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# National Institute of Justice

Research in Brief

August 1994

## Gang Crime and Law Enforcement Recordkeeping

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Gangs and crime committed by gang members are now pervasive in numerous American cities, presenting a challenge to law enforcement. A National Institute of Justice (NIJ)-sponsored survey of metropolitan police departments in the 79 largest U.S. cities showed that in spring 1992 all but 7 were troubled by gangs, as were all but 5 departments in 43 smaller cities.

In 110 jurisdictions reporting gangs, the survey found that over the previous 12-month period there were:

- 249,324 gang members.
- 4,881 gangs.
- 46,359 gang-related crimes.
- 1,072 gang-related homicides.

A problem of this magnitude calls for the development of law enforcement strategies that are flexible enough to meet local needs while possessing sufficient uniformity to make it possible to compare results across different communities. To do this requires accurate statistics on gangs in the

United States and the crimes gang members commit.

The NIJ-sponsored survey findings detailed in this Research in Brief represent a first step toward the development of national-level data on gangs, their members, and their criminal activities. Results of the NIJ Gang Survey suggest some fruitful preliminary actions jurisdictions can take to improve the information on gangs available to policymakers and officials:

### Issues and Findings

#### *Discussed in this Research in Brief:*

A survey conducted in spring 1992 of police departments in 79 large cities and 43 smaller cities to gather statistics on gangs, gang members, and gang-related crime. Specific data were solicited on the participation of females and ethnic minorities and on the anti-gang strategies used by the departments.

**Key issues:** National data on gangs are difficult to obtain because jurisdictions vary in:

- ◆ Definitions of what constitutes a gang and a gang-related incident.
- ◆ Practices in recording the number of gangs, gang members, and the number of gang-related crimes as well as the gender of gang members and details of gang-related crimes other than homicide.

◆ Capabilities for reporting these data.

**Key findings:** The survey found that:

- ◆ Gangs are a problem in the overwhelming majority of large and small U.S. cities surveyed.
- ◆ Gang-related crime is above all a violent crime problem. Homicides and other violent crimes account for about half of all recorded gang-related crime incidents.
- ◆ No law enforcement agency reported solely relying on suppression strategies; most were attempting a variety of approaches including community organization and social intervention.
- ◆ The proportion of females in gangs and committing gang-related crime is relatively small (around 3 or 4 percent).
- ◆ Although the overwhelming majority of gang members are black or

Hispanic, the proportion of white youth involvement is increasing.

- ◆ Cities with gang problems generally reported far more gang members than gang-related incidents, but this may reflect how statistics are recorded rather than the degree of criminal involvement.
- ◆ A focus on recording gang-related incidents rather than listing gang members would recognize that the problem is not about individuals forming groups but about groups and individuals in the groups committing crimes. Obtaining accurate data on gang crimes requires continuing to develop uniform definitions across jurisdictions of what constitutes a gang and a gang-related crime.

**Target audience:** Law enforcement administrators, statistical researchers, directors of juvenile justice organizations and agencies.

## The UCR: Crime Statistics Source

The importance of law enforcement estimates in measuring gang crime problems stems from their role as the major sources of other data used for the compilation of national-level statistics on crime.

The best known national statistics on reported crime are provided by the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), initiated in 1929 by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). Responsibility for collecting and compiling the UCR was assumed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1930.<sup>1</sup>

The involvement of the FBI and IACP has provided authority to the UCR. More than 16,000 police departments now contribute information to the UCR, in part because of the prestige of the FBI and IACP, but also because 30 States have passed laws mandating such participation. In 15 of these States, local police departments can incur penalties for noncompliance.

However, information on gang-related crime statistics has never been part of the UCR.<sup>2</sup> National statistics on this subject have depended on surveys such as the one described in this report. With the FBI currently implementing a nationwide incident-based system for reporting crime, the time is opportune to include in the FBI system an item on gang-related incidents—although a specific definition must be attached to it.

- Develop a centrally based collection of data on gang-related incidents. This could be part of the new National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) being implemented by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as a replacement to its Uniform Crime Reports.
- Provide technical assistance to help local law enforcement agencies contribute to this central data collection. Accomplishing this would involve continuing to develop uniform definitions across jurisdictions of what constitutes a gang, a gang member, and a gang-related crime.

● Assess the level of gang-related crime problems in terms of gang-related crimes or incidents rather than numbers of gangs and gang members. This would recognize that the gang crime problem is not about young men and women forming groups with names and symbols but about groups and individuals in these groups committing crimes against persons and property.

These actions would further the formation of comprehensive, effective policies to curb gangs and gang membership, especially among juveniles, in all our Nation's cities.

## Obstacles to gathering dependable national data on gangs

What is described under the general term, "gang problem," varies greatly from city to city. For the purposes of this survey, to be counted as a gang, law enforcement officials had to identify the group as a "gang" that was involved in criminal activity and included youth in its membership. As will be seen in this report, a universally accepted definition of "gang" does not exist, making it difficult to gather national statistics that accurately portray the extent of the gang problem.<sup>3</sup> Previous national-level surveys and numerous recent research studies have led to a greater uniformity in identifying what organizations are gangs, however.

Law enforcement agencies need help in reporting gang-related information accurately and routinely. While some manual or computerized records are maintained by all local departments reporting gang crime problems, not all local departments conduct annual tabulations that include the number of gangs, gang members, and gang-related crimes—as few as 27 of the large city police departments surveyed.

