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# Street Gang Migration in the United States: Executive Summary

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## Introduction

The print and electronic media almost daily remind us that street gangs, once thought to be contained in large urban ghettos, have touched the farthest corners of the country. Reports of big city gang members fanning out across the nation's highways and air routes seeking new markets for crack distribution added considerable fuel to local concerns about gang proliferation. Deeply imbedded within the twin contexts of gang proliferation and drug market expansion, gang migration -- the dispersion of gang members from one city to another -- has been mentioned with increasing frequency in state legislative task force investigations, government-sponsored conferences, and law enforcement accounts at the local, state, and federal levels (Bonfante, 1995; Hayeslip, 1989; California Council, 1989; Genelin and Copelin, 1989; McKinney, 1988; National Drug Intelligence Center, 1994). Unfortunately, the evidence cited most often in these documents is anecdotal and rarely reflects a systematic assessment of the prevalence, nature and consequences of gang migration.

However, if these reports are accurate, it then becomes critical to assess the role played by the migration of gang members from traditional urban centers in the emergence of street gangs in a host of mid-sized and smaller cities throughout the nation. A migratory population of gang members may require different prevention and intervention strategies than indigenous gang members. The impact of migration on local dynamics of gang formation and/or expansion may call for different collaborative efforts among law enforcement agencies. Finally, if various patterns of migration are observed in different settings, different responses by law enforcement and community agencies

may be appropriate.

Only a handful of empirical studies have addressed the issue of gang migration. Dating back to Walter Miller's work in the mid-1970s, a number of national studies have documented the increased number of cities and smaller communities that have street gang activity (Miller, 1981; Needle and Stapleton, 1983; Spergel and Curry, 1990; Curry, et al., 1994; Klein, 1995), but none of these addressed the issue of gang migration.

With only one exception, findings from the gang research on this topic contrast sharply with the perspective presented in the media and in government and law enforcement reports. Four studies looked at gangs in midwestern cities and examined their origin and relationships to gangs in larger cities (Rosenbaum and Grant, 1983; Hagedorn, 1988; Huff, 1989; Zevitz and Takata, 1992). The primary source of information in each case was interviews with gang members. The findings from these four studies were remarkably similar: gang formation was only minimally affected by the diffusion of gangs from large urban centers (primarily Chicago); local gangs showed little direct affiliation with large city gangs; and there was a far lower level of impact of gang migration on local community gang contexts than the investigators had anticipated. A fifth study of drug sales and violence among San Francisco gangs found minimal relationships with other gangs outside the city, and the author expressed skepticism regarding the ability of gang structure to support organized migration activities (Waldorf, 1993).

In contrast, Skolnick's 1988 interviews with inmates in California correctional institutions and with law enforcement and correctional officials suggested different

patterns (Skolnick, Correl, Navarro and Rabb, 1990; Skolnick, 1990). Skolnick described high levels of mobility among "entrepreneurial" California gang members, who traveled long distances to establish drug distribution outlets, and maintained close instrumental ties to their gangs of origin. Among all the empirical studies conducted in this area, Skolnick's study resonates most closely with the reports from law enforcement cited above.

The disparate perspectives offered by the empirical literature may be resolved by identifying different patterns of gang migration. This study draws on a national sample of affected cities and reports information derived from law enforcement, community informants and gang members. It is the first attempt to investigate gang migration systematically and on a national scope, and, therefore, should be viewed as exploratory.

The primary objectives addressed by this research were:

- 1) To identify the scope of gang migration, nationally;
- 2) To describe the nature of gang migration;
- 3) To assess the impact of migration on destination cities; and
- 4) To describe the current law enforcement and community agency responses to gang migration and identify those that appear to be most appropriate and effective for various types of migration.

### **Research Methods**

Four phases of data collection comprised the research design of this study. The major objective of the initial phase was to identify cities that had experienced gang migration. This was accomplished by distributing a brief mailed questionnaire to law

enforcement agencies in cities identified as potential gang or gang migration sites.

All 190 U.S. cities with populations over 100,000 were included in the initial survey effort. For smaller cities and towns, research, government and law enforcement reports, media accounts, membership lists of gang investigator associations and law enforcement contacts across the country provided references to cities that either had experienced gang migration or had local street gangs. Finally, survey respondents listed all cities to which their local gang members had moved.

These sources yielded 1,105 cities. A brief survey was mailed in 1992 to the police chief in each city with a request to pass it on to whomever in the department was most familiar with gang matters. With considerable prodding in the form of repeat mailings and phone follow-ups, 92 percent of these departments responded. Many of the jurisdictions contacted stated that they had no local street gangs and/or no gang migration, and the results from a small random sample of cities with populations ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 residents indicate that the census substantially under-represented smaller cities with gang migration.

