

## What is a gang?

“ Nobody knows”

“ Depends on who you ask”

“ Whatever you think it is”

“ I know one when I see it”

Unfortunately these phrases have been repeatedly echoed by both criminal justice practitioners and academicians on countless occasions and across numerous locations. Defining what exactly constitutes a true gang has historically plagued practitioners, academicians, social workers, and everyone who works closely with juveniles and young adults. This lack of consensus on deriving a standard definition continues to confound today’s researchers and criminal justice professionals and policy makers and consequently has important implications for understanding this phenomenon.

As Spergel (1995) suggests varying definitions of gangs, gang members, and gang crime, as proposed by different states and communities, can influence, limit, and often distort our understanding of gangs. Disparate definitions directly affect the extent to which gangs are perceived as being problematic, a slight nuisance, or even existent. Consequently, how a jurisdiction defines gangs directly affects the level of gang related crime and in turn can influence local policy and financial and resource allocation decisions.

This definitional inconsistency also precludes and limits the researcher’s ability to draw valid comparisons between different gangs both within and across separate jurisdictions and over time. Oehme’s (1997) survey respondents were specifically asked how their agency defined a gang. The responses were extremely divergent and differed for both similar and non-similar types of agencies. As Oehme (1997) remarks “without establishing a definitional framework that can be used to analyze the problem with a standard of consistency, there will be no opportunity to even suggest how widespread and serious the problem is”. Ball and Curry (1995) urge gang researchers to pay greater attention to the logic of gang definitions in order to consistently make progress in advancing gang research and theory.

Historically, gangs have been subjected to a plethora of different definitions often dependent upon who is formulating the definition and for what purpose. As Spergel

(1995) comments today's gangs tend to be defined with more of an emphasis on their criminal behavior while the gangs of the 1940's and 50's were defined on the basis of their social role and organizational structure. The definitions provided below illustrate the complexity of determining exactly what is, and what is not, a gang.

A gang is one of the three primary social groups formed in response to deep-seated but unconscious needs (Puffer, 1912).

A gang is an "interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict" (Thrasher, 1927).

Miller (1958) defined the gang as a stable group, neither overly aggressive nor violent, that helps to prepare young inner-city males for the role of an adult.

The gang is a group of lawbreakers who are primarily organized around violence and other illegal activities (Haskell and Yablonsky, 1982).

Miller (1982) later redefined the gang as "a self-formed association of peers, united by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership and internal organization, who act collectively or as individuals to achieve specific purposes, including the conduct of illegal activity and control of a particular territory, facility, or enterprise".

Curry and Spergel (1988) argue that gangs are complexly organized, sometimes cohesive and often have established leaders and rules. These groups engage in a wide variety of significantly more violent crime, conflict with other gangs and often demonstrate a tradition of possessing distinctive territory, or turf, colors and handsigns.

"Gangs are organized social systems definable mainly by their rational interest in property crime or gain" (Jankowski, 1991).

Gangs have been defined as "any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more of the following criminal acts [ 1) assault with a deadly weapon, 2) robbery, 3) homicide or manslaughter, 4) the sale, possession for sale, transportation, manufacture, offer for sale, or offer to manufacture controlled substances, 5) shooting at an inhabited dwelling or occupied motor vehicle, 6) arson, 7) the intimidation of witnesses and victims, and 8) grand theft of any vehicle, trailer or vessel ] as well as having a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity" (California Department of Justice, 1993).

Klein (1995) elucidates the following as the essential defining features of a street gang: 1) a commitment to a criminal orientation with less of an emphasis on violent crime, 2) the members and the community identify the group as a gang, 3) a certain amount of group cohesion is present, and 4) the group maintains a strong sense of territoriality over its defined geographical area.

Gangs are “ groups whose members meet together with some regularity, over time, on the basis of group-defined criteria of membership and group-defined organizational characteristics; that is, gangs are non-adult sponsored, self-determining groups that demonstrate continuity over time” (Short, 1996).

“ Youth gangs are groups of youth in your jurisdiction aged approximately 10 to 22, that you or other responsible persons in your agency or community are willing to identify or classify as a gang” (United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1997).

Oehme (1997) analyzed the content of his respondents’ definitions and derived the following consensual definition based upon the common response factors. A gang is “ a collective of youth – most likely young adults (16 and over) – that has a discernible organizational structure, whose members recurrently interact and congregate in particular areas or neighborhoods, use collective and individual symbols for identification purposes, and engage predominately in acts of violence ( including threats and intimidation) and drug-related crimes ”.

A gang is a “self-formed group, united by mutual interests, that controls a particular territory, facility, or enterprise; uses symbols in communications; and is collectively involved in crime” (Curry and Decker,1998).

A gang is “ a group 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” (Maxson, 1998).

Summarizing the vast literature on gangs, and specifically addressing the definitional problem, a recent report by the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance documents that most of the recent street gang definitions include some, or all, of the following elements:

“ 1) 3 or more individuals associate periodically as an ongoing criminal group or organization, whether loosely or tightly structured, 2) the group has identifiable leaders, although the leader for one type of criminal activity may be different than the leader for another, 3) the group has a name or identifying symbol 4) the

organization's members, individually or collectively, currently engage in, or have engaged in, violent or other criminal activity and 5) the group frequently identifies itself with, or claims control over specific territory (turf) in the community, wears distinctive dress and colors, and communicates through graffiti and handsigns among other means" (United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1997).

## **How prevalent are gangs?**

Estimating the number of gangs and gang members should be approached with extreme caution especially in light of the numerous definitions which have been used over time and across jurisdictions. As Klein (1995) warns it may not even be possible to draw meaningful comparisons across jurisdictions, or over time, until a commonly agreed upon definition can be adopted. Despite this limitation research studies, which offer national estimates on the prevalence of gangs, have been conducted and do offer some useful insight into the nature and extent of the gang issue.

No one is certain when youth gangs first emerged in the United States but it has been speculated that they were present as early as 1783 after the Revolutionary War. (Howell, 1998). Youth gangs existed within the urban areas of the United States before the 19<sup>th</sup> century with every nationality being represented at some point in American gang history (Spergel, 1995). Typically these gangs were composed of young second generation and recent immigrants who resided within low income communities which were experiencing an increase, or decrease, in the neighborhood's industrial base (Refer to Thrasher, 1927; Haskins, 1974; and Asbury, 1971 for three excellent historical accounts of gangs and their activities within some of America's largest cities).

As a general rule the pioneer gang researchers focused less attention on estimating the number of gangs and gang members with more emphasis being directed at ethnographically documenting the gang's structure, process, and daily activities. More recent gang research examines the same attributes but also devotes greater quantitative consideration to features such as the total number of gangs, gang members, and gang crimes.

Klein (1995), a long time gang researcher, notes that only 58 cities reported the presence of gangs through 1960. This number grew to 101 ten years later. Miller (1975) estimated that there were 28,500 to 81,500 gang members who were involved in 760 to 2,700 gangs. By the 1980's gangs were being reported in a greater number of cities with corresponding increases in both the number and size of the gangs becoming

apparent. Gangs were present in at least 179 different cities through 1980 and by 1982 Miller estimated that there were 97,940 gang members in 2,285 gangs within 286 different cities (Klein, 1995; Miller, 1982). Spergel and Curry (1990) estimated that there were 120,636 gang members and 1,439 distinct gangs in 1988.

As Table 1 demonstrates the number of gangs and gang members continued to grow during the current decade. A 1992 survey of law enforcement representatives, in 94 jurisdictions, reveals that gang crime problems were reported in 88 percent of the cities. Based on this survey the researchers estimated that nationwide there were 4,881 gangs with 249,324 members (Curry, Ball, and Fox, 1994). Through 1992 gangs were present in at least 769 cities (Klein, 1995). This equates to a 330 percent increase over Klein's 1980 number of 179 cities.

Curry, Ball, and Decker (1996) offered conservative and reasonable estimates on the scope of the nation's gangs in 1994. Conservatively it was estimated that there were 8,625 gangs and 378,807 gang members. Their more reasonable estimate suggests that there were 16,643 gangs with 555,181 members. Results from the 1995 National Youth Gang Survey indicate that there were at least 23,388 youth gangs in the country and that these gangs had 664,906 active members (United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1997). The researchers concluded that no state is gang-free and that youth gangs are spreading beyond the larger cities and into smaller and more rural communities. Nearly 1,500 different police departments reported that gangs were present within their respective cities (United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1997). Results from the 1996 National Youth Gang Survey, which was administered to a greater and more representative sample of agencies, indicates that 1,385 cities experienced a gang problem in that year. These agencies reported a total of 31,000 distinct gangs with membership totaling 846,000 gang members (Moore and Terrett, 1998). Results from the updated 1997 National Youth Gang Survey indicate a slight decline with 30,500 gangs and 816,000 gang members being reported (Moore & Terrett, 1999).

Table 1. Estimated Magnitude of Gangs in the United States

Survey	Year	Number of Cities	Number of Gangs	Number of Members
Klein	through 1960	58	_____	_____
Klein	through 1970	101	_____	_____
Miller	1975	___	760 - 2,700	28,500-81,500
Klein	through 1980	179	_____	_____
Miller	1982	286	2,285	97,940
Spergel & Curry	1988	68	1,439	120,636
Curry, Ball & Fox	1992	110	4,881	249,324
Klein	through 1992	769	_____	_____
Curry, Ball & Decker	1994	282	8,625-16,643	378,807-555,181
National Youth Gang Survey	1995	1,492	23,388	664,906
National Youth Gang Survey	1996	1,385	31,000	846,000
National Youth Gang Survey	1997	___	30,500	816,000
National Youth Gang Survey	1998	___	28,700	780,000

Several explanations have been offered as to why the number of gangs has increased and why gangs are beginning to emerge within smaller cities and rural areas. The most commonly offered explanation is that the big city gangs are sending their members into other small towns and rural areas in an effort to expand their drug trafficking enterprise. These areas offer the gang an opportunity to enhance their business and escape the intense law enforcement scrutiny, as well as competition with rival gangs, that they encounter in the big city. Skolnick (1990) offers some corroborating evidence for this theory and notes that the Los Angeles based Bloods and Crips have migrated to other cities in California and also seven other states outside of California. While this drug-franchising hypothesis appeals to the media the extent to which gangs seek to expand their drug network, or empires in this fashion is probably exaggerated; especially among youth gangs. Klein (1995) interviewed 228 police officers from across the nation and only 17, or 6 percent, acknowledged the existence of drug gangs migrating into their cities.

While migration for drug franchising purposes does occur it is not a fully sufficient explanation for explaining the increasing spread of youth gangs across the country. If migration does contribute to the growth and spread of youth gangs it is most likely the result of individual gang members leaving the bigger cities, because of familial relocation, to reside in smaller suburban and rural areas. The individual who may have been only a minor figure in the urban gang now seizes the opportunity to form and lead a new gang independent of his old big city gang.

Klein (1995) cogently argues that it is not necessary people migrating, but the migration of the gang culture itself that has contributed to the spread of youth gangs. The erroneous glamorization of gangs and gang life have been portrayed and disseminated through the mass media with the gang culture becoming increasingly commercialized. Consequently, teens and young adults emulate these behaviors and become “copycat” gangs with respect to the established big city gangs. Indeed, the Bloods and Crips which Skolnick found to be outside of Los Angeles may have been local youths who adopted the behaviors and dress patterns of the true Bloods and Crips.

## **Why do gangs arise?**

Classic juvenile delinquency and gang researchers relied heavily on sociological explanations when explaining the etiological roots of gang formation. Shaw and McKay (1943) discovered higher rates of juvenile delinquency within areas which possessed significantly higher levels of social disorganization. Socially disorganized areas are characterized by: rapid population movements of low income, or working class, people;

social, political, and/or extreme economic change or disruption; rapid industrialization or deindustrialization; as well as distinct negative changes in the labor market. As a result of this disorganization the key social institutions, i.e. schools, public service agencies, and local employers, are unable to build strong bonds with the community residents and cannot adequately provide programs and services which meet the residents' needs.

Cloward and Ohlin (1960) advance this social disorganization theory and argue that when young adults lack, or have been blocked, access to legitimate opportunities, such as education and vocational programs, they are unable to achieve the cultural and economic success goals that they have been socialized to believe in and pursue. Consequently, they will turn to illegitimate opportunities, such as criminal activity, in order to still achieve cultural and economic success through other available means. Criminal youth gangs are more likely to arise under these circumstances. Youth who lack access to both legitimate and illegitimate opportunities may form conflict, or fighting, gangs as a way of achieving some form of status and success within their communities.

Chin (1990) found elements of structural, political, and cultural fragmentation within New York City's Chinatown which was attributed to increasing immigration. As a greater number of Chinese immigrants arrived in the many communities of Chinatown the existing residents found it more difficult to maintain the current political, cultural, and social status quo. Communities became further isolated and fragmented, on the basis of ethnic and provisional lines, and as stability deteriorated criminal activity and gangs emerged as a means of protecting the community's unique ethnic identity and status within Chinatown.

