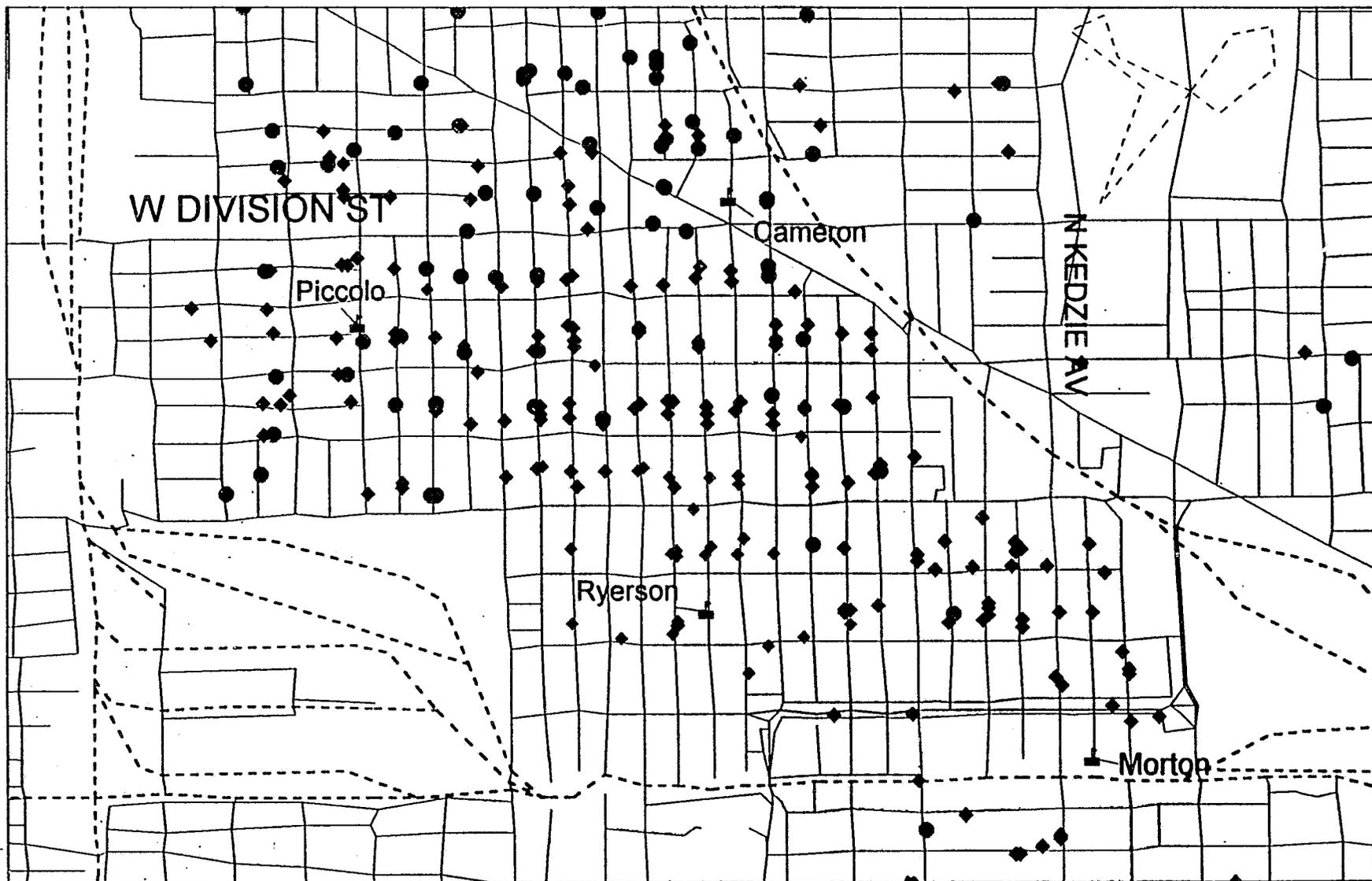
## 432 Chicago Youths



**Latino**

**African-American**

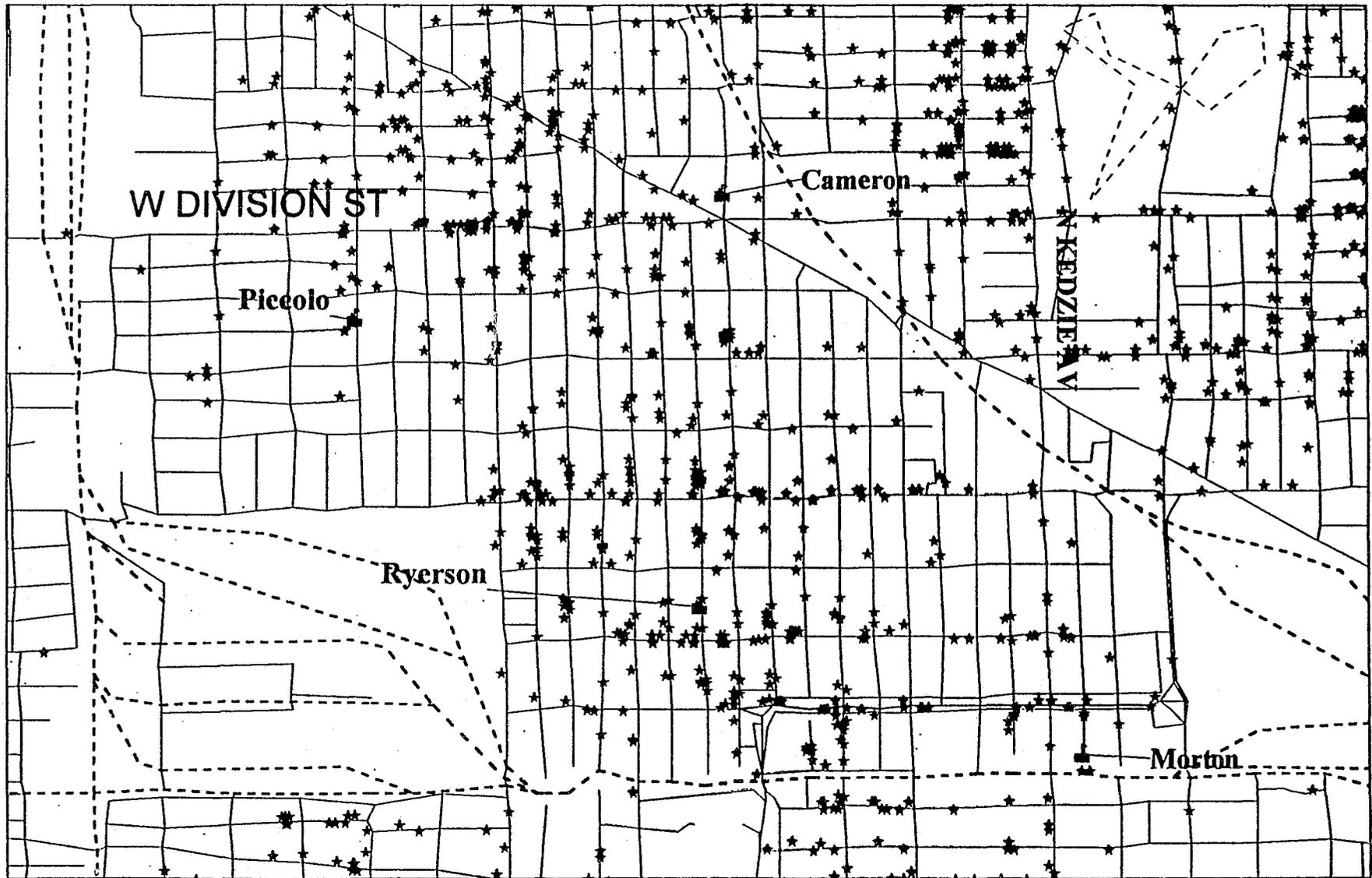
# Residence of Youth in Study Population by Ethnicity



● Latino

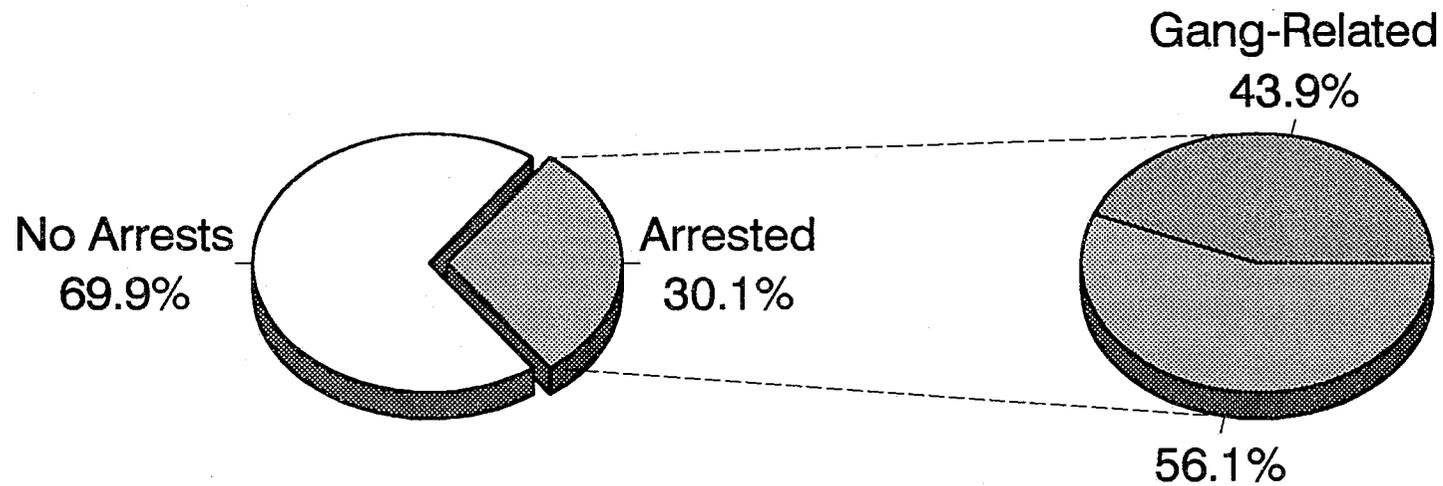
◆ African-American

# Gang Crimes Reported by CPD 1987-1992 for Neighborhood of Interest



# Figure 4 Ever Arrested and Gang-Related Arrest by 1992

Latino Youths (n = 136)



**Figure 5 Ever Arrested and Gang-Related Arrest by 1992  
African-American Youths (n=296)**