The mailed survey yielded 710 cities that reported experiencing at least some street or drug gang migration.<sup>1</sup> Among these, 480 cities cited at least ten migrants

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of the initial survey, gangs were defined as "groups of adolescents and/or young adults who see themselves as a group (as do others) and have been involved in enough crime to be of considerable concern to law enforcement and the community. Drug gangs may be separate subgroups of street gangs, or may develop independently, but should be included." Migration was defined as "temporary relocations such as visits to relatives, relatively short trips to sell drugs or develop other criminal enterprises, and longer stays while escaping gang crackdowns or gang activity. Longer term residential changes such as moves (either individually or with family) and court placements with relatives should be included."

within the past year, or were not able to provide the estimates that we requested. The 480 cities represented the population for the second major phase of the study. The major objective was to conduct in-depth telephone interviews with law enforcement officers in order to develop descriptions about the nature of migration and about police responses to migration. Contact with a sample of 270 cities yielded completed interviews in 226, fifteen of which reported drug migrants only.

A random sample of 50 of the 226 cities was selected for interviews with community respondents. The primary objectives of this additional procedure were to identify promising community strategies and to assess the degree of consensus between law enforcement and community views on gang migration. Community informants were identified by law enforcement respondents and through contacts with city government, local school districts or United Way offices. Interviews were completed in 42 cities.

Case studies of three cities comprised the final phase of the study. The cities were selected in concert with NIJ personnel and the NIJ Gangs Working Group as exemplars of three patterns of gang migration. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, reported a high volume of black gang migration, primarily for drug sales purposes. Hispanic gang members moved to Napa, California, as part of family or residential relocations stimulated by the agricultural labor market. Finally, Lawndale, California, experienced the influx of large numbers of black gang migrants reflecting regional mobility patterns. The case study method involved extensive telephone interviews in preparation for 3-4 day site visits. In each city, personal interviews with city officials, law enforcement, community representatives and youth service providers were conducted. On-site

personnel were hired to complete qualitative interviews with approximately one dozen gang migrants in each city.

## Major Findings

### National Scope of Gang Migration

Gang member migration, broadly defined, is widespread in this country. One hundred fifty-five or 80 percent of cities with more than 100,000 residents cited at least some migration, as did another 555 smaller cities. Ninety of these had a population of under 10,000 residents.