Miller (1958) originally viewed the youth gang as a normal means of adapting to life within a socially disorganized community with the gang serving as a prosocial mechanism for preparing the teens for adulthood. The lower class communities were described as distinct subcultures in which young males placed significant value on being tough and street smart. Getting into trouble, demonstrating one's individuality, and being able to seek out, and generate, exciting activities were considered to be desirable attributes for surviving in the often unpredictable and dangerous lower class community.

Other researchers have emphasized the role of poverty as a causal, or at least a significantly contributing factor, for gang formation either independent of, or within the context of, social disorganization. The lack of economic resources creates obvious tension within those affected communities and for its residents. Groups within socially isolated communities who have few, if any, employment opportunities and poor job information networks will not develop a strong sense of attachment to the labor force. Consequently, they may turn to illegitimate activities as a means of generating income (Wilson, 1991).



Fagan (1996) expands this concept and notes that one obvious source of illegitimate income is the selling and distributing of drugs. The sharp decline in cocaine prices and profound social and economic changes within impoverished and disorganized communities have produced situations in which the existing legitimate blue-collar jobs have been replaced by illegitimate drug related jobs. The expanding crack market essentially provided jobs for a surplus pool of unskilled workers and created situations in which the existing drug dealers faced increased competition to retain their share of the market. Lacking adequate opportunity to obtain legitimate blue collar jobs many gang members may have turned to drug distribution as a substitute for the traditional adult job. As the number of drug dealers increased so did acts of drug related violence and the gang became an important vehicle for maintaining one's drug territory for offering collective protection against rival dealers seeking to expand their own drug territory.

Sullivan (1989) documents the existence of dual or segmented labor markets. A primary market is said to exist when there are ample steady paying jobs in which enough income is generated to support a family. The secondary labor market consists of low paying jobs, welfare conditions, temporary employment opportunities, and illegal activities. Individuals within secondary markets vacillate between these various activities and sources of income. Greater levels of street crime and youth gang activity are more likely to occur in communities with more pronounced, or severe, secondary markets.

Vigil (1988) found a higher prevalence of gang formation within communities, and among youth, who experienced multiple marginality. Segmented labor markets, poverty, racism, and social isolation interact to produce situations in which the community and its residents are outside of, or marginal to, the legitimate economy and the accepted cultural mainstream. Gangs arise as a coping mechanism for those youths who are prevented from adapting to the dominant culture.

## **Who joins gangs and why?**

When discussing why youths choose to affiliate themselves with a street gang it is imperative to realize that only a small percentage of the youth within a given community actually become gang members. Therefore, it is not sufficient to state that **all** gang members reside in low-income areas, or belong to a racial or ethnic minority group, or come from broken homes. A far greater number of youth who reside in impoverished areas, have ethnic or minority status, and reside in broken, or dysfunctional homes, do **not** join gangs. As Klein (1995) comments the gang is a minority within its own age cohort; a cohort composed of many youth who share similar economic backgrounds, minority status, and family situations.

Research and interviews with gang members demonstrate a wide diversity of behaviors, attitudes, and psychological attributes among members both within and between gangs. As Klein (1995) suggests gang members are not much different from their own non-gang peers. However; gang members do tend to demonstrate some of the following attributes to a greater extent when contrasted with non-gang youth.

- ◆ Difficulty in school with lower than normal I.Q.'s
- ◆ Lower impulse control
- ◆ A marked tendency toward aggressiveness and physical prowess
- ◆ Inadequate social skills
- ◆ An enhanced need, or desire, for belonging
- ◆ An enhanced need, or desire, for status and recognition
- ◆ A boring, uninvolved lifestyle in which episodes of excitement are sought out and valued
- ◆ A weak, or non-existent, attachment to adult control systems
- ◆ A lack of structure to develop personal and social identity

As noted earlier Miller (1958) and other researchers would question the validity of interpreting many of these characteristics in a negative manner. Many of these attributes could actually be considered as positive, even required factors for surviving in the “urban jungle”. As Spergel (1995) notes a few research studies have found exceptional organizational and leadership abilities among gang members; however, the majority of the gang literature tends to continue to view the attributes listed above as aggravating factors for gang membership.

The motivational reasons for joining a gang are just as diverse as the characteristics of the gang members themselves. Little systematic research, on identifying the risk factors which can predict why certain youth are more inclined to join a gang, has been conducted. However, case studies and self-report interviews offer a wide variety of reasons. Youths may join gangs for some, or all, of the following reasons:

- ◆ Their friends or family members belong to a gang
- ◆ Gangs are present in their neighborhood
- ◆ Protection
- ◆ Forced to join
- ◆ A desire for recognition, power, and status
- ◆ Excitement and new experiences
- ◆ To make money and increase their material possessions
- ◆ Rebellion against parents or as an escape from an unbearable home
- ◆ A chance to “belong” and be accepted

While a considerable number of gang members offer protection as their reason for joining the gang empirical research documents that in many of these cases the perceived threat of violence was far greater than reality. Many youths feel compelled to join the gang out of a perceived fear that they will consistently be harassed, even killed, should they decline to join. In actuality their fears are often exaggerated and ironically they face a greater risk of personal victimization by joining the gang and becoming involved in its criminal activities. Likewise, few youth are actually forced to join a gang. Coercion as a recruitment method appears to be more rare than originally thought. However, this can occur when a gang needs to increase its size, as prior to an anticipated altercation with a rival gang, or when the gang perceives a threat to its territory such as an influx of new immigrants or residents (Spergel, 1995; Klein, 1995).

## **What are the demographic features of the American street gang?**

### *Age*

Many individuals erroneously assume that street gangs are entirely composed of teenagers or juveniles under the age of 18. This assumption continues to persist despite countless studies which refute this notion. Thrasher (1936) in his pioneering study of Chicago street gangs, in the 1920's, found that member ages ranged from 6 to 50 years old with the majority of the members being 11 to 25 years old. While the gang literature of the 1950's and 60's focused on juvenile gangs ample evidence suggests the presence of young adults in their twenties either forming their own gangs or belonging to juvenile gangs (Spergel, 1995). By the 1970's, and certainly the 1980's, the average age of gang members had increased over the average age of the typical 1950's member. Chin (1990) reported an average age of 22.7 years for those members in his Chinatown study of the 1980's.

Analyzing 1987 and 1988 Chicago Police Department records Bobrowski (1988) found an average age of 19.4 among male gang members and Spergel (1995) notes that the average age of Chicago's gang homicide offenders grew from 19, in 1985, to 20 years of age in 1990.

Klein (1995) notes that this "graying effect" is more apparent in cities with established, or chronic, gang problems. Trends suggest that members are retaining their ties to the gang for longer periods of time as opposed to joining at older ages. The presence of these older gang members can negatively impact the gang and its activities since these members are more likely to be criminally experienced and more heavily involved with drug sales. Consequently, these individuals become "revered" and serve as undesirable role models for the younger members.

### *Race/Ethnicity*

As previously mentioned gangs have historically transcended all racial and ethnic lines but today's gang members are predominately, but not exclusively, Black and Hispanic males. Miller (1982) surveyed nine large cities and found that 44.4 percent of the gang members were Hispanic, 42.9 percent were Black, 9 percent were White and roughly 4 percent were of Asian descent. Klein (1995) analyzed police records and reported that 45 percent of Los Angeles' gangs were Hispanic, 41 percent were Black, 9 percent were Asian, and the remaining 5 percent were White. As Bursik and Grasmick (1993) argue the overrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics within gangs does not reflect any special predisposition on their part.

As Spergel (1995) suggests mixed race gangs are not uncommon in many jurisdictions although Black gangs demonstrate a greater propensity for remaining homogeneous. While mixed race and ethnic gangs do occur these appear to be anomalies with racial and ethnic homogeneity remaining as the dominant pattern among American street gangs. An analysis of gang composition in Chicago reveals that homogeneity levels were greatest for Black gangs (96 %), followed by Hispanic (94%) and White gangs (88%) (Knox, 1991).

Hispanic gangs are primarily composed of Mexican-American and Puerto Rican youth while Asian gangs include youth from China, Korea, Japan, Cambodia, and Vietnam. White gangs usually consist of second or third generation youth with ties to Poland, Italy, Ireland and recently Russia.

### *Gender*

Historically gangs have been a male dominated institution with females being relegated to either support roles, such as carrying weapons or drugs, or separate auxiliary gang members attached to the all male gangs. Female auxiliary gang members were often precluded from participating in formal meetings of their affiliated male gang. As Klein (1995) notes this exclusion was a product of male chivalry and as a result of the belief that the females would be susceptible to "snitching" if they were allowed access to the gang's criminal planning activities. Members of these auxiliary gangs tended to possess the same psychological and sociological attributes of their male counterparts and did engage in independent criminal activity but to a lesser, and substantially less violent, extent.

Recent research on female gangs provides ample evidence of a changing pattern with respect to male gangs. Females are now joining male gangs as true members, as opposed to fulfilling a support role, and a greater number are also forming their own independent, non-male affiliated gangs. (Campbell, 1990) (For an excellent account of an all female gang see Lauderback, Hansen, and Waldorf, 1992).

In spite of this emerging independence female gang members still constitute a minority, in terms of both their number and their criminal activities, when contrasted with male gang members. Curry, Ball, and Fox (1994) reviewed police gang files and found that females constituted 5.7 percent of the included gang members. Other studies have produced similar figures with Miller's 1975 estimate, of 10 percent, remaining as the maximum estimated proportion of female gang members (Curry, 1998). One notable exception can be found in the work of Esbensen and Winfree (1998) who found female membership to be as high as 38 percent of the total membership. Female gang members commit fewer offenses and far fewer violent offenses (Curry, 1998). Compared to male gang members they are also less likely to condone acts of physical violence and to believe that violence is justifiable ( Deschenes, et. al, in Curry, 1998).

However, recent investigative reports indicate that female gang members are becoming as equally violent, and in some cases even more violent, than their male counterparts. Female gang members are using violence as a means of establishing, maintaining, and enhancing "face" or reputation for both themselves and for the gang as a whole. In many cases females have to exert twice the effort, hence more random and unprovoked acts of violence, in order to gain the same reputation as a male gang or gang member (Wang, 1998; Sikes, 1997).

## **What are the structural features of American street gangs?**

### *Organizational Structure*

The gang's organizational structure can range from a highly organized militaristic unit, in which roles are clearly defined, to a loose amoeba like form with no clearly defined roles and expectations. The former type of gang is far more scarce than the later. While supergangs have existed these represent the extreme end of the organizational continuum. Gangs, such as the Vice Lord Nation and the Black Disciples, with clear hierarchical organization, established ranks, and in some cases a formal charter do not reflect the typical American gang.

The traditional gang structure consists of several tiers of members arranged on the basis of the members' ages. The oldest members, often referred to as veteranos or original gangsters, occupy the top tier. Following this group is a middle or junior tier with the youngest members, babies or pee-wees, being found in the lowest tier. Typically the members do not associate and operate as a full unit. Normally, small cliques of similarly aged members will form and associate with each other. Consequently, the majority of the gang's crime is performed by these individual cliques as opposed to the entire gang operating jointly as one unit.

Klein (1995) notes that this structure is more common in cities with long standing gangs and among gangs in which membership is intergenerational. However, Klein (1995) reports that the traditional structure is no longer the predominant form. His survey of 261 police agencies revealed that 65 percent of the cities' gang structures did not demonstrate the traditional profile. The most predominant structure today is less vertical and age-graded. The typical gang is autonomous, claims less territory, and tends to have a shorter existence. Twenty percent of the respondents reported geographically connected gangs with a horizontal structure. The Bloods and Crips epitomize this model with branches, or sets, spreading across different neighborhoods and cities.

### *Types of Members*

Gang membership is an extremely fluid and dynamic process with most gangs demonstrating relatively high turnover rates as new recruits enter as other members dissociate themselves from the gang and its activities. Contrary to popular assumptions it is possible to terminate one's membership with little, if any, negative repercussions. Commenting on the "once you are in – your in for life" notion Decker and Lauritsen (1996) argue that in many cases this is widely used by the gang's leaders as a form of propaganda for maintaining control over the other members and to maintain a sizeable membership.

