



OJJDP FACT SHEET

J. Robert Flores, Administrator

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Highlights of the 2002 National Youth Gang Survey

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The 2002 National Youth Gang Survey is the eighth annual survey conducted by the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) since 1995. The 2002 survey used a newly selected sample of law enforcement agencies based on updated data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The following local agencies are included in the nationally representative sample:

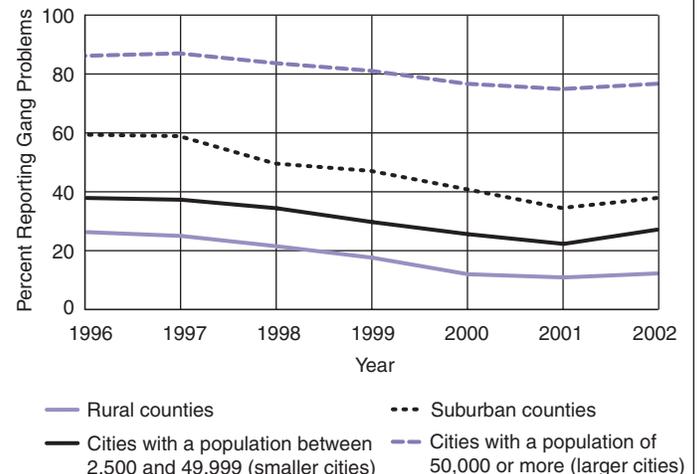
- ◆ All police departments ($n=627$) serving cities with a population of 50,000 or more (larger cities).
- ◆ All suburban county police and sheriff's departments ($n=745$) (suburban counties).
- ◆ A randomly selected sample ($n=699$) of police departments serving cities with a population between 2,500 and 49,999 (smaller cities).
- ◆ A randomly selected sample ($n=492$) of rural county police and sheriff's departments (rural counties).

Survey recipients were asked to report information solely for youth gangs, defined as "a group of youths or young adults in your jurisdiction that you or other responsible persons in your agency or community are willing to identify as a 'gang.'" Motorcycle gangs, hate or ideology groups, prison gangs, and exclusively adult gangs were excluded from the survey. Survey data were collected in 2003 and represent the prior calendar year.

Survey Findings

Of the 2,563 survey recipients, 2,182 (85 percent) responded to the 2002 survey. All cities with a population of 250,000 or more reported youth gang problems in 2002, as did 87 percent of cities with a population between 100,000 and 249,999. Thirty-eight percent of responding suburban county agencies, 27 percent of responding smaller city agencies, and 12 percent of responding rural county agencies also reported youth gang problems in 2002. In general, smaller city agencies outnumber larger city agencies 10 to 1, and rural county agencies outnumber suburban county agencies 3 to 1. Therefore, the steady decline of reported gang

Law Enforcement Agency Reports of Gang Problems, 1996–2002



Note: For the random-sample groups, the observed variation in the percentage of agencies reporting gang problems from 2000 to 2002 is within the range attributable to sampling error; therefore, it does not represent a definitive change in the estimated number of jurisdictions with gang problems.

problems over the initial survey years is most notable for smaller cities and rural counties. The figure shows the percentage of law enforcement agencies, by agency type, that reported youth gang problems from 1996 to 2002.

Based on survey results, it is estimated that, in 2002, youth gangs were active in more than 2,300 cities with a population of 2,500 or more and in more than 550 jurisdictions served by county law enforcement agencies. These results are comparable to those from recent NYGC surveys and provide preliminary evidence that the overall number of jurisdictions experiencing gang problems in a given year may be stabilizing.



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It is also estimated that approximately 731,500 gang members and 21,500 gangs were active in the United States in 2002. The estimated number of gang members between 1996 and 2002 decreased 14 percent and the estimated number of jurisdictions experiencing gang problems decreased 32 percent. This difference is largely a result of the decline in reported gang problems by smaller cities and rural counties that have also reported comparatively fewer gang members over survey years. Larger cities and suburban counties accounted for approximately 85 percent of the estimated number of gang members in 2002.

A total of 142 cities with a population of 100,000 or more reported both a gang problem and gang homicide data (i.e., the number of homicides involving a gang member) in 2002. Of these cities, 51 reported 0 gang-related homicides. Of the remaining 91 cities that reported 1 or more gang-related homicides, 89 reported a total of 577 gang-related homicides and 2 (Chicago and Los Angeles) reported a total of 655 gang-related homicides. When compared with the more than 1,300 total homicides recorded in Chicago and Los Angeles in 2002,¹ these findings suggest that approximately half of the homicides in these 2 cities were gang related in that year.

¹ Federal Bureau of Investigation. 2003. *Crime in the United States 2002*, table 8 (www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_02/html/web/offreported/02-table08CA.html and www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_02/html/web/offreported/02-table08GA-IN.html).

Forty-two percent of respondents indicated their youth gang problem was “getting worse” in 2002 compared with 2001 and 16 percent indicated it was “getting better.” In the 2001 survey, these statistics were 27 percent and 20 percent, respectively, indicating an appreciable increase in the proportion of respondents who regarded their gang problem as worsening.

For Further Information

For additional information about youth gangs, call the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s (OJJDP’s) Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse at 800-851-3420 or contact NYGC at 800-446-0912 or www.iir.com/nygc/.

Arlen Egley, Jr., Ph.D., and Aline K. Major are Research Associates with NYGC, which is operated for OJJDP by the Institute for Intergovernmental Research in Tallahassee, FL.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.