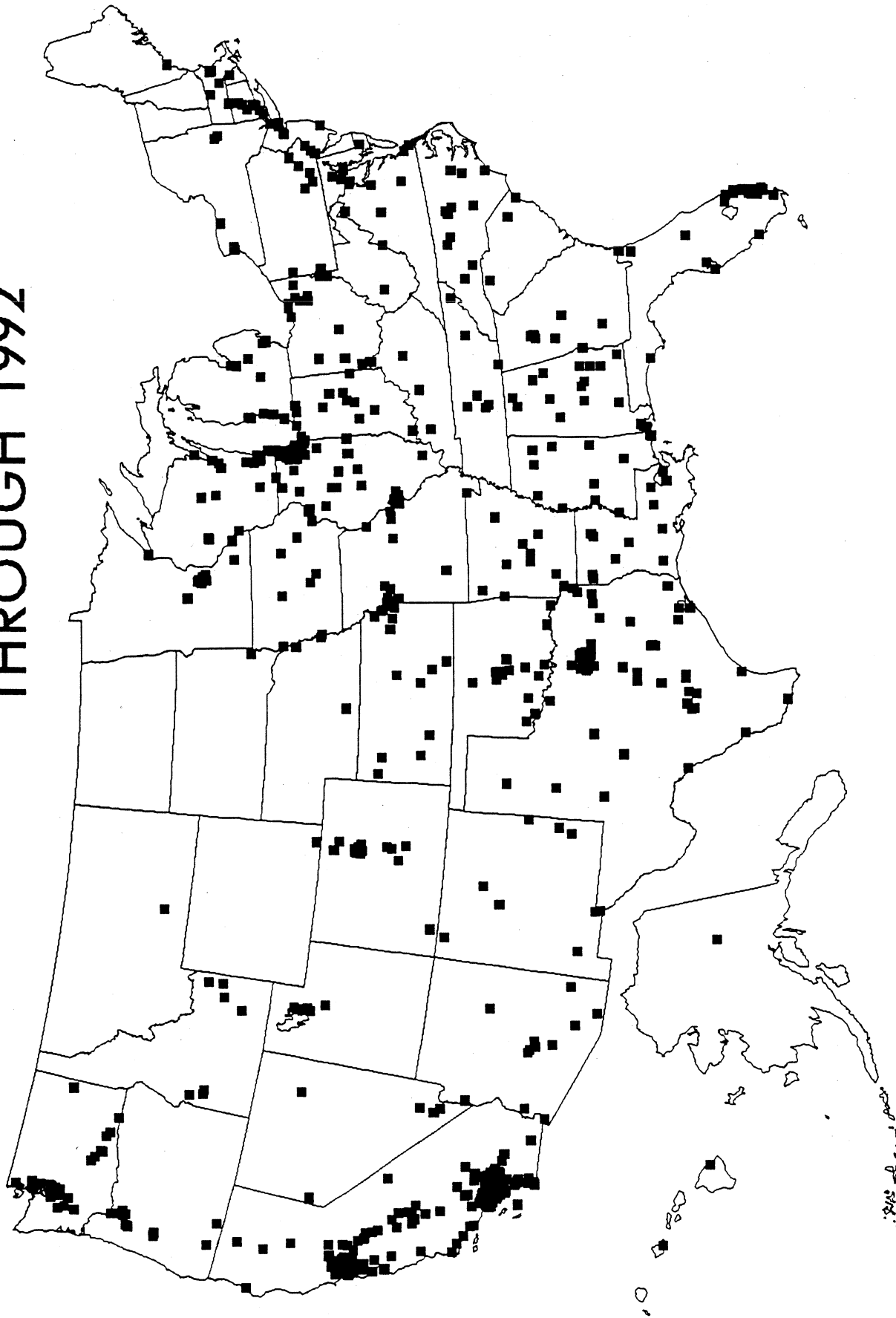
As indicated on the accompanying map,<sup>2</sup> these cities are located throughout the U.S. Forty-four percent of the migration cities were located in the western region, with slightly less prominence in the midwest (26 percent) and southern (25 percent) portions of the country. Gang migration appears to be a relatively rare phenomenon in the northeastern region; only about five percent of the migration cities were situated there.

Gang migration is a recent phenomenon; relatively few cities (13 percent) report their first experience of gang migration as occurring prior to 1986. In most cities, the emergence of local, indigenous gangs preceded the onset of migration (54 percent), or occurred within the same year (41 percent); only 5 percent of the cities had dates of onset of migration prior to the emergence of local gang problems. This pattern was confirmed in the telephone interviews, where the majority of respondents (81 percent) disagreed with the statement "without migration, this city wouldn't have a gang problem."

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<sup>2</sup> Total numbers differ due to missing information on date of emergence of gang migration.

# GANG MEMBER MIGRATION THROUGH 1992



Number of Cities = 694



Estimates of the total number of migrants vary widely from up to a dozen (30 percent of the 600 cities that could provide figures) to the thousands (16 cities). A more reliable but still quite variable estimate is the number of migrants arriving in the prior year. Just under half (47 percent) of the 597 cities that provided an estimate reported the arrival of no more than ten migrants in the year preceding the survey. Only 34 cities (5 percent) estimated that more than 100 gang migrants arrived in the prior year.

This general depiction of the scope of gang migration, derived from the initial survey of 1,100 cities, suggests that the movement of gang members from one city to another is a broad and yet shallow phenomenon. In recent years, hundreds of cities have seen the arrival of gang members, but in relatively low numbers. The potential for deleterious impact on local gang activity and crime rates would appear to be limited by the low volume of gang migrants involved. More detailed descriptions of the characteristics of gang migrants, their influence on local gangs and crime patterns, and local responses emerged from the interviews with law enforcement gang experts in a sample of 211 cities that reported at least ten migrants in the previous year.<sup>3</sup>

### **Characteristics of Gang Migrants**

Even with the deletion of low volume migration cities from the population, most of the cities reported the arrival of relatively few migrants in the past year. Eighty-one cities, or just over 40 percent that could provide reliable estimates, reported 25 or fewer recent arrivals (see chart below). Fifty or more migrants had arrived in the past year in

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<sup>3</sup> Data provided by respondents in 15 cities with drug, but not street, gang migrants are not included.

about 30 percent of the cities. The median number of recent migrants was 35.