The appropriate statistic for assessing the magnitude of gang-related crime problems is not the number of gang members but the crimes they commit.

## Previous estimates

National estimates of gang-related crimes (see "The UCR: Crime Statistics Source" on this page) have been generated by periodic studies conducted by university re-

## Survey Methodology

The Gang Survey was conducted for NIJ by the University of West Virginia in spring 1992. Researchers contacted police department administrators in all 79 U.S. cities with populations of 200,000 or more (based on 1990 Bureau of Census projected estimates).<sup>4</sup> In an effort to identify changes in the dimensions of the national gang problem, the NIJ Gang Survey also contacted 43 smaller city and 11 county jurisdictions included in the 1988 OJJDP/University of Chicago survey.

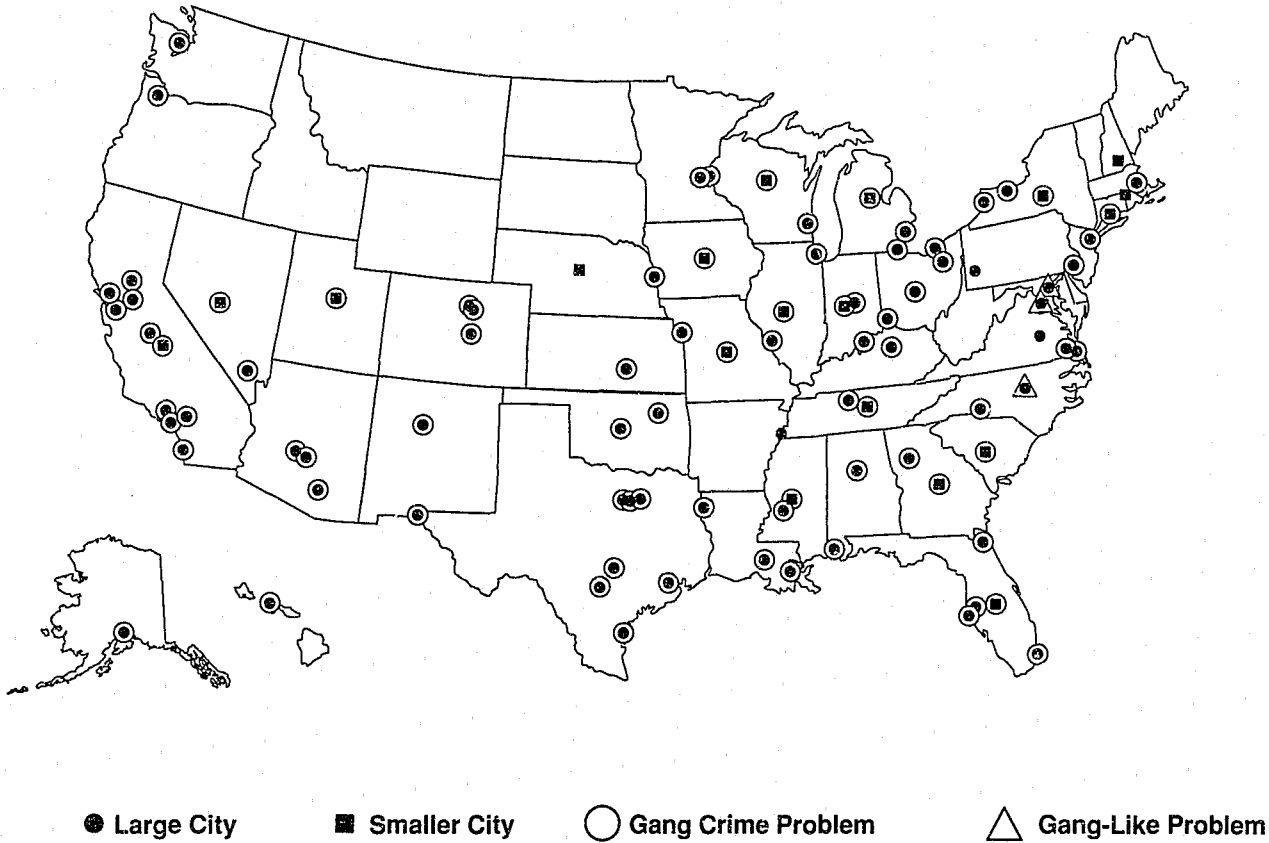
For each police department targeted for the survey, the senior official, usually a chief of police or police commissioner, was sent a letter from the project's principal investigator accompanied by a letter from a representative of the National Institute of Justice describing the project and encouraging participation. Each administrator was asked to refer survey staff to the individual representing the agency who was to provide official information about the agency's handling of gangs or other youth-based groups engaged in criminal activity. The survey included only groups that law enforcement officials identified specifically as "gangs," that engaged in criminal activity, and that involved juveniles in their criminal activities.

Anonymity of law enforcement agencies and their official representatives was intentionally avoided in order to (1) follow the UCR model of collecting data, (2) conduct a census of official, not personal, perspectives on the problem, and (3) construct a list of officially designated local spokespersons on gang crime problems who could be consulted by other researchers and law enforcement agencies.