Gang members' commitment and involvement levels also vacillate considerably throughout their gang careers. The most dedicated and involved members form the core or nucleus of the gang. These core members establish and define the gang's identity and also tend to be more active in the gang's criminal and non-criminal activities. As Klein (1995) suggests one can become a core member by being heavily involved in crime

and/or the routine activities of the gang. Many core members are heavily involved in the gang's criminal activities but not its daily routine activities and vice-versa. Individuals with less commitment, or fringe members, are often not recognized as full members, demonstrate sporadic attendance at gang related functions, and possess less status when compared to the core members. Individuals, or "wannabees" who aspire to become gang members are typically younger and pose a greater threat for law enforcement since their aspirations can act as an aggravating factor for engaging in violent crime in order to prove themselves and receive member status. Seniors or older gangsters are normally older teens or young adults who either were, or still are, attached to the gang for many years. These members are perceived as having the highest status and are often viewed as mentors or role models. Spergel (1995) notes the existence of floaters or individuals that act as brokers or consultants to the gang. Floaters do not have member status but associate with the gang whenever their expertise or resources are needed.

Spergel (1995) concludes that gang membership criteria and roles are often vague and unclear even among the gang's members themselves. Gang members may graduate to higher status positions, especially as they grow older; however, many members may shift back and forth between core and fringe status in relation to the degree to which they need the gang and its perceived benefits.

### *Leadership*

Types of leadership vary across gangs with no one dominant theme being apparent. Leadership within the traditional gang of the 1950's and 60's was highly correlated with age. Instead of having one clear leader for the entire gang numerous leaders existed within each of the age-graded cliques. Older leaders had stronger reputations but their status did not always enable them to exert leadership over younger members.

Klein (1995) reports this same style for many of today's gangs with leadership being heavily dependent upon gang activities. One member might act as a leader for criminal activities while another member may play a more important role when non-criminal, or social, activities are in question. Leadership also changes frequently over time as members leave the gang and other newer members become more committed to the gang and its activities.

Miller (1981) delineates three stereotypical models of leadership and notes that elements of all three can usually be found to exist at some point during the life of the gang. The military command model, with a centralized and hierarchical chain of command; the key personality model and a collective leadership model. The military

model is often erroneously presumed to be the most common type of leadership but the majority of gangs tend to be more democratic and less rigid than this model would imply (Klein, 1995).

### *Gang Size*

Assessments on the sizes of gangs should be approached with caution given the fact that membership is highly transient with turnover occurring on a relatively frequent basis. Law enforcement estimates on Chicago and Los Angeles “supergangs” have suggested that membership rosters can range in the thousands and even hundred thousands. However, these estimates are usually derived from arrest records or intelligence databases which are historical in nature and may include members who are no longer active with the gang and/or may list “wannabees” as actual members. Results from the National Youth Gang Survey indicate that 90 percent of the nation’s largest cities reported having more than 500 gang members. An average gang size of 98 members can be derived from this study (United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1997).

A five city case study, conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum, indicates approximately 4,000 to 5,000 gang members in San Diego, Austin, Kansas City, and the Metro-Dade area. The number of distinct gangs within these cities ranged from 60 to 75. An estimated 100,000 gang members belonging to 132 gangs were reported for Chicago (Lamm-Weisel and Painter, 1997).

Some researchers argue that gangs are relatively small and range anywhere from 4 to 50 or 75 members (Spergel, 1995). Typically gangs will be smaller in cities with emerging gang problems and larger in those cities with established, or chronic, gang problems. The size of a gang can also vary by season and with specific events that affect the gang. Gang rosters may swell in a time of crisis, such as impending gang violence or to protect turf or drug markets when they are threatened, in order to demonstrate greater strength. Likewise a gang’s size may decrease if the gang faces no threats and exists in a more stable environment.



## **What type of criminal and non-criminal activities do gangs engage in?**

The typical gang member spends a considerable amount of time simply “hanging out” looking for excitement, regaling in past war stories and reliving other prior neighborhood events. Obviously non-gang delinquents and non-delinquent youth engage in these same behaviors; however, recent research indicates that gang youth may participate in these activities on a more frequent basis. Huff (1996) surveyed gang and non-gang youth and found that gang members were significantly more likely to “hang out”, attend parties, “cruise”, and fight when contrasted with their non-gang counterparts. The differences were most pronounced for fighting with 93 percent of gang members reporting this behavior and only 20 percent of the non-gang youth reporting the same. Extremely significant differences became apparent when the youth were asked about drugs and alcohol. Gang youth were approximately 2 ½ times more likely to drink alcohol, 5 times more likely to use drugs, and 8 times more likely to report that they had sold drugs (Huff, 1996).

A recurrent theme in the gang literature is a noticeably greater discrepancy, in the criminal behavior of gang members, when compared to non-gang youth. Gang members demonstrate consistently higher levels of offending in both studies which examine self-report and official arrest data. Esbensen and Huizinga (1993) report gang member offending to be 2 to 3 times greater than crime among non-gang youth. This greater level of criminal activity includes both non-violent and violent offenses with a greater disparity occurring for violent crime (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, and Chard-Wierschem, 1993).

Huff (1996) notes that Cleveland gang members were significantly more likely to report engaging in assaults on rivals, carrying guns and knives to school, carrying concealed weapons in general, and arson. Only 2 percent of the non-gang youth reported prior participation in a drive-by shooting contrasted with 40 percent of the gang members. Thirty-four percent of the gang members had intimidated or assaulted victims and witnesses with 15 percent reporting prior involvement in an episode of homicide. No non-gang youth reported involvement for these last two offenses.

Recent research indicates not only a greater criminal involvement among individual gang members, but also demonstrates that gang members can be held accountable for a large proportion of all juvenile crime. Analyzing self-report data Thornberry and Burch (1997) found that gang members' delinquent acts were disproportionate in relation to their representation in the population. Gang members constituted 30 percent of the teens, in the researchers' Rochester sample, yet accounted for 65 percent of all reported acts of delinquency. These gang members were

responsible for 86 percent of all reported serious crime, 69 percent of all violent crime, 68 percent of all property crime, and 70 percent of all reported drug sales (Thornberry and Burch, 1997).

Despite these salient findings it is important to note that criminal activities vary by gang member and gangs as a whole. Not all gang members offend at equal rates, indeed many gang members never commit criminal acts. Likewise, some gangs can be held accountable for a large proportion of crime while similar gangs, in other locations, will only be accountable for a smaller proportion of the total crime.

## **What is the relationship between gangs, drugs and violence?**

As the research documents drug related offenses and acts of violence are more prevalent among gang members; however, as Moore (1990) suggests attributing the individual acts of the members to the entire gang as a whole can be a problematic assumption. The simultaneous growth in gang related violence and drug related offenses, primarily crack cocaine distribution, led to speculation that the gangs were controlling the drug markets and engaging in more violence as a result. Two opposing viewpoints have emerged surrounding this controversial hypothesis and the extent to which the gangs are involved in wholesale drug trafficking.

Skolnick (1990) argues for the existence of supergangs which are highly structured organized groups of entrepreneurs whose primary activity is drug trafficking. These were originally street gangs that evolved into business organizations and which seek to further their distribution network by any means, including the threat and use of force. Taylor (1990) argues that the gangs of Detroit have joined forces with drug dealers to form powerful drug distribution alliances which ruthlessly maintain violent control over their territory. The California Department of Justice (1993) reports that the Bloods and Crips have taken over the drug markets in several cities and routinely engage in street level violence as they battle for control of the drug trade.

Alternatively, Klein (1995) argues that the typical street gang does not have the capability to become a rational business organization and that while individual gang members may sell drugs the entire gang does not exist, and function, for this reason. The classic street gang is structurally and functionally distinct from the drug distribution group or gang. The street gang engages in generalized and spontaneous acts of crime while the drug gang's crime is specific and focused on business. Drug gangs have more cohesion, a greater degree of centralized leadership, and place more value on loyalty and secrecy. Finally, the street gang's territory is defined by residential proximity whereas

the drug gang's territory is dictated by drug sales and market demand irrespective of where the members live. Decker, Bynum and Weisel (1998) offer confirmatory evidence regarding the extent to which street gangs evolve into organized criminal syndicates or crime groups. With the exception of the Gangster Disciples, in Chicago, these researchers found that street gangs are not transforming or growing into organized crime groups.

As Fagan (1996) suggests not all gang violence is necessarily connected with drug sales, nor are all drug selling and violence necessarily connected with gangs. Moore (1992) and Chin (1990) found no significant relationship between gang violence and drug trafficking among Chicano and Chinese gangs respectively. Hagedorn (1988) found similar findings among Black males in Milwaukee. It is plausible that individual gang members experience altercations with drug dealers and these escalate into episodes of street violence which draw in more gang members. These gang members retaliate to defend their turf or "homeboys" but not for maintaining or expanding a drug distribution network.

Maxson and Klein (1996) clarified the relationship between gangs, drugs, and homicide by analyzing homicide data with an emphasis on gang and drug related motives. The researchers concluded "that while participants in gang related homicides are more likely to have roles in the sale and distribution of drugs, the sales involvement may be less likely to figure as a cause, for the homicide, when compared to non-gang homicide cases". "If anything, the sales-violence connection seems stronger in non-gang cases."

Fagan (1996) argues that the increasing gang violence is more attributable to three non-drug related factors. Gang members have gotten older and older offenders are more prone to commit more serious offenses. Gang neighborhoods have become more socially and economically isolated with fewer legal opportunities. Consequently, robbery has become a more frequent means of acquiring money and material goods. Third, Fagan (1996) suggests that more, and more powerful, firearms are now easily accessible to gang members.

## **What are the methods for addressing the gang issue?**

Gang prevention programs have been exceedingly rare in the past and still remain so today. Prevention is problematic in that it requires accurately predicting who is likely to become a future gang member and an understanding of the exact conditions under

which gangs arise. Without precise knowledge of these, for a given community and its youth, it is difficult to apply generic programs and assume they will work under all conditions and for all youth. In addition, Klein (1995) warns that identifying a youth as a potential troublemaker, or gang member, can label or stigmatize the youth and create the exact opposite and unintended effect in which the negatively labeled youth gravitates to the gang.

Gang intervention programs have been the most prevalent form of managing the gang situation. Intervention programs seek to reform, rehabilitate, and divert gang members away from the gang and into more prosocial and acceptable activities. Typical intervention programs utilize community mobilization, street outreach, and the provision of opportunities or some combination of the three.

Community mobilization programs seek to empower the neighborhood's residents both socially and politically. Once empowered, and actively involved in community affairs, the residents would become attached or bond to each other and to the surrounding social institutions like the school or church. The community's cohesiveness would then enable the residents to define community problems and develop their own effective solutions. The logical outcome would be a healthy and organized community environment; an environment which substantially minimizes the chance of gang formation and persistence. These programs were popular in the 1920's and 30's and are once again being renewed today (See Spergel, 1995, for an exceptional community based model for managing the gang situation and Atkinson, 1996, for an exemplary example of community mobilization).

The most well known community mobilization program was the Chicago Area Project which vitalized the community and in turn produced a substantial reduction in juvenile delinquency. Despite its success and praise from the Rand Corporation it had not been identically replicated elsewhere through 1990 (Knox, 1991).

Despite its success other community programs have failed to reduce gangs and gang crime and some have paradoxically exacerbated the problem. Klein (1995) argues that these community programs probably inadvertently increased gang cohesiveness and the gang's renewed stability made it more difficult to intervene and dissolve, or at least dilute, the gang's power. Klein (1995) cogently argues that gang cohesion is the critical component to understand when working with gangs. All programs must work to loosen the gang's cohesiveness if they are to succeed.

Street outreach programs tended to typically possess strong social work components with individual students, counselors, and social service workers being assigned to work with one specific gang or one distinct community. The common feature of these programs was for the worker to interact with the gang on its turf and to foster a strong rapport with the members. Workers were encouraged to demonstrate empathy and understanding and provide activities for, and assistance to, the gang

members. The major drawback to these programs, during the 1950's and 60's when they were at the height of their popularity, was that they increased gang cohesion tremendously as only the really "bad" "gangs were afforded a street worker. Thus the gangs image of itself, both to the members and to outsiders, was substantially enhanced. Often, increased cohesion and heightened status lead to more criminal activity. Those youth who were closest to their assigned workers were often the same ones who experienced more trouble with the police (Gold and Mattick, 1974).

While the historically disappointing use of street workers has lead to their contemporary decline programs which seek to provide social, vocational, and educational opportunities continue to flourish today. As Spergel (1995) comments these programs, in conjunction with community mobilization, appear to offer promise as effective gang intervention strategies. In essence, if the gang members can receive educational and vocational skills their chances of gaining access to legitimate opportunities, such as continued education or employment, will be attenuated and their gang involvement will decline. School to work transition programs, such as the East Los Angeles Skills Center, the Job Corps, and many local job placement programs have been successful with assisting gang members and other at-risk youth (Spergel, 1995).

Suppression programs, such as task forces, street sweeps, and gang specific legislation, are primarily administered by law enforcement and prosecution offices and target specific gang offenses and influential gang members. The underlying assumption is that removal of gang leaders will cause the gang to disband and stiff penalties will deter others from forming and joining gangs. Since the 1980's suppression programs have expanded considerably as a result of several factors. The increase in gang related violence and its relationship to the drug war; as well as the perception that intervention has largely been unsuccessful have contributed to an increase in the use of suppression tactics. Klein (1995) advocates an intense evaluation and scrutiny of these tactics in order to fully understand their efficacy to eradicate gangs and gang related crime.