### Volume and Sociodemographic Characteristics of Gang Migrants in 211 Cities\*

New migrants past year (N = 198)	
Up to 25 migrants	41 %
26-50 migrants	28 %
More than 50 migrants	31 %
Typical age of migrants (N= 208)	
Mean and Median	18 years
Female migrants (N = 196)	
5 or fewer female migrants	81 %
Ethnicity of migrants is predominantly (60 percent plus) (N = 208)	
Black	49 %
Hispanic	28 %
Asian	7 %
White	1 %
No ethnic predominance	16 %

\* Varying city numbers included in analysis reflect missing information on particular variables. Percentages may fail to sum to 100 due to rounding errors.

The average age of migrants reported for each city ranged from 13 to 30 years, with the typical age of about 18 years. Female gang migrants were uncommon. Compared with the ethnic distribution of gang members nationally, gang migrants are somewhat more likely to be black. About half of the cities reported that at least 60 percent of their migrants were black; predominantly Hispanic distributions emerged in 28 percent of the cities. Predominance of Asian (14 cities or 7 percent) or white (two cities) gang migrants was unusual.

From where do gang migrants come? Cities within the Los Angeles area were

cited among sources of migration by 63 percent of the law enforcement informants. One-third of the respondents mentioned Chicago area cities and far fewer reported the New York (12 percent) or Detroit (10 percent) areas as sources. About one-fourth cited the city of Los Angeles to be their primary source of migrants; Chicago was selected as the primary source in 14 percent of the cities. The primary source of migration was typically (60 percent of cities) within 100 miles of the responding city; only 12 percent cited primary source cities greater than 1,000 miles away. A regional migration pattern, or a clustering of three or more source cities within 30 miles of each other, was evident in about one-fourth of all interviewed cities.

The average length of stay was typically three months or longer and only about one-quarter of cities reported typical visits of less than one month in duration. This pattern is consistent with the motivations for migration cited by respondents. Officers were asked to select which of several reasons described why most gang members move into their city. Family moves (39 percent) along with stays with relatives and friends were combined in a category of "social" primary motivations which accounted for 57 percent of the respondents. The second most frequently cited primary motivation was drug market expansion (20 percent of cities) which was combined with other criminal opportunities to create a larger category of extra-legal attractions (32 percent of total) in these migrant-receiving cities. Features of departure cities, "pushes" such as law enforcement crackdowns (8 percent), a desire to escape gangs, and court-ordered relocations were cited in 11 percent of the cities.

Contact between migrants and members of their old gangs was frequent in more

than half of the cities. Sometimes the nature of the contact was drug-related (39 percent) or for dealing weapons or stolen goods (27 percent), but it most commonly served the social purposes (66 percent) of maintaining neighborhood or familial ties.

In sum, migrant gang members tend to be young males of either black or Hispanic ethnicity. They often originate in Los Angeles or Chicago, travel relatively short distances, for largely social reasons, and stay for at least several months. Drug-related, short-term relocations appear to be the lesser pattern. Gang migrants characteristically maintain social ties with at least some members of their original gangs.

### **Influence on Local Gang and Crime Situations**

There was no dominant pattern of the ways in which migrants participate in gangs in their new cities. About one-third of cities reported a prevailing pattern of migrants recruiting for old gangs or branching operations. Migrants mostly joined pre-existing local gangs in about 20 percent of the cases, and about the same number reported that migrants retained their affiliation with their old gang only. Few respondents felt that migrants discontinued gang activity altogether; however, such individuals may be less likely to come to the attention of officers.

Migrants reportedly influenced local gang rivalries, clothing, recruiting methods and the size of gangs in most of the cities. They were less often viewed as affecting the structural organization or criminal orientation of local gangs. Considering that the focal occupational concern of these law enforcement respondents is crime, it is not surprising that most cities (86 percent) reported that migrants have had an impact on local crime rates or patterns, primarily increases in theft (50 percent), robberies (35 percent), other

violent crimes (59 percent) and gun use or sophistication of firearms (36 percent).

Migrants were somewhat or heavily involved in drug sales in about three-fourths of the cities. This pattern extends to both black (68 percent of cities with black migrants) and Hispanic (57 percent) gang migrants, with rock or crack cocaine most commonly distributed by blacks, and marijuana sales more frequent among Hispanics. Despite the reportedly widespread involvement in drug sales, migrants were generally not perceived as having a substantial impact on the local drug market, probably due to their relatively low numbers.

These general characterizations of gang migration could obscure specific patterns that might reveal different implications for promising responses. Primary motivation, drug gang versus street gang and volume of migration were the three policy-relevant dimensions examined. Only the first proved successful in differentiating among migration cities.