The complete listing of names, addresses, and phone numbers for each law enforcement agency representative designated for the survey can be found in the full report of this study, *National Assessment of Law Enforcement Anti-Gang Information Resources*, available for a fee from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850 (800-851-3420). Ask for NCJ 147399.

searchers under cooperative agreements with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) or the Na-

Exhibit 1. Gang Crime Problems by Site, 1992



Source: NIJ Gang Survey

tional Institute of Justice (NIJ). In the first national-level study of the gang problem published in 1975,<sup>5</sup> an OJJDP-sponsored research project studied 12 large cities, 6 of which were found to have gang crime problems. Estimates for the 6 cities ranged from 760 to 2,700 gangs and from 28,500 to 81,500 gang members. An expansion of the original study in 1982 estimated 97,940 gang members in 2,285 gangs in 286 cities.<sup>6</sup> Within a year, two other OJJDP-sponsored researchers,<sup>7</sup> using a random sample of police departments in cities with populations over 100,000, reported that 27 (45 percent) of the 60 cities had gang crime problems.

The next effort to gather national-level data was begun in 1988 when the University of Chicago, with funds from OJJDP, con-

ducted a survey of community-level gang programs that might serve as prototypes for a national-level gang program initiative.<sup>8</sup> From 35 jurisdictions with organized responses to gangs, the OJJDP/University of Chicago survey reported 1,439 gangs and 120,636 gang members, but some jurisdictions provided only estimates rather than exact data.

### Distribution of gang problems

Exhibit 1 shows survey results on the officially reported presence of gang problems for the cities in the study. Of the large city police departments, 72 (91 percent) reported the presence within their jurisdictions of criminally involved groups with youths as members that they labeled as "gangs." Of the seven jurisdictions not re-

porting gang problems, three (4 percent) reported the presence of gang-like, criminally involved, youth-based groups that were officially identified by some label other than "gangs." Baltimore, Maryland, reported a "drug organization" problem; Raleigh, North Carolina, a "posse" problem; and Washington, D.C., a "crew" problem.<sup>9</sup> Police departments in Memphis, Tennessee; Newark, New Jersey; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Richmond, Virginia, reported they had no officially acknowledged gang or gang-like problems.

If the 3 cities with "gang-like" crime problems are combined with the 72 reporting gang problems, 95 percent of large U.S. city police departments reported that gangs or gang-like organizations engaged in criminal activity and involved youths

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**Exhibit 2. 79 Largest U.S. Cities by Type of Officially Reported Gang Problems as of Spring 1992**

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**Reported Gang Problem**

Akron (OH)	Fresno (CA)	Omaha (NE)
Albuquerque (NM)	Honolulu (HI)	Philadelphia (PA)
Anaheim (CA)	Houston (TX)	Phoenix (AZ)
Anchorage (AK)	Indianapolis (IN)	Portland (OR)
Arlington (TX)	Jackson (MS)	Riverside (CA)
Atlanta (GA)	Jacksonville (FL)	Rochester (NY)
Aurora (CO)	Jersey City (NJ)	Sacramento (CA)
Austin (TX)	Kansas City (MO)	San Antonio (TX)
Baton Rouge (LA)	Las Vegas (NV)	San Diego (CA)
Birmingham (AL)	Lexington (KY)	San Francisco (CA)
Boston (MA)	Long Beach (CA)	San Jose (CA)
Buffalo (NY)	Los Angeles (CA)	Santa Ana (CA)
Charlotte (NC)	Louisville (KY)	Seattle (WA)
Chicago (IL)	Mesa (AZ)	Shreveport (LA)
Cincinnati (OH)	Miami (FL)	St. Louis (MO)
Cleveland (OH)	Milwaukee (WI)	St. Paul (MN)
Colorado Springs (CO)	Minneapolis (MN)	St. Petersburg (FL)
Columbus (OH)	Mobile (AL)	Stockton (CA)
Corpus Christi (TX)	Nashville (TN)	Tampa (FL)
Dallas (TX)	New Orleans (LA)	Toledo (OH)
Denver (CO)	New York (NY)	Tucson (AZ)
Detroit (MI)	Norfolk (VA)	Tulsa (OK)
El Paso (TX)	Oakland (CA)	Virginia Beach (VA)
Fort Worth (TX)	Oklahoma City (OK)	Wichita (KS)

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**"Drug Organization" Problem Only**

Baltimore (MD)

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**"Posse" Problem Only**

Raleigh (NC)

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**"Crew" Problem Only**

Washington (DC)

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**No Reported Problem**

Memphis (TN)  
Newark (NJ)  
Pittsburgh (PA)  
Richmond (VA)

Source: NIJ Gang Survey

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within their jurisdictions. Exhibit 2 lists the large cities in the study by presence of reported gang crime problems as of spring 1992.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, the NIJ Gang Survey also gathered updated information on gang crime problems in 43 smaller city police departments.<sup>11</sup> A total of 38 cities (88 percent) reported gang crime problems in 1992. Exhibit 3 lists the smaller cities in the study by presence of reported gang crime problems as of spring 1992.

### Changes since 1988

Many of the cities surveyed by this project (the 43 smaller cities and 51 of the 79 largest cities) were included in the screening process for the 1988 OJJDP/University of Chicago survey. The presence of gang crime problems in these 94 cities could therefore be compared for 1988 and 1992. Exhibit 4 shows the increase that occurred

over these 4 years, in both large and small cities.

### Defining gangs

Of the 72 police departments in large cities reporting gang problems, 70 completed a questionnaire on what constitutes a gang or supplied researchers with a copy of an official definition or regulation pertaining to gangs. Police departments in smaller cities were less likely to supply official definitions than departments in larger cities. All prior national surveys of gang crime problems have encouraged police departments to move toward more uniform definitions. Previous researchers have refined the criteria for defining gangs to include violent behavior, group organization, leadership, territory, and recurrent interaction, but some have also included symbols worn or used by particular gangs to identify themselves.<sup>12</sup> In this report dress decoration and

graffiti are labeled as "symbols," and police departments are counted as using this criterion if their definition includes wearing certain colors, sharing a common set of signs and symbols, or writing graffiti.