## **What are the recommended best practices for dealing with the contemporary gang issue?**

The National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Research and Development Program, which is located at the University of Chicago, recently completed a comprehensive assessment of the gang situation including current problems and effective solutions. The following provides a synopsis of some of the program's major recommendations (United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1996).

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*General Considerations*

- ◆ The gang problem must be recognized, analyzed, and addressed
- ◆ Community organization, mobilization, and participation is imperative
- ◆ Collaboration between key criminal justice, social service, and community agencies
- ◆ Long-term comprehensive strategies and short range suppression and outreach services are necessary
- ◆ The implementation of **both** intervention and suppression models will facilitate greater success
- ◆ Youth gang members must be held accountable for their behavior, yet be given opportunities to change
- ◆ Systematic research and evaluation is needed
  
- ◆ Community oriented and multi-agency responses should be afforded to the highest funding priority

*Law Enforcement*

- ◆ Address emerging and stable gang problems separately
- ◆ Vary resources on scope and severity of the problem
- ◆ Communities with emerging gang problems might be better served by designating a few gang specialists as opposed to establishing a full gang unit
- ◆ Communities with established, or chronic, gang problems should establish a specialized gang unit
- ◆ Develop common definitions for gang, gang member, and gang crime
- ◆ Combine aggressive enforcement with community involvement and participation
- ◆ Pursue, and utilize, secondary social intervention activities such as youth referrals and counseling programs
- ◆ Maintain up-to-date intelligence information
- ◆ Target hardcore members and gang “hot-spots”
- ◆ Conduct staff and community gang awareness training
- ◆ Administrators in communities with emerging gang issues should not deny, or downplay, their existence
- ◆ Administrators in communities with chronic gang problems should resist pressure to simply increase suppression tactics and develop programs targeted at true gang and potential gang members

*Judicial*

- ◆ In communities with serious gang problems the prosecutor should follow a case from start to finish (vertical prosecution)

- ◆ Prosecutors should pinpoint cases immediately after law enforcement affects an arrest
- ◆ Formulate policy and procedures as to how gang cases will be managed
- ◆ Pretrial testimony should be videotaped in case victims or witnesses later recant their testimony
- ◆ Prosecutors should encourage and develop community based strategies such as counseling and job training
- ◆ Reserve long periods of incarceration for hardcore members or cases with serious violence
- ◆ Sentence minor offenders to shorter periods, preferably community supervision
- ◆ The court should improve its capability to access and provide gang related information
- ◆ Judges should be visible to the community and participate in interagency task forces

### *Corrections*

- ◆ Probation officers should conduct risk/needs assessments on gang probationers
- ◆ Probation officers should employ a service brokerage approach dependent on local resources
- ◆ Probation officers should participate in school programs
- ◆ Establish intensive supervision programs for serious offenders
- ◆ Compile gang intelligence data within the jail or prison
- ◆ Establish ties between correctional institutions and community agencies
- ◆ Incorporate and consider gang specific issues in institutional treatment programs
- ◆ Parole officers should establish networks with other criminal justice personnel and community members
- ◆ Use a step-down approach to assist the gang parolees' reintegration into the community

### *Schools*

- ◆ Gang behavior within the school should be openly assessed and addressed
- ◆ Schools with gang problems should establish school community councils
- ◆ Gang members in the schools should be targeted for remedial education, supervision, and support services
- ◆ Develop school gang codes and policies
- ◆ Involve parents of gang members in the educational process

## **What is known about contemporary gangs in North Carolina?**

Anecdotal evidence, media accounts, and conversations with criminal justice personnel indicate the presence of gangs in North Carolina. Indeed, Klein (1995) identified the presence of gangs in at least one North Carolina city prior to 1970 with the number of cities reporting a gang presence increasing to 13 by the end of 1992. The National Youth Gang Survey (1997) lists 24 cities and 10 counties which reported active gangs in their respective jurisdictions in 1995.

Only one comprehensive statewide research study has been conducted in this area. Oehme (1997) surveyed 410 non-randomly selected law enforcement, educational, court and correctional personnel in 1994. Of the 257 survey respondents, which represented 58 cities and 95 counties, 2,772 youth gang members were reported. These members belonged to 127 different gangs which were located in 39 different localities (18 cities, 15 counties, and 6 correctional facilities). Gangs were reported to exist in both urban and rural areas of the state with the largest perceived number being identified in the cities of Charlotte, Durham, Brevard, and Lumberton and in the unincorporated areas of Mecklenburg, Caldwell, and Durham Counties. 84 non-gang youth groups, with 1,450 members, were also reported and as the researcher notes these youth groups have the dangerous potential to evolve into formal youth gangs.

The number of reported members per gang ranged from 3 to 20. The typical municipal youth gang was reported to consist of 16 members while the average size of the typical county youth gang was reported to be slightly larger with 19 members. Demographically, 66.1 percent of the members were Black, 24.3 percent were White, 1.6 percent were of Hispanic origin, and the remaining 1.7 percent were of Asian descent.

Oehme (1997) found a significant relationship between these youth gangs and both the level of serious violent crime and drug-related activities. Sixty-one percent of those respondents, who reported the presence of youth gangs in their jurisdictions, described the gangs' involvement in Part I offenses (murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, motor vehicle theft, larceny, and burglary) as being either very serious or serious. These agencies also mentioned that when contact with a gang member occurred 67 percent of the cases involved gang members with prior criminal records. Sixty-eight percent of the agencies reported that drug distribution was a primary activity of the gang while 64 percent responded that this drug distribution involved importation from outside the community.



Gangs with larger memberships and more adult members were more likely to be involved in both serious violent crime and drug-related activities. Strong evidence of non-local gang members being involved with drug importation, and the presence of adult gang members possessing common ties to other adult organized crime groups, was discovered and offers limited support for the existence of drug franchising in North Carolina. The study also noted evidence of increasing drug involvement among many street gangs in spite of the fact that these gangs did not possess the typical attributes of a drug gang.

The causative factors of limited social opportunities, dysfunctional family life, and poverty were the most commonly cited explanations for gang formation and persistence. Law enforcement agencies and juvenile court counselors were the most active in terms of responding to the presence of gangs within their respective communities; and the trend was toward suppression activities and strategies as 42.3 percent of the agencies acknowledged engaging in these tactics. All agencies which had active gang programs reported an unusually strong belief that these approaches were highly effective (Oehme, 1997).

The renewed national attention on youth gangs has impacted North Carolina and research is beginning to emerge which examines the state's gangs. However, with the exception of Oehme's (1997) seminal work this research appears to be more focused on gathering intelligence information which is normally only descriptive in nature. Little systematic work has been conducted which addresses the key and emerging gang issues such as migration and the relationship between drugs and gang violence. Research, which utilizes a uniform or standard definition of gangs, gang members, and gang crime needs to be initiated. This will enable researchers to compare and contrast the state's gangs with each other. Information on the evolution of gangs, and the extent to which their criminal activities, vary over time needs to be provided in order to advance our knowledge in this area.

The structural, behavioral, and demographic features of specific gangs should be examined and classified within a statewide perspective. This is specifically needed in order to ascertain a more precise understanding of the relationship between drugs and gangs in North Carolina. Are there distinct street and drug gangs or have street gangs evolved into drug gangs? Likewise, studies should be directed at ascertaining the nature of and the extent to which youth gangs interact with prison and adult organized crime groups. Comparative studies will also delineate the major similarities and differences between urban and rural gangs, as well as the variance along racial and gender lines. Specific research on the ecological context in which gangs form and persist needs to be pursued in order to understand the social dynamics of those communities with an identified gang presence. Current agency responses to gangs should be scientifically evaluated in order to identify best practices and effective solutions. Finally, research is needed which examines the extent to which gangs affect an agency's financial and personnel resources and addresses agency specific needs in these areas.

## Methods

### *Survey Instrument*

A 73 item questionnaire was compiled based upon the existing gang literature (For a full copy of the survey refer to the Appendix). The questionnaire was subdivided into three sections with part one collecting basic demographic information about the survey respondent. The respondents' positions within their respective agencies, years of criminal justice experience, age and gender were asked in order to produce a basic profile of those practitioners who completed the survey. The second section of the survey dealt with youth crime in general and specifically addressed comparative analyses with youth crime over the past five years. Questions dealing with violent crime, drug related crime, and firearms related offenses were included with the respondents being asked to indicate if these offenses have increased, decreased, or remained the same, within their jurisdictions, over the past five years. Respondents were also queried about today's typical youthful offender compared to the typical youthful offender of five years ago. A five item Likert type scale was used in order to ascertain the extent to which the respondents either agreed, disagreed, or had no opinion about the level of violence, drug use and weapons possession of today's offender in comparison to the typical offender of five years ago.

The issue of gangs and their absence or presence and influence within the community was initially addressed in the second section also. A four-pronged test was utilized in order to determine the types of gangs within the respondents' respective jurisdictions. Respondents were asked if youth tend to "hang out" in groups, if any of these groups demonstrated a commitment to criminal activity, if these groups acknowledged their collective identity through names, dress, graffiti or other means, and if these groups restricted their activities to certain geographical areas. Affirmative responses to all four questions would serve as an indicator that classic street gangs exist within the respondent's community.

The researchers debated over the issue of imposing a common definition of gangs as opposed to simply asking: "Do you have gangs in your jurisdiction?" Asking this question would allow each respondent to define gangs as they are locally perceived but prevent the possibility of comparing gangs across jurisdictions. Consequently, it was determined to use the four-pronged test, for some survey items, as a common definition of what constitutes a gang in order to permit comparative analyses across jurisdictions, over time, and between differing gangs. Other questions allowed the survey respondent to utilize their own perceived and/or locally defined definition of what constitutes a gang. Utilizing both approaches would allow the researchers to examine the disparity between the perceptions of gangs and the reality of gangs.

The final section of the survey dealt specifically with the attributes of gangs and gang members. Questions were asked about gang crime, the criminal justice response to the gangs as well as specific information on individual gangs. Respondents were asked to identify unique gang names, the gang's affiliation, the number of members, the types of criminal activity that the gang predominately commits and the racial composition of the gang. Each respondent was asked to delineate information on up to eight different gangs within their community.

When discussing gang typologies the majority of the existing gang literature tends to define gangs along discrete and dichotomous taxonomies, i.e. gangs are either street, or territorial, gangs **or** drug gangs. Little discussion has been devoted to those street gangs who also distribute drugs nor to those drug gangs who still retain some "turf", such as an open air drug market. This study sought to organize gangs along a continuum ranging from strictly street gangs to primarily street gangs who deal drugs to primarily drug gangs who maintain minimal territory to purely drug distribution gangs. Consequently specific questions were asked about each gang's drug distribution involvement and the extent to which they maintained "turf". Thus the method allowed the researchers to identify pure street gangs, pure drug gangs; as well as those gangs which fall within the gray areas of the street-drug gang dichotomy.

Finally, the respondents were asked a series of questions in which they were asked to use a 7 point Likert type scale to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with questions concerning gang violence, drug sales, gang origins, gang member attributes, and gang migration. These questions were included in order to identify how the gangs have evolved from the time they were first noticed within the community to the present time.

### *Survey Sample*

A total of 1,137 surveys were mailed to various criminal justice professionals throughout the state. Numerous agencies within each county were surveyed in order to increase the reliability and comprehensiveness of the study and also to reduce the likelihood of encountering gang denial which would have been much higher had only one branch of the criminal justice system been surveyed. Of this number 433 were completed and returned by the respondents. These respondents resided in 94 of the state's 100 counties. This equates to an overall return rate of 38.1 percent (Refer to Table 2 for a list of surveyed professionals by job type and the specific number of questionnaires which were mailed and returned).

Surveys were mailed to all of the state’s 492 School Resource Officers with 171 or 34.8 percent being returned. Surveys were also mailed to every Sheriff’s Office with 36, or 36 percent being completed. The same was true with the police departments with 389 cities being surveyed and 109, or 28 percent, responding to the survey. Surveys were distributed to each of the state’s 39 Chief Court Counselors of which all 39 were returned for a 100 percent return rate. Each of the state’s 34 Chief Probation Officers were asked to return three completed surveys from their district. 67, or 65.7 percent, were returned. Finally, the ten directors of the state’s detention centers and the five training school directors were surveyed of which 11, or 73.3 percent, replied.