### **Motivations to Migrate**

Only about one-third of the respondents singled out extra-legal "pulls" (primarily drug market expansion) as the most important motivation for gang member relocation to their cities, but several features were associated with this primary motivation. They were more likely to be larger cities (population exceeds 100,000) and located in the south. Migrants to these cities traveled longer distances and stayed for briefer time periods. They tended to be older and more often were black, whereas "social" reasons were more common in cities with predominantly Hispanic migrants. Almost by definition, cities typified by migration for extra-legal reasons reported substantial crime increases,

extensive involvement in drug sales and higher levels of migrant influence on local gangs.

The size of the local gang situation (i.e., number of indigenous gang members or number of local gangs), date of migration onset, and migrants' associational patterns with local gangs were not related to the primary motivation for migration.

This pattern of migration clearly presents a viable target for a strong law enforcement response. While migration for criminal purposes was reported by only about one-third of all cities, far more common was migration for social reasons. These cities tended to report younger migrants, Hispanic ethnicity, longer stays and less involvement in drug sales. Such cities may benefit from prevention and early intervention programs that provide alternative activities and opportunities.

#### **Local Responses to Gang Migration**

The identification of promising or innovative strategies to respond to gang migration was a primary objective of the study. The interview surveys with law enforcement officers in the 211 street gang migration cities requested detailed information on the utilization of nine specific strategies and their perceptions of how effective these strategies were in reducing the volume or negative impact of gang migrants on their cities. About one-fourth of these cities were targeted for interviews with community representatives in order to obtain information about community-based strategies and also their perspectives on street gang migration to their cities.

Reflecting the generally low volume of migration represented in this sample, one-third of the law enforcement respondents said that their departments view gang migration as minor or not a problem. Only 18 percent of these departments viewed it as

a severe problem. Most information about migration derives from routine field contacts, arrests and street informants, but 90 percent of the departments reported "some" or "a lot" of information-sharing with other law enforcement agencies within the state. More than one-half also had migrant-related contacts with out-of-state agencies and other law enforcement agencies within their city.

Operational coordination with local (78 percent), state (50 percent) and federal (40 percent) law enforcement agencies was relatively common. However, few respondents viewed either information or operationally-based coordination as effective in reducing migrant numbers or illegal activities.<sup>4</sup> The use of selective violations (e.g., narcotics laws) to arrest gang migrants was utilized to at least some extent by about three-fourths of the departments, but was cited as effective by just 42 percent of the departments that employed this strategy. The use of specific gang laws (e.g., STEP) was not viewed as a particularly effective response. Gang sweeps and other suppression strategies were utilized in about 40 percent of the departments, and perceived to be effective by a majority of officers. Prevention strategies were rarely mentioned (15 percent) but considered effective by more than half of the departments using them.

Collaboration with community agencies and institutions was reported in nearly two-thirds of the cities, most commonly with the school system and community or citizen groups. This collaboration most often took the form of information exchange or gang awareness education, but rarely involved service referrals or direct participation in

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<sup>4</sup> The measures of strategy effectiveness were necessarily perceptual; systemic evaluation of strategies to respond to migration was virtually nonexistent.

service provision. While community collaboration was viewed as an effective response to migration in 54 percent of the cities, less than one-fourth of the respondents could provide the name of someone outside law enforcement who was informed about gang migration.

Many officers responded to questions about strategies relative to their overall gang intelligence and operational activities. Most departments have not developed specific responses to migrants (e.g., targeting of entry points) and respondents found it difficult to retain a focus on migrants in the interview. A factor analysis of the utilization of various strategies revealed a weak cluster of informational and operational coordination. As noted above, these strategies were not viewed as particularly effective, nor did they fall within the objective of identifying "innovative and promising" responses to gang migration. A qualitative assessment of the interview responses revealed comments about departmental tactics that specifically addressed migration in just one-fourth of the cities.

The lack of law enforcement programs that might be highlighted likely reflects the recent occurrence of migration as well as the relatively minor role that migration plays in the overall gang problem in many cities. The officer respondents reported substantial negative impacts from gang migration, yet this view was not supported by departmental policy development or systematic enforcement approaches.

A separate study component targeted a sample of 50 cities for interviews with community representatives. Interviews were conducted with 42 community respondents, most of whom were involved with social service provision. The primary objectives of



these interviews were to gather information on community programs and responses to gang migration and to assess the level of consensus between community and their law enforcement counterparts.