Violent behavior trailed symbols as a defining criterion in both large and smaller cities, according to the NIJ Gang Survey. For large cities, 93 percent included some reference to symbols in their definitions; for the smaller cities, all with definitions included one or more references to symbols (exhibit 5).

There is a growing convergence of definitions of gangs. In 1992, more departments were using similar definitions than in 1988.

### Recording gang information

All departments that reported the presence of gang-related crime problems keep some kind of official record of these gangs, their

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## Exhibit 3. Smaller Cities by Presence of Officially Reported Gang Problem as of Spring 1992

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### Reported Gang Problem

Albany (NY)	Fort Lauderdale (FL)	Orlando (FL)
Benton Harbor (MI)	Fort Wayne (IN)	Pasadena (CA)
Berkeley (CA)	Garden Grove (CA)	Peoria (IL)
Cambridge (MA)	Gary (IN)	Pomona (CA)
Chattanooga (TN)	Glendale (CA)	Racine (WI)
Chino (CA)	Greenville (MS)	Reno (NV)
Cicero (IL)	Hartford (CT)	Rockford (IL)
Compton (CA)	Hiialeah (FL)	Salt Lake City (UT)
Decatur (GA)	Huntington Beach (CA)	San Bernadino (CA)
Des Moines (IA)	Inglewood (CA)	Spartansburg (SC)
El Monte (CA)	Joliet (IL)	Sterling (IL)
Evanston (IL)	Kansas City (KS)	Tallahassee (FL)
Flint (MI)	Madison (WI)	

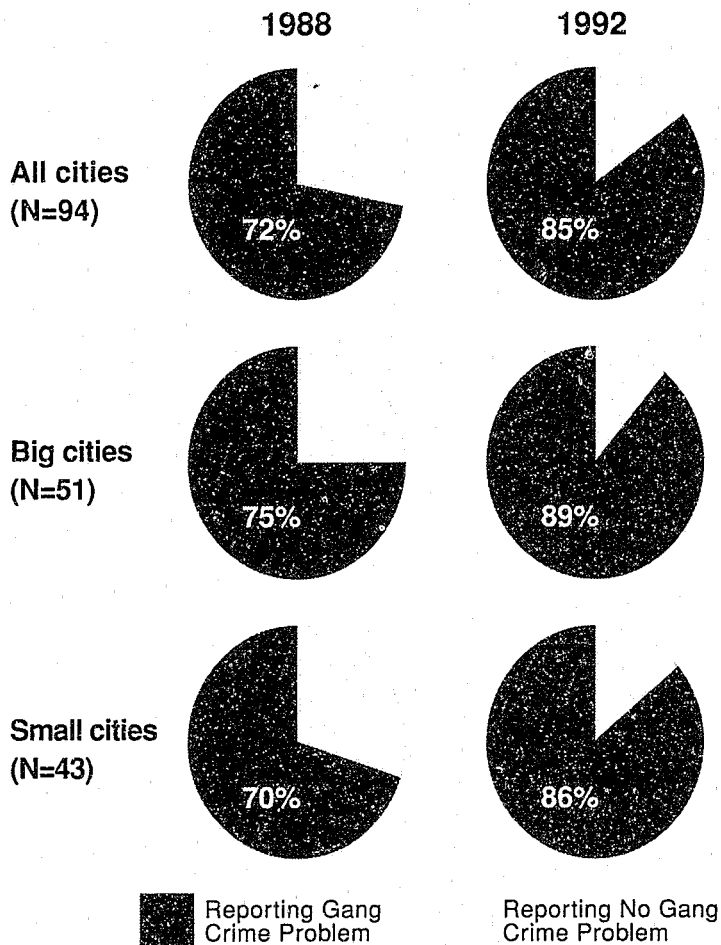
### No Reported Gang Problem

Charleston (SC)  
Lincoln (NE)  
Portsmouth (NH)  
Springfield (MA)  
Wilmington (DE)

Source: NIJ Gang Survey

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**Exhibit 4. Cities Reporting Gang Crime Problems in 1988 and 1992**



Source: NIJ Gang Survey

members, or their specific gang-related criminal activity. For all 110 departments in large and smaller cities reporting gang crime problems, 85 percent (93 cities) record data on these 3 measures of the gang crime problem: 90 percent of the largest cities keep records of all 3 measures compared to 78 percent of the smaller cities. In another 12 percent (13 cities), police departments keep records on gangs and members but not incidents. Of the remaining four departments, one department keeps records on members and incidents, one on incidents only, and two on members only.

### Reporting gang information

Policy administrators and policymakers who must develop and conduct responses to gang crime need to know the magnitude of the problem. The ability of police departments included in the NIJ Gang Survey to report this information in terms of the number of gangs, the number of gang members, and the number of gang-related crimes varied considerably. While a majority of the respondents, regardless of city size, recorded all three measures of gang crime information, reporting capability on these three different statistical measures of jurisdictional gang crime problems did not match the degree of recording.