Table 2. Survey Mailing and Return Rates by Criminal Justice Profession/Department

Profession	Number Mailed	Number Returned	Response Rate
School Resource Officers	492	171	34.8%
Sheriffs’ Offices	100	36	36%
Police Departments	389	109	28%
Juvenile Court Counselors	39	39	100%
Probation Officers	102	67	65.7%
Detention Facilities & Training Schools	15	11	73.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,137</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>38.1%</b>

## Results

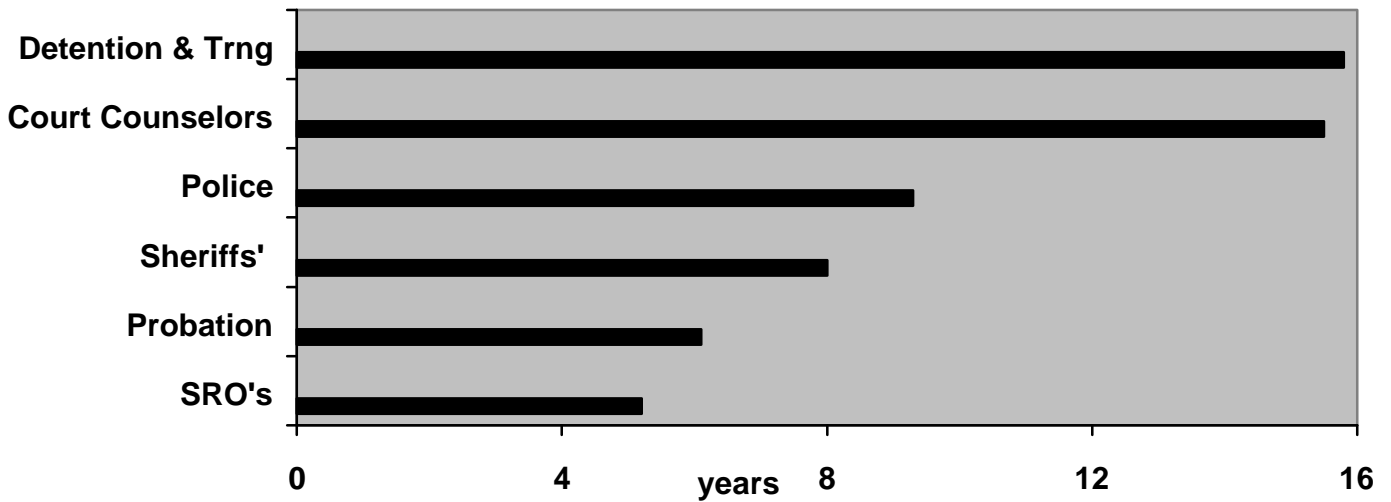
### *Respondent Demographics*

The number of survey respondents was heavily skewed toward male members of the criminal justice system with 342, or 79.2 %, of those who reported their gender being male officers or employees. Females constituted the remaining 90, or 20.8%, of the survey respondents.

The majority of the respondents were sworn law enforcement personnel, 314 or 72.5%, with an average of 12.3 years of sworn experience.

The amount of time that the respondents had been working with juvenile and/or youthful offenders varied from less than a year to 34 years of service in this capacity. The average number of years varied from 5.2 for the School Resource Officers to 15.8 years among the detention and training school directors. The average respondent had been working with these offenders for 7.9 years (Refer to Figure 1 for each survey group).

**Figure 1. Average Number of Years Working with Youthful Offenders by Respondent Occupation**



The respondents' ages ranged from 22 to 68 with the typical respondent being 38 years old. The male respondents were slightly older, 38.6 years versus 35.9 years for the females. Detention and training school directors had the oldest average age, 45.7, followed by the court counselors and the representatives from the Sheriffs' Offices (40.9 years each). The average age for the police department respondents was 39.9 followed by the SRO's (36.6 years of age). Probation officers were the youngest with their average age being 34.4 years.

Educational status varied among the respondents with the majority of them having either attended (31.5%) a four-year university program or graduating from the same (39.4%). Sixteen percent held an Associates' degree from a two-year program, Seven percent held a high school diploma and six percent held advanced graduate degrees.

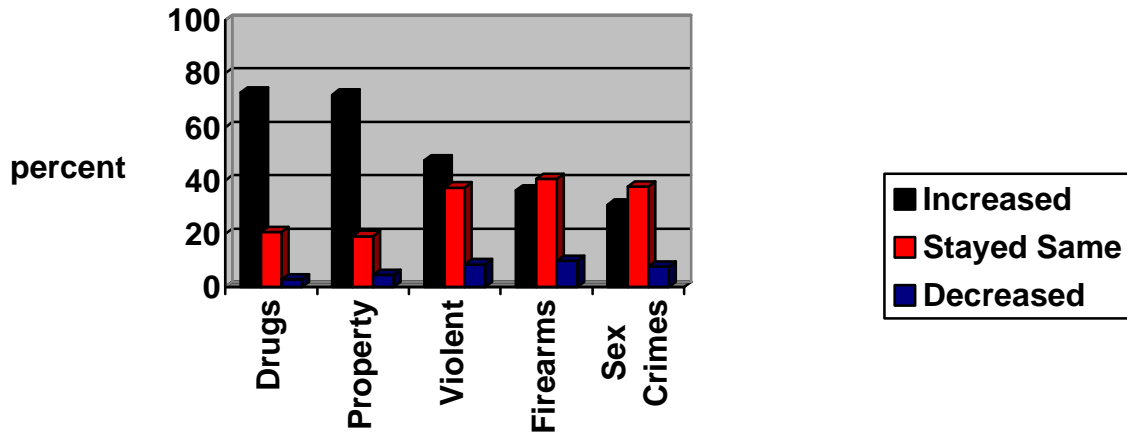
### *Perceptions of Youth Crime within the Community*

The following section delineates the viewpoints and perspectives of those respondents who work with youth in the community. Members of the Sheriffs' Offices, police and probation departments and court counselors were queried about the nature and extent of youth crime within their respective communities with a specific intent of examining how this crime has changed within the last five years.

Survey participants overwhelmingly reported that general youth crime has increased within their respective communities over the past five years with 77 percent reporting a noticeable increase. Only 3.6 percent reported a decline over the past five years, while 14.1 percent responded that youth crime has remained unchanged during this period. The remaining respondents were uncertain about the youth crime trends in their jurisdictions.

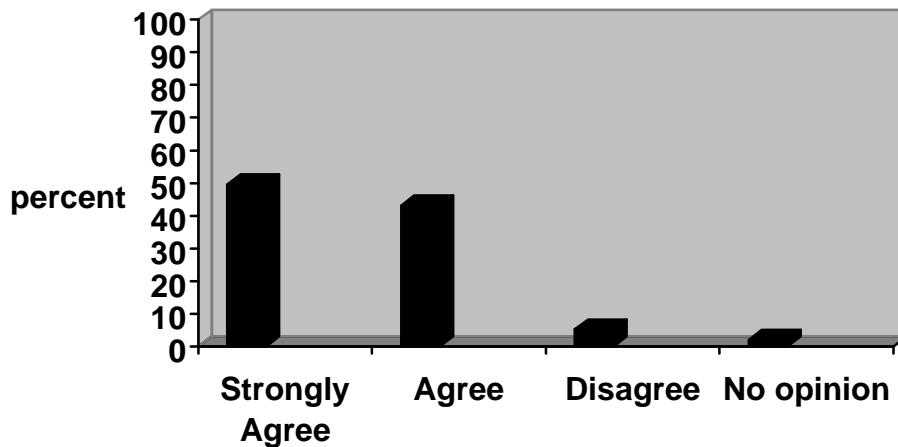
The most striking increases were reported for drug- related offenses and property crimes with 72.8 percent reporting an increase in drug crimes and 72 percent reporting an increase in property crimes over the past five years. Violent crimes were also reported as being slightly more problematic with 47.6 percent reporting an increase, 37.4 reporting no increase and 8.5 percent reporting a decline in these offenses over the five year period. Respondents were relatively equally balanced on the issue of firearm violations with 40.7 percent viewing no change, 36.2 percent reported an increase, with only 8.2 percent noting a decline in these offenses within the last five years. Perceptions of sex crimes were similar with 37.8 percent noting no change, 30.9 percent responding to an increase and 7.7 percent reporting a decline in these offenses (Refer to Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Respondent Perceptions of Youth Offenses within the Past 5 Years**



Respondents were also asked a series of questions which enabled them to draw comparisons between today’s youthful offenders and those of five years ago. This facilitated not only the comparison of youth crime at an aggregate level but also facilitated historical comparisons to be drawn at the level of the individual youthful offender. The survey participants overwhelmingly agreed, or strongly agreed, that today’s typical offender is a different breed from prior youthful offenders, even those of five years ago. Today’s typical offender was described as being more violent, more likely to possess a firearm and use drugs, more likely to be younger and engage in a greater amount of collective, or group, criminal activity. Figures 3 through 7 depict the response distributions for various questions which were related to comparing today’s youthful offenders to those of five years ago.

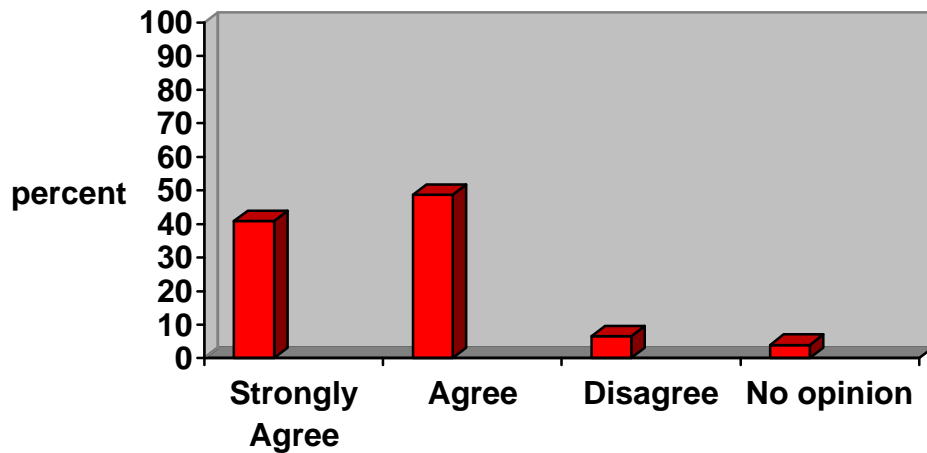
**Figure 3. Today’s Typical Offender is more Violent than the Typical Offender of Five Years Ago**



As Figure 3 reveals the survey participants did note substantial differences between the level of violence perpetrated by today’s average offender and that of the typical offender of five years ago. According to 92.7 percent of those surveyed today’s offenders demonstrate far more violence, while only 7.9 percent disagreed or offered no opinion.

As Figure 4 demonstrates the perception of today’s offender as being more likely to possess a firearm was confirmed by the respondents with 48.6 percent agreeing with this assumption and 40.9 percent strongly agreeing. Only 6.5 percent argued that this assumption is invalid and that today’s offender is no more, or even less, likely to carry a weapon.

**Figure 4. Today’s Typical Offender is more Likely to have a Firearm than the Typical Offender of Five Years Ago**



The current youthful offenders, in North Carolina, were perceived to engage in a greater degree of drug use than their counterparts of five years ago. Nearly 88 percent of the respondents reported this to be true for the youth in their respective communities. Less than ten percent disagreed with this belief (Refer to Figure 5).



**Figure 5. Today's Typical Offender is more Likely to use Drugs than the Typical Offender of Five Years Ago**

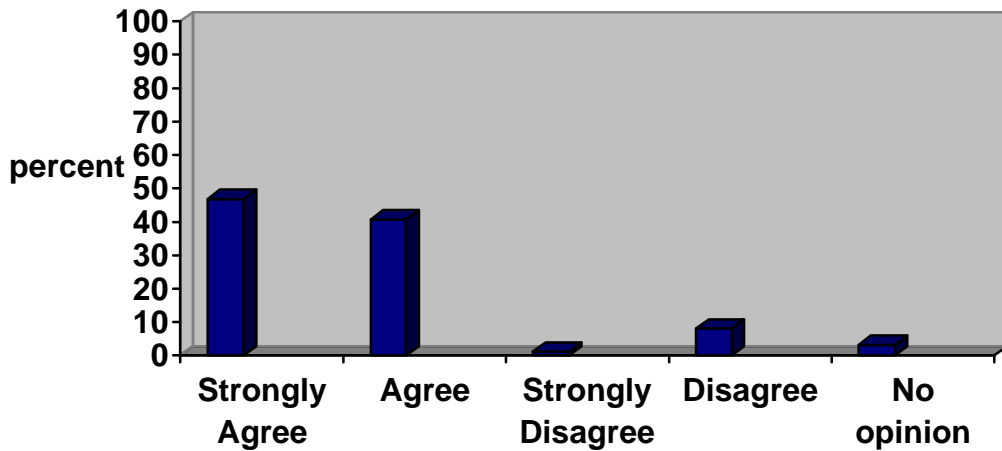


Figure 6 documents the extent to which today's youthful offenders are perceived as being younger than the typical offenders of five years ago. Eighty percent of the respondents either agreed, or strongly agreed, with this position; while 13 percent perceived no substantial differences in age when comparing youthful offenders over the last five years.