The two types of informants provided somewhat different perspectives on the nature of gang migration to their cities, which was not surprising given the various bases of knowledge that individuals bring to this issue. Police and community respondents identified at least one migrant source city in common most of the time, but agreement on all the cities from which migrants moved was quite rare. Community respondents were more likely than police to specify family moves as the primary motive, and less likely to identify drug market reasons. Consequently, community representatives were somewhat more likely to report stays of longer duration than law enforcement respondents. A higher level of agreement emerged from the items about the degree to which migration represented a problem for the city (primarily, moderate) and about levels of police and community collaboration (at least "some" reported by community respondents in 60 percent of the cities).

Many respondents described communities that have recently recognized the problem and were just beginning to work with police. Four community respondents reported that **no** steps had been taken by their community to address migration. Of the 38 responses that described activities, only three mentioned migrants specifically. Each of these involved law enforcement and school or housing authority collaboration to identify migrants or to share information on newcomers. The remaining answers described gang or even more general crime prevention or intervention activities. Over

half of them specify distinct roles for law enforcement, confirming the high levels of police/community collaboration reported by law enforcement.

In summary, the interview survey of community respondents yielded an array of collaborative activities geared toward addressing youth crime or gang activity. There was little attention given to development of coordinated responses to gang migration and few innovative or promising programs or strategies were identified. This is not to suggest that the activities described to us might not be useful responses to community issues. On the contrary, many of them resonate well with recommended programs for gang or delinquency reduction derived from other research projects.

Very few respondents of either type reported efforts in their community to identify newcomers in order to offer enhanced opportunities or skill development. For community-based service providers, this may represent a lost opportunity to engage newly arrived gang members in prosocial alternative activities. The case studies of three high volume migration cities, provided a final opportunity to identify promising responses to gang migration.

### **Case Studies of Gang Migration**

Napa, Milwaukee and Lawndale were selected as case studies because they reflected certain key dimensions—high migrant numbers, drug or family motivations and black or Hispanic predominance. They were not intended to be representative of migration cities across the country, but to allow the research team to explore, in greater depth, some of the issues that emerged in the large-scale survey efforts. Thus, it would not be appropriate to "sum up" the three case studies to derive conclusions.

The case studies provide illustrations of points that emerge from the data reported above and suggest implications that will be elaborated in the last section. For instance, the reasons for gang member migration are far more complex than has been portrayed by the media and some enforcement agencies. This is perhaps best illustrated in Milwaukee, a site selected specifically because of its drug-related pattern but one which nonetheless manifests a wide variety of migration motives. Drug franchising is not the principal driving force—normal family residential changes are paramount along with a not uncommon desire to move into less gang-oriented communities.

The interviews with migrants suggested that the joining of gangs in their new cities ranges from firmly established, prior connections to haphazard connections to none at all. Further, there is great variety in the level and nature of contacts maintained (or not) with gangs in prior locations. The site visits revealed the strength of ties to the gang subculture.

In Napa, gang migrants became members of local gangs, shedding old gang ties while drawing on similar experiences with new gang affiliates. They carry the Norteno/Sureno association with them and maintain it while in Napa. While changing gangs as one moves to new locales, the larger regional (and cultural and generational) identity remains for Napa gang migrants.

Retention of gang identity was also important to the Milwaukee gang migrant experience. Gangs in the old industrial cities of the midwest articulate the gang alliances of Folks and People, and the different gangs (such as Vicelords, Latin Kings, Gangster Disciples) position themselves relative to these two larger identities. The level of

movement between Milwaukee and Chicago (or Detroit, Gary, St. Louis) gang members, the presence of the same gang names in these places, and the amount of familial relationships among these gangs, enhances the ease with which migrants might maintain the same gang identity wherever they go in this region. Consequently, distinguishing those gang migrants who "maintain a previous gang affiliation and/or identity" becomes complicated.

Lawndale offered a further variation on the maintenance of gang identity theme. While California's Crips and Bloods soar in the nation's mythology as highly organized "supergangs," they are in actuality, the least of the supergangs that are represented in these case studies. The Lawndale gang migrants are indicative of the "micro" level of gang membership which is characterized in southern California gangs as numerous discrete sets, be they Crips or Bloods. Like Milwaukee gang migrants, much of the Lawndale gang migrants' maintenance of previous gang affiliation is based on proximity. They maintain ties with their same set, and in their former location. There are only a few Lawndale-based gangs, none of which are affiliated with any of the gang sets from which our respondents had come.

Finally, the migrant interviews provided a number of instances in which the migrants' report being in less trouble with the law. While this reduction might be predicted from age maturation alone, the specific interview responses suggested plausible explanations other than maturation. The implications for policy seem obvious: one might balance off reduced gang activity against the concern about the spread of gang culture.