Only 34 departments (31 percent) were able to report the number of gangs, number of gang members, and number of gang incidents for their jurisdictions for 1991. Another 15 (14 percent) reported numbers of gangs, members, and gang-related homicides. The capability of reporting numbers of gangs and members, but not incidents, was found in 37 (34 percent) of the departments.

In the remaining 21 percent of cities, information reporting varied.

Akron, Ohio, with a newly recognized gang problem, reported only the number of gang-related homicides for 1991 (40 incidents). San Jose, California, with its computer system, could provide only information on the number of gangs. St. Petersburg, Florida, with a manual record-keeping system, provided detailed statistics on incidents but could produce no estimates of the number of gangs or gang members in the jurisdiction.

Fresno, California, maintains manual records but does not tabulate any of the three kinds of requested gang information. New York City and Philadelphia have recently limited their local gang crime problems to only Asian gangs; gang-like crime problems among ethnic groups other than Asian are treated as "drug organizations." The only available statistic for New York City for 1991 was 19 homicides attributed to Asian gangs.

Additional difficulties encountered in reporting on the scope of gang problems varied considerably across cities. In Jacksonville, Florida, a shortfall in staffing committed to dealing with a growing gang problem means the tabulation of annual gang statistics is given lower priority. In San Diego, California, two computers are used to store gang information, but summary reports are extracted from paper files. In Honolulu and Miami, data are input into regional GREAT (General Reporting, Evaluation, and Tracking)<sup>13</sup> systems, but the departments themselves do not have the capability to generate reports.

**Exhibit 5. Criteria for Defining Gangs**

Criteria Used	Large Cities*	Smaller Cities*
Use of Symbols	93%	100%
Violent Behavior	81%	84%
Group Organization	81%	88%
Territory	74%	88%
Leadership	59%	48%
Recurrent Interaction	56%	60%

\*Of the cities surveyed, 70 (89%) of the large cities and 25 (58%) of the smaller cities indicated the criteria used to define gangs.

Source: NIJ Gang Survey

**Gang members and gang incidents**

In the majority of jurisdictions that reported both numbers of gang members and numbers of gang-related crimes (in addition to gang homicides), far more gang members were reported than gang-related incidents. For example, the Los Angeles Police Department reported 503 gangs and 55,258 gang members yet only 8,528 gang-related crimes in 1991. The Chicago Police Department reported that 29,000 gang members in 41 gangs accounted for only 4,765 gang incidents in 1991. The Louisville Police Department reported 250 gang members in 10 gangs and only 1 gang-related incident (an assault) in 1991.

In the largest cities reporting gang problems, 26 reported statistics on gang members and gang-related incidents for 1991. Of these 26 departments, only 3 reported more gang-related incidents than gang members—Denver (5,100 members, 6,109 incidents), Seattle (800 members, 1,083 incidents), and Tucson (1,377 members, 2,607 incidents). None of these three cities reported more than two incidents per gang member. Statistics on gang-related incidents were less likely to be reported in the smaller cities, but of the 10 reporting numbers of gang members and gang-related incidents, only Flint, Michigan, reported more incidents for 1991 than members.

Two explanations for this apparent imbalance are possible. One is that gang member files are maintained from year to year, while gang incident files are year-specific. Thus gang members may be tracked in the files even though they have not recently committed gang-related incidents. It has been suggested that gang members' names be routinely purged from files after a given time period has elapsed without an additional offense.

A second reason for this ratio is the degree to which gang crimes involve multiple of-

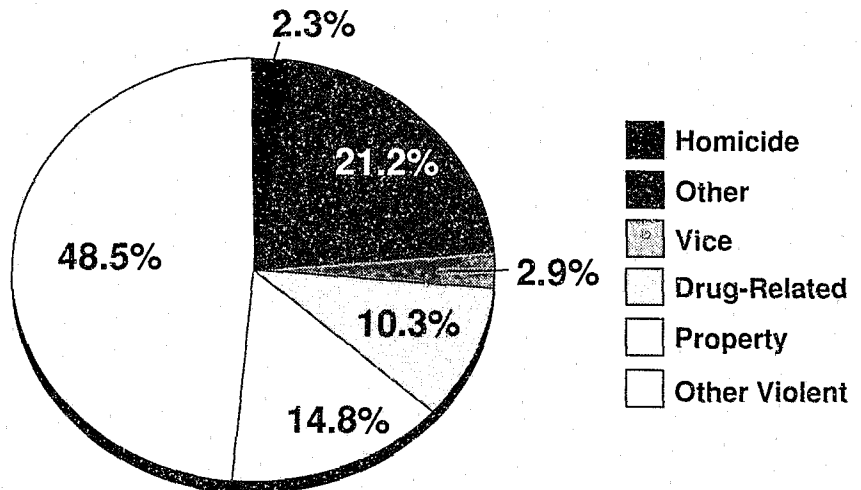
fenders, particularly when the Chicago definition is used. The Chicago definition is based on a crime's being related to gang function. Another definition, the Los Angeles definition, is based on a crime's involving a gang member either as an offender or a victim.<sup>14</sup> The 1988 University of Chicago/ OJJDP national survey revealed an even greater variation in the definition of gang incidents across cities than that constituted by the difference between Chicago and Los Angeles.<sup>15</sup>

An examination of the data currently available on gang incidents reveals their utility. As can be seen in exhibit 6, gang-related crime, as reflected in available law enforcement statistics, is above all a violent crime problem. Homicides and other violent crimes account for about half of all recorded gang-related crime incidents. Crimes that are usually thought of as explicitly motivated by profit, such as property crimes, drug-related crimes, and vice, represent comparatively smaller portions of the national gang crime problem as measured by law enforcement statistics.