**Figure 6. Today's Typical Offender is Younger than the Typical Offender of Five Years Ago**

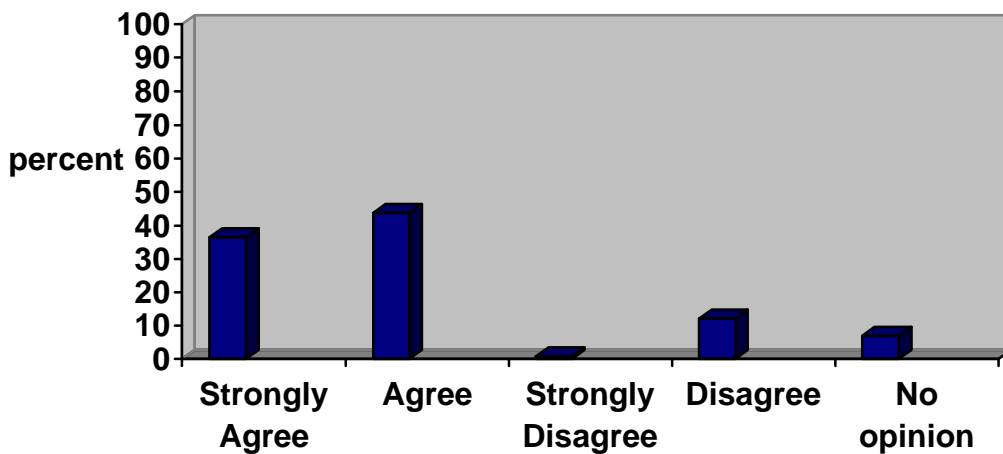
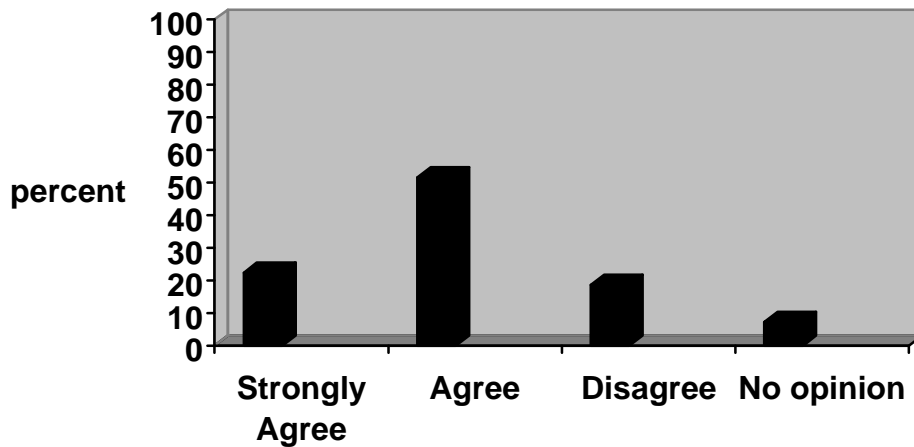


Figure 7 depicts the notion that today’s youthful offenders are more likely to commit criminal activity as part of a collective group than they were five years earlier. Approximately three-fourths of those who responded to the survey acknowledged that they perceived more group criminality today when contrasted with five years ago.

**Figure 7. Today’s Typical Offender is More Likely to Offend as Part of a Group than the Typical Offender of Five Years Ago**



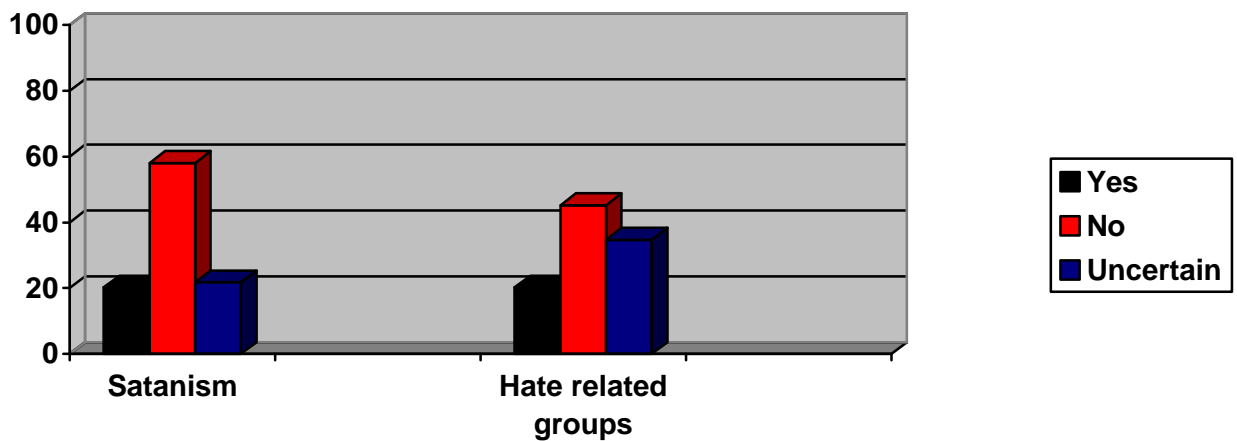
Arrest statistics, which are more of a measure of system activity and less of a measure of the total number of true crime incidents, partially confirm the validity of the respondents’ perceptions concerning drug activity. Drug arrests of teens, under the age of 18, grew 40.8 percent during the period of 1994-1998. However these statistics indicate a decline of 5.8 percent in violent crime arrests and a decline of 1.7 percent in weapon related offenses for these offenders during this period (North Carolina Department of Justice, 1999). Data from the United States Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1999) suggest that the proportion of juvenile crime committed in groups has not changed appreciably during the past 24 years. While some of these data are crude proxy measures for measuring the real aggregate amount of criminal activity they do demonstrate the discrepancies which can occur between the reality of youth crime and the perceptions of youth crime.

Respondents also expressed their agreement with the assumption that drugs and weapons were driving the increases in youth violence within their communities. However the percentage who either agreed, or strongly disagreed, that these offenses were the primary causal factors for increasing youth violence was not as pronounced as the popular press and media would lead one to belief. Sixty-five percent agreed, or strongly

agreed, that drugs and weapons were more accessible today than they were five years ago and were contributing to the increasing level of youth violence. The fact that more than one-fourth of the participants disagreed with this theory is intriguing and suggests that other factors, such as the lack of adequate parenting, the societal desensitization towards violence and the depiction of violence in the popular culture may be causing, contributing to, or interacting with drug and weapon availability to drive this increase.

The survey was also designed to elicit responses regarding several controversial or emerging issues facing today's youth. Figure 8 presents these findings regarding satanic and skinhead involvement within the community. Twenty percent acknowledged substantiated acts of satanism or satanic rituals with the same percentage acknowledging the presence of skinheads, neo-Nazis or other youth espousing hate related views. Perhaps most alarming is the higher percentages of uncertainty among the respondents with one-third being unaware of hate-related groups and nearly one-fourth not being informed about satanic activities, suggesting the need for increased awareness of these issues.

**Figure 8. Percent Reporting Satanic Activity and the Presence of Hate Related Groups**



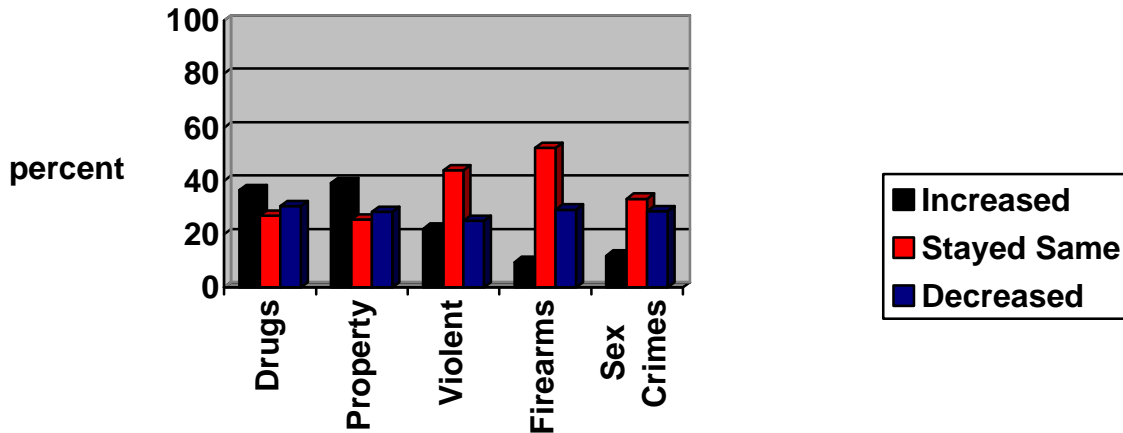
### *Perceptions of Youth Crime in the Schools*

The School Resource Officers (SRO's) were also asked the same questions as those presented in the preceding section; however they were instructed to respond based on their perceptions of youthful offending and offenders within the context of the school and school grounds and **not** the community as a whole. This enabled the collection of **school specific** data which would provide short term trends concerning the perceptions of school violence and the nature of youthful offenders who commit criminal activity within the schools.

Fewer SRO’s perceived an increase in school related crime over the last five years, however this increase was not as intense as the perceived increase in youth crime in the community. A lower percentage of SRO’s reported a perceived increase when contrasted with those respondents who were queried about crime in the community. Less than half of the SRO’s noted this increase (43.5%). A slightly greater number of SRO’s perceived crime in their respective schools as remaining the same or declining (47.6%).

Figure 9 reflects this overall trend in which the majority of the SRO’s either reported a decline in criminal activity within the schools or noted that crime has not changed within the past five years. Based on the survey data the perceptions of youth related crime vary substantially with the perceptions of increasing youth crime being greater in the community and to a lesser extent in the schools. As the figure reveals more SRO’s perceived drug and property crimes as having increased over the past five years. The majority of the respondents perceived violent crime, firearm offenses, and sex crimes as remaining the same during this period.

**Figure 9. SRO’s Perceptions of School Related Offenses within the Past 5 Years**



While the SRO’s perceptions of youth violence in the schools differed from those of criminal justice personnel who work in the community their perceptions of the typical youthful offender, who commits school related crime, paralleled their community counterparts. Perceptions of youth who commit school violence today versus five years ago indicate a similar offender profile. The majority of the SRO’s noted that youth who commit school related crime are becoming younger, more violent, more likely to use drugs, carry a weapon and more likely to commit crime in groups versus the typical school related offender of five years past.

Incidents of satanic rituals and hate related groups were reported to be present within the schools. Eighteen percent of the SRO's reported confirmed cases of satanism and 20.6 percent reported the presence of skinheads or other hate groups within their schools.

### *Youth Gangs in North Carolina*

The survey respondents identified a total of 332 distinct gangs in North Carolina with at least 5,143 total members or an average of at least 15.5 (16) members per gang. This average gang size is consistent with Oehme's (1997) prior finding and suggests that individual gangs are not getting larger in terms of their membership. These gangs were located in 62 of the 94 counties (66%) in which a survey response was obtained. Of this number 171 were reported by the SRO's as being active in their schools or at least having one of their members in the classroom. Of the 5,143 total gang members 1,183, or 23 percent, were reported by the SRO's which indicates that nearly ¼ of the reported gang members are still in the classrooms of the state's public school facilities. These gang members, who are still within the schools, were found in 35 (37.2%) of the 94 counties in which at least one survey response was obtained. SRO's indicated that these gangs were present in at least 58 of the state's middle and senior high schools.

While direct comparisons with Oehme's 1997 study are not possible due to differing sampling strategies it is at least informative to note that the number of gangs has risen from 127 gangs, since the early 90's when he collected his data, to the current 332. This represents an increase of 161 percent during the decade. Oehme found 2,772 members whereas the current studied identified 5,143 which represents an increase of 85.5 percent.

As previously mentioned a standard definition of what constitutes a gang was adopted in order to permit comparisons between gangs and across counties. The definition was drawn heavily from Klein's (1995) previous work. A four-pronged test was utilized in order to determine the types of gangs within the respondents' respective jurisdictions. Respondents were asked if youth tend to "hang out" in groups, if any of these groups demonstrated a commitment to criminal activity, if these groups acknowledged their collective identity through names, dress, graffiti or other means, and if these groups restricted their activities to certain geographical areas. Affirmative responses to all four questions would serve as an indicator that classic street gangs exist within the respondent's community.

Applying this four-pronged test greatly diminished the number of self-defined gangs from 332 to only 99. These 99 gangs represent the classic street gang which maintains a turf, identifies themselves as a gang and maintains a commitment to criminal activity. These 99 gangs have a total reported membership of 2,003 individuals and are located in 30 (31.9%) of the 94 counties for which at least one survey was returned.