Each of the cities exhibited a unique attribute of gang migration. Yet none of the

strategies offered as remedies appear to be focussed on the particular migrant problem, but on gangs in general. For example, in Napa, the overwhelming law enforcement concern and suppression emphasis is on the Spanish speaking Surenos. However, most gang members in Napa, including migrant gang members, are Nortenos; and most local Surenos did not become gang members until after they arrived in Napa. This is a specific problem that law enforcement, schools and community agencies should address through open discussion and strategies for solving language and acculturation barriers, and work with the youth to circumvent these barriers and biases.

Milwaukee, through a city-administered diversion program, appeared to adopt a social service approach of helping individuals and this was exemplified in some of the strategies reported in the site interviews. However, gangs seemed to be considered primarily a law enforcement problem which framed the migrant issues largely in drug sales terms.

Lawndale appears to be perched on a powder keg. There is no one in the city taking the lead in addressing youth ennui—whether gang related or not. There are few youth serving agencies in a city with a growing population of families trying to escape the frustrations of urban life. Lawndale, like Napa, has an opportunity to address a problem which is far less complex (at the moment) than that of Milwaukee.

Gang migrants in all three cities consistently stated that their perception of the ways they and other gang migrants were treated overall is dependent upon the particular individual's purpose for moving to a city, and each person's motivation and/or desire to maintain or drop his or her gang identity. Citizens, community service organizations, and

law enforcement agencies can work together to ensure that gang membership is not the only option that young people have. Strategically, there are clearly opportunities to intervene with gang migrants. Programs can be implemented in schools with the help of law enforcement, city administration, and community services to introduce a wide range of choices to young people which would give them support and encouragement and allow them to make decisions not to join or rejoin gangs.

### **Policy Implications and Directions for Further Research**

Attempts to identify promising law enforcement and community strategies which address gang migration were not successful. However, the results of the study suggest several directions that local and federal policy might take. The core policy issues, as they are informed by the study findings, are as follows:

#### **1. Migration is not the cause of local gang problems.**

Most cities had local gangs prior to the onset of migration and a large proportion of respondents felt that their city would have a gang problem regardless of migration. While large numbers of cities report gang migration, the numbers of migrants are generally small and represent a relatively minor proportion of the overall gang population.

The lack of specificity of gang programs and law enforcement strategies frustrated the researchers' attempts to highlight promising responses to migration. In light of the relatively small numbers of migrants, this now seems appropriate. The optimal targets for ameliorating gang activity are the local conditions that foster it—limited economic opportunity, class and ethnic conflict, social disorganization and decaying social

institutions. While communities attempt to grapple with the root causes of gang activity, they must also invest in targeted prevention and intervention programs. The variety of such programs described by community respondents, coupled with high levels of police and community collaboration, suggest that such efforts are underway in many cities. More active recruiting of gang migrants into these programs could yield benefits for these individuals as well as the larger community.

**2. Law enforcement officers report substantial negative impacts, yet few departments have established policies or coherent strategies to address these problems.**

Despite their relatively low numbers, special intervention strategies might be warranted if gang migrants present unique threats to their destination communities. The evidence for this concern is somewhat mixed and presents a complicated picture for policy makers.

The social demographic characteristics of gang migrants fall roughly along similar lines of the general gang population of the U.S. Typical ages ranged from 13 to 30 with mean and median ages converging at 18 years. Female migrants were uncommon, as were those with Asian or white ethnic backgrounds. Predominantly Hispanic distributions emerged in about one-fourth of the cities; black gang migrants predominated in half of the cities. This suggests that black gang members relocate to other cities disproportionately when compared with Hispanics. The slightly elevated levels of black gang migration may reflect more general migration patterns. In any case, the characteristics of gang migrants provide little support for the contention that only the worst gang members move.

However, the law enforcement reports of substantial negative influence on local gang dynamics and crime patterns cannot be dismissed. Law enforcement accounts of migrants contributing to the solidification of local gang identities and commitments were not infrequent. Substantial involvement in drug distribution and increases in theft and violent crimes were attributed to gang migrants. Unfortunately, few departments maintain crime profiles of gang migrants that might be compared with local gang members; nor can they accurately estimate the proportion of all local crimes that are committed by gang migrants. The data we gathered were, by necessity, perceptual, and the views of these officers are quite consistent—gang migrants commit a lot of crime and exacerbate local gang problems.