**Gender and gangs**

The NIJ Gang Survey specifically requested available official record data on females involved in gang-related criminal

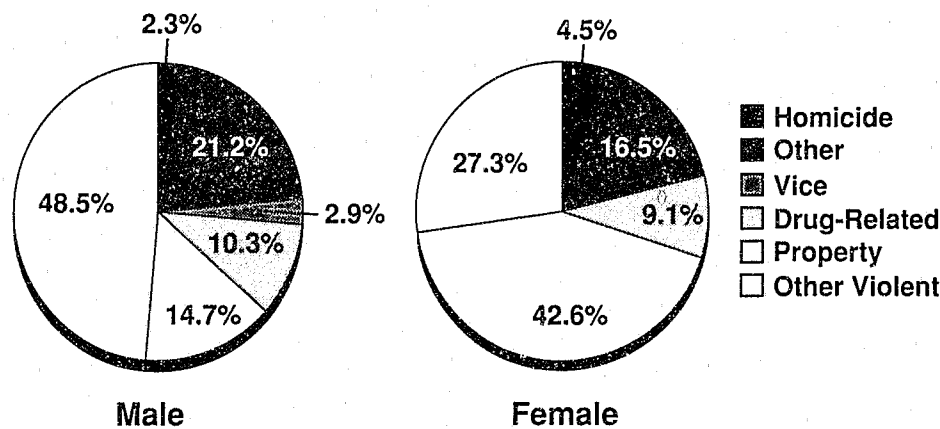
**Exhibit 6. Gang-Related Crime by Type as Percent of Total Recorded**



Source: NIJ Gang Survey



**Exhibit 7. Gang-Related Crime by Type as Percent of Total Recorded by Gender**



**Note:** No gang-related crime was reported in the Vice category for females.

**Source:** NIJ Gang Survey

activity. Yet in a number of cities females, as a matter of policy, were never classified as gang members.<sup>16</sup> In other jurisdictions, females were relegated statistically to the status of “associate” members. In all, 23 (31.9 percent) of the largest city police departments with reported gang crime problems did not provide statistics on female gang members, and 9 (12.5 percent) reported no female gang members. Forty large city police departments reported a total of 7,205 female gang members. Including numbers from the 21 smaller cities and county jurisdictions brings the total to 9,092 female gang members in 61 law enforcement jurisdictions across the Nation.

This figure represents only 3.65 percent of the total number of gang members reported to the researchers. If, in an effort to control for law enforcement policies that officially exclude female gang members, gang members are counted only from cities reporting some number of both male and female gang members, this percentage increases to 5.7 percent.

The survey also requested that available statistics on gang-related crimes be broken down by type of crime and by gender. Although a number of law enforcement agencies were not able to report annual statistics

for gang-related crimes, 59 large and smaller cities and selected counties did report the most commonly available gang-related crime statistic—number of gang-related homicides. Annual statistics for other types of gang-related crimes were reported by smaller numbers of cities.

Exhibit 7 indicates the major differences in the types of crimes officially attributed to males compared to females. Proportionally almost twice as many female gang-related crimes were homicides (4.5 percent for females and 2.3 percent for males). Violent offenses not resulting in a homicide were proportionally much more common for male gang offenders, while property crimes were more common for female offenders.

Looking at raw national totals, only the percentage of gang-related property crimes (1.1 percent or 75 of 6,880) attributed to females exceeds 1 percent of the total number for any type of crime. Only 8 (0.7 percent) of the total of 1,072 gang-related homicides were attributed to females. If one limits the analysis to jurisdictions reporting gang-related crimes for females, the percentages attributed to females for each type of crime increase substantially. In these jurisdictions the respective per-

centages for females for each type of crime are 11.4 percent for gang-related homicides, 3.3 percent for other violent crimes, 13.6 percent for property crimes, 12.7 percent for drug-related crimes, and 16.7 percent for other crimes.

The 1988 OJJDP/University of Chicago survey received reports of the existence of 22 independent female gangs in 1987 from its sample of communities with organized responses to gang crime problems. The 1992 NIJ Gang Survey received reports of 99 independent female gangs spread over 35 law enforcement jurisdictions in 1991. (Although it did not count the number of female gang members, Birmingham, Alabama, recorded the existence of two independent female gangs; in addition, Portland, Oregon, had one; and St. Paul, Minnesota, and Wichita, Kansas, each reported three.)

Because of changes in the way gangs are defined and identified, as well as differences in national survey methodologies, it is difficult to determine if female involvement in gang-related crimes rose between 1987 and 1991. Only 23 of the 34 law enforcement agencies offering 1987 estimates to the 1988 OJJDP/University of Chicago survey provided official annual statistics on the number of female gang members in their jurisdictions to the 1992 NIJ Gang Survey.