Of these 99 gangs 52 were reported to be either active in the schools or at least have members who still attend school. These 52 school oriented gangs consisted of at least 471 reported members and are located in 18 different counties.

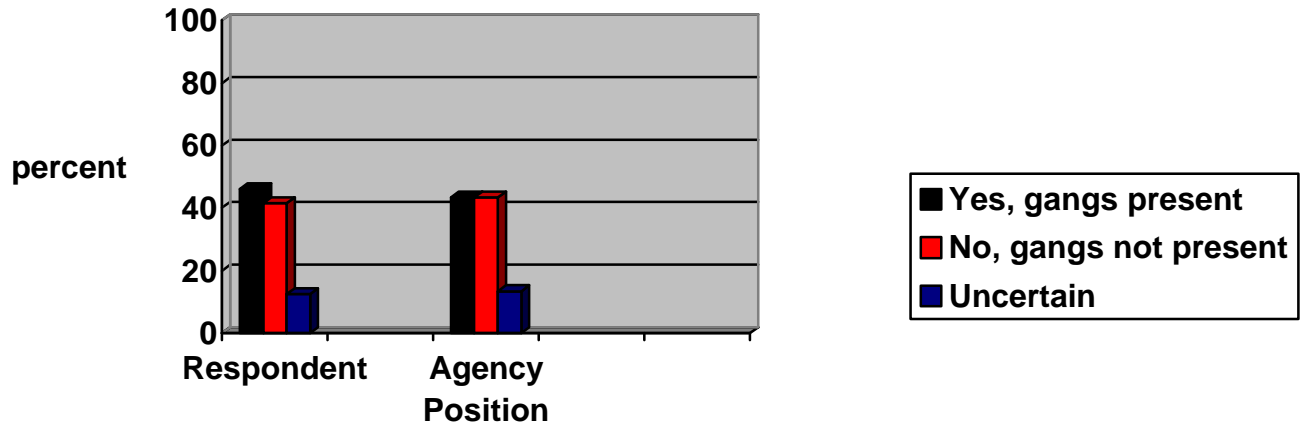
The following sections discuss the respondents' perceptions of gangs, the types of action strategies which have been employed in response to the emergence of a gang and specific details such as age, race and gender composition of the 332 gangs which were reported by the survey participants.

### *Youth Gangs in the Community*

The respondents were asked a series of questions which dealt with the presence, or absence, of gangs in their respective jurisdictions; the length of time the gangs had existed there, the originating source of the gangs and the manner in which their agencies responded to the emergence of gangs. Roughly half (46%) of the respondents acknowledged a gang presence in their communities with a slightly lower percentage (41.5%) reporting no knowledge of this activity. Fewer participants reported that they were uncertain about the presence of gangs in their respective communities (12.5%).

The survey participants were also queried about their agency's official position concerning the presence of gangs. Figure 10 depicts a comparison between the respondents' personal knowledge of a gang presence and the agency's official position on gangs. The agency positions closely resembled the respondents' personal knowledge with 43.3 percent of the agencies acknowledging a gang presence in their jurisdictions. An equal number of agencies did not report or recognize the existence of gangs in their communities. This suggests that the level of agency denial is not as pronounced in North Carolina as it is in other states or at the national level. Indeed, as Figure 11 indicates only 6.8 percent of the respondents indicated that their agency denied the existence of gangs even though they had been identified as existing in the community.

**Figure 10. Respondent versus Official Agency Position on the Recognition of a Gang Presence in the Community**



The length of time in which the gangs had existed in the community varied from 1 year to 12 years with the average length of time being 3 years. One quarter of the respondents indicated that gangs had been in their area between 2 to 4 years and less than ten percent indicated a long term (five years or more) gang presence in their communities. Thus it appears that the gang phenomenon, or at least the acknowledgment of gangs, is relatively new for the majority of North Carolina's communities.

The origin, or source from which the state's gangs emerged, parallels the existing gang literature with approximately half of the state's gangs originating completely at the local community level and half of the gangs' origins being a combination of local and extra community sources. Only 5.5 percent of the respondents indicated that all of their gangs migrated from other areas either with, or without, possessing ties to existing gangs from outside their jurisdiction. This confirms the presence of gang immigration yet supports the bulk of the existing literature which suggests that gangs are primarily home grown with local youth being less likely to have ties to the bigger and larger gangs of Chicago, Los Angeles and other major metropolitan areas. The issue of super gangs does not seem to apply as strongly in North Carolina as in other states.

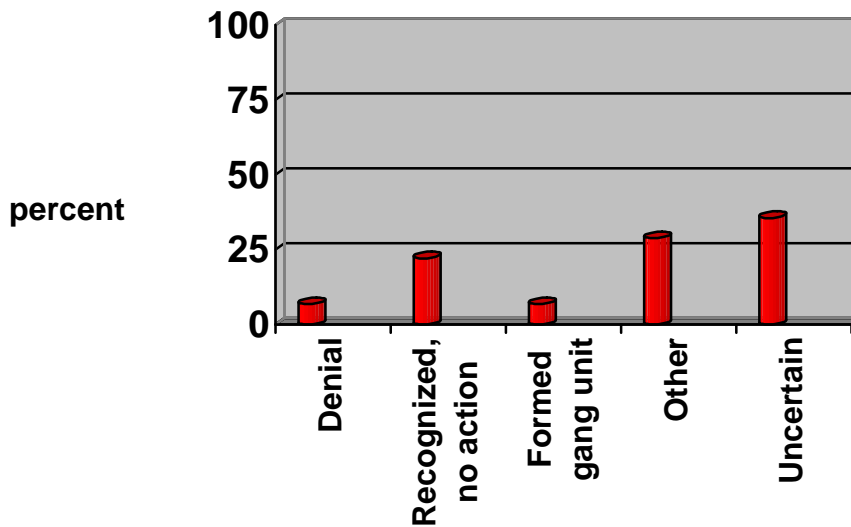
The few respondents who did report gang immigration in their areas noted that the gangs, who had migrated into the area, possessed ties with several of the nation's largest and most dangerous gangs. Affiliations were reported with the Bloods, Crips, Folk Nation, People Nation, Latin Kings, Mexican Mafia and the Texas Syndicate. While the

veracity and reliability of these ties were not questioned future investigation should be directed at testing the nature and extent of these affiliations.

Figure 11 represents agency response immediately following the recognition of a gang presence within the community. The majority of the respondents were uncertain as to how their agency responded (35.6%). Unfortunately 22.1 percent noted that no action was taken even though gangs were reported to be active in their jurisdictions. Less than ten percent noted that their agencies formed either intra-departmental, or inter-departmental gang units. Many respondents noted other responses such as intelligence activities, targeted patrols, gang training and forming **liaison** relationships between law enforcement and probation or court counselor offices. As previously mentioned only 6.8 percent of the respondents noted an official denial on the part of the agency despite the fact that their agency knew of gangs in the area.

The survey participants were asked if their agency was currently tracking, or monitoring, the gangs and gang activities in their communities. Surprisingly, 41 percent noted that no intelligence or tracking was currently being performed and another 25.6 percent were uncertain about their agency’s activities in this area. This suggests that more agencies need to take a proactive role in this regard and immediately begin monitoring the gangs, their members and the types of criminal activities in which they are engaging.

**Figure 11. Agency Response after a Gang Presence was Identified in the Community**





### *The Evolution of Youth Gangs in the Community*

The survey respondents were asked a series of questions in which they were instructed to compare their current youth gangs with the first gangs which were originally identified by their agencies. This enabled a comparative analysis which would provide insightful information on how gangs have evolved in North Carolina over the years. A seven point Likert scale was designed to elicit these responses with the participants being asked to respond along a continuum from very strongly agree to no notable difference to very strongly disagree. For the purpose of this analysis these items were collapsed into three response sets – agree, no difference, disagree.

More than half of the respondents (56.2%) indicated that today's youth gangs are not more, or less violent, than when they initially emerged in the community. This finding contradicts current gang research which suggests that gangs have become more violent over the years due to an increased accessibility to firearms. The study suggests that North Carolina's gangs are no more violent today than in the past. Slightly more officers agreed that gangs were more violent today (27.4%) than disagreed (16.4%).

Similarly, the majority of the respondents reported seeing little change in the extent to which youth gangs have become involved with drug sales. Nearly half (44.6%) noted no change in this behavior over time. More participants did note that gangs are more involved in selling drugs today (39.4%) than the percentage reporting that youth gang involvement in this crime has declined when compared to years past (16.0%).

Over half (51.9%) of those who responded to the survey noted an increase in the extent to which youth gangs have become more involved with possessing handguns. Over one-third (37.7) reported that this involvement has remained constant with today's youth gangs showing no substantial differences with regard to handgun involvement. Only 10.5 percent reported that today's gangs possess handguns less than when the gangs were initially identified in the community.

When asked about the organizational cohesiveness and structure of today's gangs 48.4 percent noted that the level of organization within the gangs has not changed over time. However, 33.1 percent did report that the structure of today's gangs is more organized when compared to gangs of the past.

Responses were nearly identical concerning an increase in the number of female gang members with 46.8 percent explaining that there has been little change in the number of female members over time. Roughly one-fourth (24.7%) did note that this has

changed, since the gangs were first recognized, with more females becoming involved in gangs and their activities.

More than half of the survey participants (55%) responded that they have noticed no change in the gang members' ages. Twenty-seven percent did report that the gang members are not getting older which implies that they may be getting younger which is consistent with national trends and gang intelligence data.

Half (50.8%) of those who responded to the survey noted that they did not see any difference in the extent to which youth gangs are having contact with, or forming working associations with, prison and/or adult gangs. However, 32.8 percent did agree that today's gangs are having more contact with these other types of criminal gangs and organizations.

With the exception of increasing involvement with handguns it appears that today's gangs are roughly identical to those of the past. No significant changes were noted in terms of drug sales, violence and the organizational and compositional structure of the gangs. This lack of evolutionary growth or change may be due to the fact that the monitoring and tracking of gangs is a relatively recent endeavor. Since the average amount of time that gangs have been identified, by those who responded to the survey, was only three years it may be too early to have witnessed any substantial changes in the gangs. Future research and intelligence should be directed at studying these new gangs and tracking the changes that take place within them over time.

#### *Attributes of Youth Gangs in North Carolina's Communities: Age*

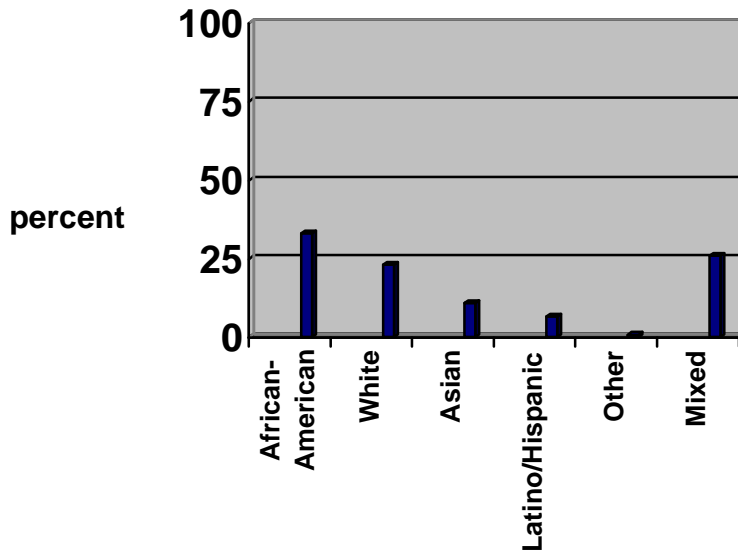
A considerable amount of variation was found in the ages of those gang members who were reported by the survey participants. Gang member ages ranged from 7 to 62 with the average gang member being 15 (15.5) years old. Of the 3,960 gang members who were identified in the community 2,063, or 52.1 percent, were 21 years old and younger and 851, or 21.5 percent, were juveniles under the age of 16.

#### *Attributes of Youth Gangs in North Carolina's Communities: Race/Ethnicity*

Figure 12 depicts the gangs' racial composition for those gangs in which the survey respondents were able to provide this information. A third (33.3%) of the

reported gangs were comprised of strictly African-Americans, while all White gangs constituted 23 percent of the gangs. Asian gangs accounted for 10.8 percent, followed by Latino and Hispanic with 6.5 percent. Consistent with the existing gang literature North Carolina’s gangs are becoming less homogenous with members of different races and ethnic backgrounds belonging to the same gang. These mixed gangs accounted for 25.9 percent of the total number of gangs reported.