In the context of these perceptions, the lack of departmental policies and coherent strategies to reduce the negative impact of gang migrants was surprising. Neither law enforcement nor community agencies seemed to differentiate migrants from other gang members in their implementation of intervention strategies. The perception of gang migrants as "outside agitators" or troublemakers has not spurred many communities to develop coherent activities to address the issue. Most of the gang migrants reported that their levels of criminal activity had diminished since their relocation to new cities. Such moves may disrupt commitments to gang affiliations and the period of adjustment to a new environment may create a window of opportunity for social service programs. Many gang respondents expressed a desire for help in turning their lives around, assistance with finding jobs and more after-school and recreational activities.



### 3. Different types of migration require different response strategies.

The analysis of patterns of migration revealed that migrant characteristics vary by the reasons for migration. Drug market expansion and other illegal pursuits were the primary motivations in about one-third of the cities. Larger city size and location in the south distinguished these cities from other migration cities. Their migrants tended to be older, more often to be black, to travel for longer distances and to stay for shorter periods of time. The depictions of gang migration in these cities resonate with Skolnick's description derived from California inmate interviews. The judicious exercise of interdiction and suppression strategies may benefit these communities. However, the case study of Milwaukee yielded a mixed picture of migration reasons with social factors figuring quite prominently in the decision to relocate. An aggressive social service policy might fare well even in cities where the expansion of criminal activities is viewed as the primary catalyst for gang migration.

Migration for social reasons—family moves motivated by higher quality of life, the joining of relatives and friends and so on—is far more common. Hispanic ethnicity, younger ages, longer stays and less involvement in drug sales characterize these cities. Gang prevention and early intervention programs that provide alternative activities and opportunities may be more promising avenues in these cities than aggressive law enforcement strategies. Communities that are mobilizing to respond to local gang problems should actively recruit migrants into these programs. Federal agencies could provide a vital supportive role to the development of such programs.

**4. A national file of gang members is not supported by the study but regional data bases may be beneficial.**

In the last few years, some federal law enforcement agencies have joined with local police officials to promote the establishment of a national file on gang members. The costs and benefits of such an undertaking should be weighed carefully, in light of the findings generated by this study. The majority of gang migrants do not travel long distances to their destination cities. The social and economic costs of establishing a national gang database would not yield substantial benefits to the vast majority of cities that experience gang migration. Occasional telephone contact with gang investigators in Los Angeles and Chicago may prove sufficient for the smaller number of cities desiring confirmation of the gang status of newcomers traveling extended distances.

On the other hand, regional gang databases may provide benefits for tracking or investigation purposes. About one-fourth of the cities reported clusters of migrant source cities within 30 miles of one another. In particular, databases that cover the areas immediately surrounding Los Angeles and Chicago might be supported.

Future research efforts should build on the findings of this study while attempting to redress some of its limitations. Systematically organized ethnographies of several carefully selected migration cities could investigate the influence of migrants on local gang contexts, the transition of gang members into their new environments, and the critical junctures in gang identities much more effectively. A national survey of law enforcement should be repeated in order to update the study findings. Future surveys should employ a stratified random sampling design to yield a representative sample of

small and mid-sized cities. Any national law enforcement survey on street gangs should include items on gang migration that would permit comparisons to this study's findings.

Future studies should pay close attention to patterns of migration. The primary reasons for relocation are associated with migrant and city characteristics that require further investigation. We have suggested that program and policy responses need to reflect the nature of migration experienced; no uniform set of strategies would be appropriate to all such cities.

The implementation of strategies to respond to gang migration are in their infancy. Police are not optimistic about the effectiveness of the tactics currently in use. Systematic assessment of these practices is nearly nonexistent and very much needed before more effective policies can be developed. We have suggested that some gang migrants may be amenable to social programming strategies. Currently, there appears to be little effort to engage these individuals in prosocial activities. Communities should be encouraged to provide such programs on an experimental basis and assess them carefully for their effectiveness with gang migrants, as compared with local gang clients and at-risk youth.

This research has indicated that gang migration is not an important cause of the proliferation of gangs in U.S. cities. Gang migration clearly provides an avenue for the dissemination of gang subculture and mythology, but a systematic study of the diffusion of gang culture through the media is long overdue.

Finally, systematic information must be gathered on the criminal profiles of gang migrants. Offending profiles should be compared with local gang members to assess

whether they represent, in fact, the elevated crime threat that so many local officials perceive them to be. Migrants' individual histories of criminal activity should be investigated to determine the circumstances in which relocation to a different city might prove an effective crime reduction technique. Judges and concerned family members employed this tactic years before anyone thought to study gang migration—it is high time that we determine the conditions in which such moves should be encouraged.

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