### Ethnicity and gangs

In the early part of this century, gang involvement in criminal activity was viewed as a social phenomenon associated with ethnic Americans, most commonly second-generation white immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe and African-Americans recently arrived from the South. More recent studies have increasingly focused on the growth of involvement in gangs by Central and South American and Asian immigrants. Although most research in the last few decades has focused on minority involvement in gang activity, the study of involvement of white youths in gang-related crime has continued.<sup>17</sup> The NIJ Gang Survey, like previous research, indicates that involvement in gang-related

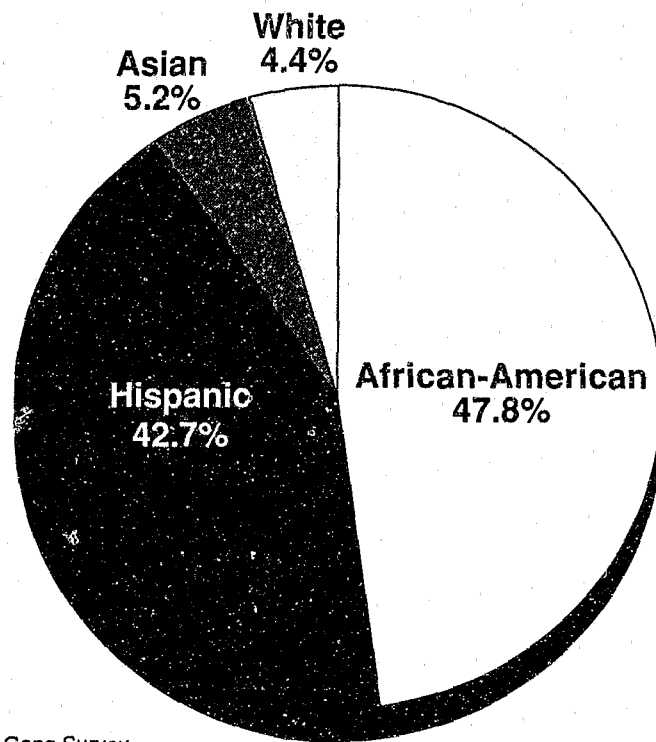
Crime remains for the most part associated with African-American and Hispanic youths, although the proportion of white and Asian youths appears to be increasing. Of the police departments reporting gang crime problems, almost all said they recorded the race or ethnicity of gang members. As with other types of data noted above, there was a difference between *recording* information and *being able to report* that information in summary form. Of the 72 large city police departments reporting gang crime problems, only 25 (35 percent) provided statistics on the ethnicity of identified gang members; of the 38 smaller cities, only 12 (32 percent) provided statistics on ethnicity. As exhibit 8 shows, the ethnic composition of gang members in these cities remains predominantly black (48 percent) and Hispanic (43 percent). The black groups were made up primarily of African-Americans but also included Jamaicans and blacks of other countries.

Only 16 cities (11 of them among the largest cities) provided ethnic breakdowns on gang members for both 1990 and 1991 (The 1992 NIJ survey asked for ethnicity data for both 1990 and 1991.) From the data for these cities, it is possible to gain a limited idea of how the ethnicity of gang involvement may be changing. While the reported number of black gang members for these cities increased by 13 percent between 1990 and 1991, the number of Hispanic gang members increased by 18 percent over the same period. Although significantly smaller in terms of actual numbers of gang members, the numbers of gang members identified as Asian or white were increasing at a significantly higher rate. From 1990 to 1991 for cities where data were available, the number of Asian gang members increased by 66 percent and the number of white gang members by 55 percent.

### Law enforcement anti-gang strategies

Having analyzed the scope of gang activity and the composition of gangs, the survey sought to identify the primary and second-

Exhibit 8. Gang Members in 1991 by Ethnicity



Source: NIJ Gang Survey

ary law enforcement strategies cities used to respond to gang problems. It also sought to analyze the links, if any, between the strategies used and the department's perceived effectiveness in dealing with gangs.

Analysis of law enforcement agency strategies for dealing with gang crime problems was modeled after the analysis conducted by the OJJDP/University of Chicago researchers,<sup>18</sup> who identified five primary categories of response strategies:

- **Community organization:** contact with community organizations, provision of speakers to these organizations, sharing of information, help in the organization of community watches and graffiti cleanup campaigns.
- **Social intervention:** cooperation with social service agencies, particularly counseling programs.
- **Opportunity provision:** cooperation with school tutoring and jobs programs.

- **Suppression:** identification of gang members, special case management, special intelligence operations, increased law enforcement, increased incarceration, and increased liaison between law enforcement agencies.

- **Organizational change/development:** identification of additional resources and funding, advocacy of new laws.

All respondents to the 1992 NIJ Survey mentioned suppression as one of their response strategies, and 44 percent identified it as their primary response strategy. When researchers compared the perceived effectiveness of gang response programs and the prevalence of each primary strategy, the researchers found that only in cities that had adopted opportunity provision and community organization as their primary strategies was there greater perceived agency effectiveness in dealing with gang-related crime problems.

In the NIJ Gang Survey, of the 72 large cities with gang-related crime problems, 64 (89 percent) completed the strategy-effectiveness questionnaire requested by the survey. Of the 38 smaller cities reporting gang-related crime problems, 27 (71 percent) completed this portion of the survey. All responding departments reported trying at least one special suppression strategy and at least one community organization strategy. Most had tried more than one of each. In the large city departments, all had tried at least one organizational change strategy; in the smaller cities, a majority (78 percent) had.

Ways of preventing the formation of gangs, such as social intervention and opportunity provision strategies, were less commonly used in both large and small cities. In the large cities, social intervention strategies were used by 31 (48 percent) of the reporting departments and opportunity provision strategies by 26 (41 percent). Among the smaller cities, a majority of departments did, however, report cooperating with social service programs (63 percent) and tutoring and job programs (51.9 percent).

No law enforcement agency reported relying completely on suppression strategies. This may reflect recommendations being made in recent years including those found in the OJJDP/University of Chicago research and development products that grew out of the 1988 survey.<sup>16</sup> Those findings strongly recommended balanced programs that employ a wide range of strategies, and that is the approach that most local law enforcement agencies responding to the NIJ Gang Survey seemed to be following.

## Conclusion

In summary, this study showed the need to work toward standardizing the meaning of "gangs" around the Nation to improve collection and reporting of national data on gang-related crime. On the basis of accurate data, the effectiveness of multiple intervention strategies could then be better assessed.

## Notes

1. A brief history and description of the UCR is provided by A.D. Bierman and J.P. Lynch, *Understanding Crime Incidence Statistics: Why the UCR Diverges From the NCS*, New York: Springer-Verlag, 1991.

2. The variables collected and reported in the UCR can be found in Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1992.

3. J.M. Hagedorn, *People and Folks: Gangs, Crime and the Underclass in a Rustbelt City*, Chicago: Lake View Press, 1988; and R. Horowitz, "Sociological Perspectives on Gangs: Conflicting Definitions and Concepts," in C.R. Huff (ed.), *Gangs in America*, Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1990, are advocates of more open, local definitions of what constitutes a gang. On the other hand, citing the need for national-level assessments and comparisons needed by law enforcement practitioners and policymakers, W.B. Miller, *Violence by Youth Gangs and Youth Groups as a Crime Problem in Major American Cities*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975; J. Needle and W.V. Stapleton, Reports of the National Juvenile Justice Assessment Centers, *Police Handling of Youth Gangs*, Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, 1983; C.L. Maxson and M.W. Klein, "Street Gang Violence: Twice as Great or Half as Great?" in C.R. Huff (ed.), *Gangs in America*, Newbury Park: Sage, 1990; and I.A. Spergel and G.D. Curry, "The National Youth Gang Survey: A Research and Development Process" in A.P. Goldstein and C.R. Huff (eds.), *Gang Intervention Handbook*, Champaign, Illinois: Research Press, 1993, have called for a greater emphasis on uniform definitions.

4. This definition of "large" cities as those having a population of 200,000 or more is one that has been used by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in other studies. Three southern cities, Shreveport, Louisiana; Jackson, Mississippi; and Mobile, Alabama, have 1990 populations greater than 195,000. There are no other U.S. cities with populations between 195,000 and 200,000, so these three cities were included in the group of large cities.

5. W.B. Miller, 1975.

6. W.B. Miller, *Crime by Youth Gangs and Groups in the United States*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1982.

7. J. Needle and W.V. Stapleton, 1983.

8. A. Spergel and G.D. Curry, 1993:361-402.

9. Operational definitions for "posse" and "crew" correspond to the operational definition for "gang" in that each is involved in criminal activity and includes youth in its membership. At this level of analysis, the only difference between a posse, a crew, and a gang is the local law enforcement agency's official label for each.

10. Pittsburgh officially recognized its gang crime problem in June 1992 and subsequently formed a gang response task force within the city police department.

11. These cities were screened in 1988 by the OJJDP/University of Chicago survey (see "Survey Methodology"). One additional small city, Glendale, California, was included in the OJJDP/University of Chicago screening process. It was identified as having a gang crime problem but having no organized community response.

12. J. Needle and W.V. Stapleton, 1983. The additional criterion that Needle and Stapleton added was "dress including body decoration and identifying graffiti."

13. Developed in the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department and Los Angeles Police Department. See C.R. Huff and W.D. McBride, "Gangs and the Police," in A.P. Goldstein and C.R. Huff (eds.), *The Gang Intervention Handbook*, Champaign, Illinois: Research Press, 1993.

14. The difference between the Chicago and Los Angeles definitions has been discussed by I.A. Spergel, "Youth Gangs: Continuity and Change," in N. Morris and M. Tonry (eds.), *Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990; C.L. Maxson and M.W. Klein, 1990; and R. Block and C.R. Block, "Lethal and Nonlethal Street Gang Crime in Chicago," NIJ Draft Report, 1992.

15. I.A. Spergel and G.D. Curry, 1993.

16. Miller, 1975, estimated that 90 percent of gang members in cities with gangs were male.

17. For studies of white ethnics and gang involvement in the first half of the 20th century, see F.M. Thrasher, *The Gang*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927; and W.F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943. For studies on Hispanic gang involvement, see J.W. Moore, *Going Down to the Barrio: Homeboys and Homegirls in Change*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991; J.D. Vigil, *Barrio Gangs*, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1988; and F. Padilla, *The Gang as an American Enterprise*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1992. For studies of Asian gangs, see K.L. Chin, *Chinese Subculture and Criminality: Non-traditional Crime*

*Groups in America*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990; and J. Fagan, K.L. Chin, and R. Kelly, *Lucky Money: Paying Lucky Money to Little Brothers*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. For a description of the role of race relations in the emergence and development of African-American gangs, see J.M. Hagedorn, *People and Folks: Gangs, Crime and the Underclass in a Rustbelt City*, Chicago: Lake View Press, 1988. W.B. Miller described the continued involvement of whites in gangs in the late 1960's in "White Gangs," *Transaction* 6, 1969:11-26. A more recent description of the criminal involvement of white youths in gangs is provided by M. Sanchez-Jankowski, *Islands in the Street*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

18. I.A. Spergel and G.D. Curry, 1993.

19. A complete list of the products of the OJJDP/University of Chicago project can be found in I.A. Spergel and G.D. Curry, 1993.

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