**Figure 12. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Gangs in the Community**



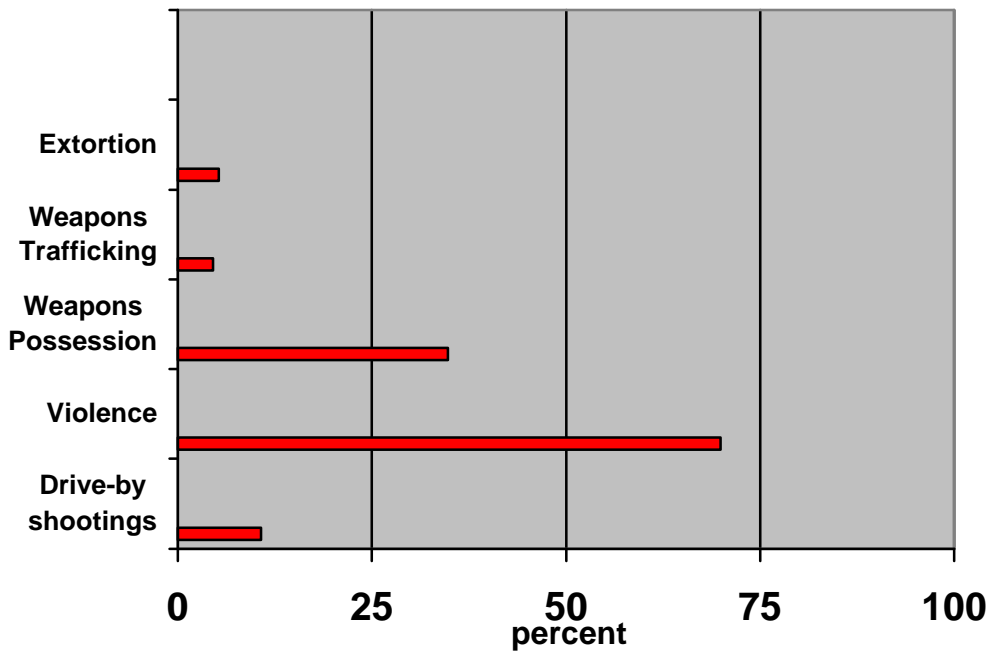
*Attributes of Youth Gangs in North Carolina’s Communities: Gender*

A total of 791 females were reported as being active gang members in at least 37 different gangs across the state. These females account for 20 percent of the total number of gang members in the community. The number of females in the gangs ranged from one to 500 with this large number being an all-female gang.

*Attributes of Youth Gangs in North Carolina’s Communities: Criminal Activities*

Figures 13 and 14 present the types of criminal activities which are being perpetrated by North Carolina's gangs. The most common types of crime which are attributable to gangs and their members are violent crimes, with 69.9 percent of the gangs committing assaults and robberies, property related crimes (65.9 %) and drug possession with 62.1 percent of the gangs being involved with illicit substances. Drive-by shootings have not become as common with the state's gangs rarely engaging in this behavior. Extortion and weapons trafficking were also reported as being relatively rare crimes among the state's gang members.

**Figure 13. Percent of Gangs Engaging in Violent and Weapon Related Crimes**



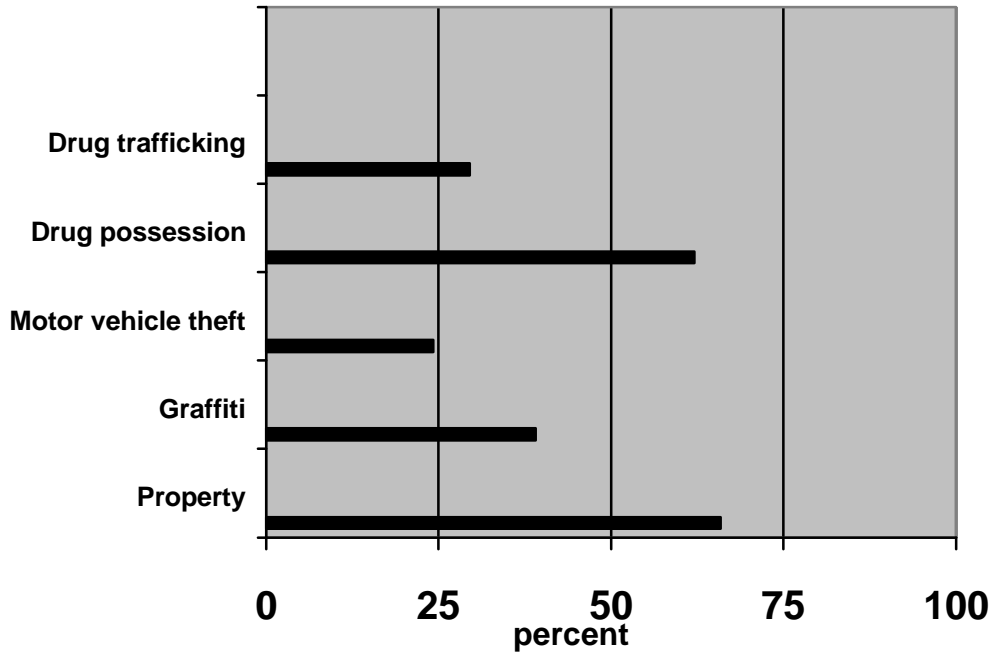
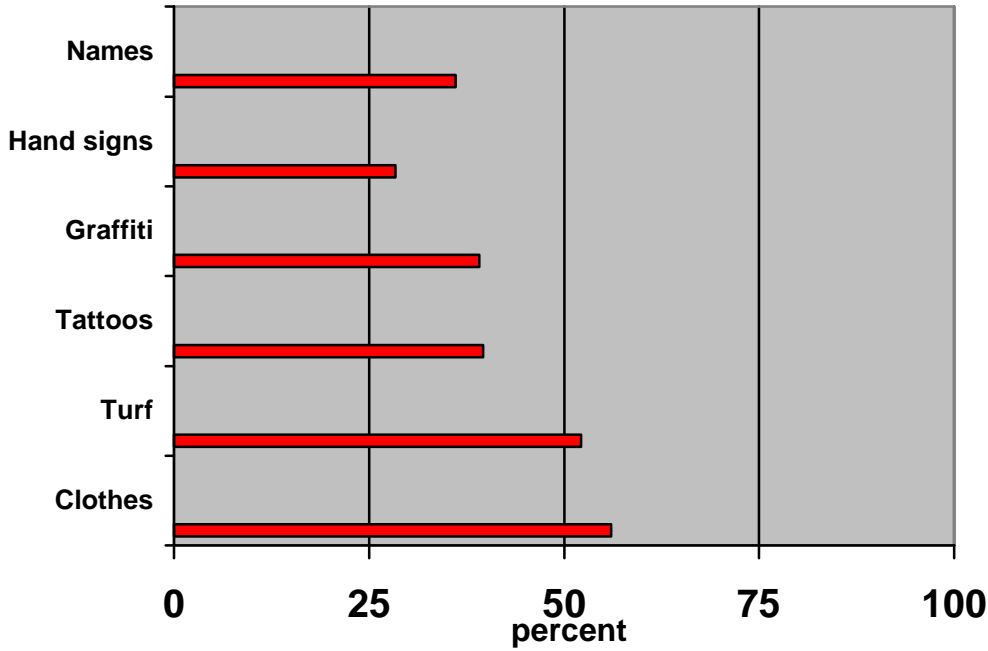
**Figure 14. Percent of Gangs Engaging in Property and Drug Related Crimes***Attributes of Youth Gangs in North Carolina's Communities: Identifying Features*

Figure 15 presents the identifying features for the gangs in the communities. Specific articles, and colors, of clothing was the most common identifier with 56 percent of the gangs having unique clothes which represent their membership and gang status. Half of the gangs were territorial and maintained an established “turf”. Graffiti was common with 39.1 percent of the gangs employing this as a method for identifying their presence and for communicating other messages. Tattoos were reported for 39.6 percent of the gangs, distinctive names were found among 36.1 percent of the gangs and hand signing was apparent for 28.4 percent.

**Figure 15. Percent of Gangs with Specific Identifying Features**



*Youth Gangs in the Schools*

The following sections delineate the perceptions of the School Resource Officers (SRO’s) as related to the issue of gangs in the schools. Their viewpoints on how today’s gangs are similar to, and different from, those of the past will be presented; as well as the specific attributes of school gangs and their members.

*The Evolution of Youth Gangs in the Schools*

One-third of the SRO’s reported that gangs have been present in their schools from 2 to 4 years with 28.9 percent noting that gang members have been in the classroom

for five years or more. Nine percent reported that gangs were a new phenomenon as having existed in the classrooms for one year or less.

The origin of these school related gangs closely resembles the evolutionary pattern as found in the general community with 55.1 percent of the SRO's noting that the gangs in their respective schools were a combination of local, home grown gangs and gang members who immigrated from other schools or communities. Slightly more than one-third (36.7%) noted that all the gangs in their schools were formed by, and consist of, local youth.

A comparative analysis of today's school related gangs with those of the past reveals a strikingly different profile when compared with the changing nature of gangs in the community. A greater percentage of SRO's, as compared to those respondents who were asked to describe gangs in the community, noted that today's school related gangs are becoming more violent (40.1 % versus 27.3%). Gang members in the schools also appear to have become more involved with drug sales as half of the SRO's agreed that this crime has increased over time. Gang members in the schools are also more likely to be involved with firearms as 70.1 percent of the SRO's believed this to be more problematic today.

The School Resource Officers reported more organizational cohesiveness and a strengthening of the gangs' organizational structure as contrasted with the school gangs when they were first identified. Nearly half (47.9%) agreed that the gangs have become more organized in the schools.

More female members are forming, or joining, gangs in the schools with 43.5 percent of the SRO's reporting this fact. The aging of the school gang members has not changed over time with nearly 50 percent responding that they have not witnessed any significant changes in the members' ages. Likewise, today's school gangs are no more likely to have ties with prison gangs or other adult criminal enterprises. Today's school gangs and their members were alleged to have become more involved in vandalism with 59 percent of the SRO's noting an increase in this behavior.

Based on the survey responses of the SRO's it appears that school related gangs and their gang members have evolved in a more drastic manner over time when compared to the evolution of those gangs who conduct their activities in the community. School gangs are becoming more violent, engaging in more drug selling activities, more vandalism and are more likely to possess firearms than their predecessors. Their organizational structure appears to have changed also with many gangs being reported as

possessing a greater degree of solidarity and having a far greater degree of internal cohesiveness than prior school related gangs.

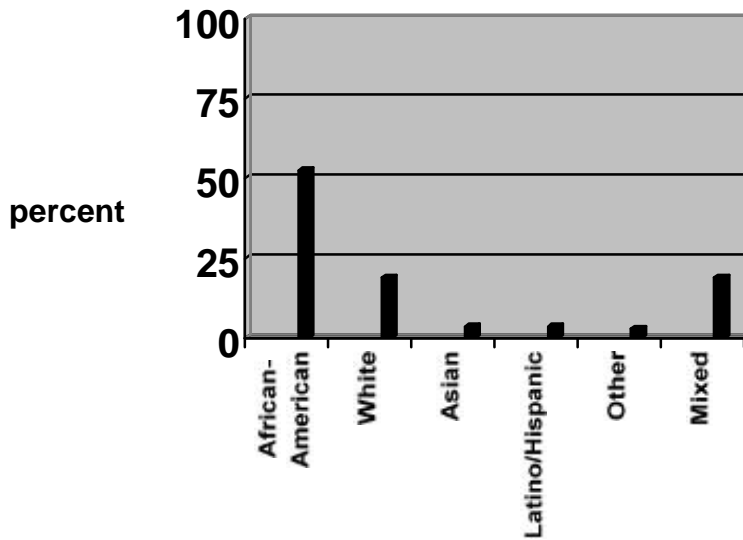
*Attributes of Youth Gangs in North Carolina's Schools: Age*

The average gang member within the schools was 16 years old with the average youngest age being 13 and the average oldest age being 19 years. Of the 1,183 gang members which were identified by the SRO's 783, or 66.1 percent, were 13 years old or younger.

*Attributes of Youth Gangs in North Carolina's Schools: Race/Ethnicity*

The racial and ethnic composition of the gang members in the schools varied from those gangs found within the community with a larger percentage of African-American gang members being reported as existing within the state's public schools (52.4 % versus 33.1%). School gangs were found to be more homogenous with only 18.9 percent of the reported gangs being identified as possessing members of more than one racial or ethnic group. White youth gangs constituted 18.9 percent of the sample with Asian and Latino gangs representing 3.5 percent each (Refer to Figure 16).

**Figure 16. Racial/Ethnic Composition of Gangs in the Schools**



*Attributes of Youth Gangs in North Carolina's Schools: Gender*



The number of females, who were reported to belong to school based gangs, ranged from one to fifteen with the average number of females per gang being 3 (2.8). Of the 1,183 youth who were identified as gang members within the schools 216 were females (18.3%) who were affiliated with 44 different gangs.

*Attributes of Youth Gangs in North Carolina's Schools: Criminal Activities*

Figures 17 and 18 depict the percentage of SRO's who responded that documented cases, for the specific crimes listed, had occurred in their schools or were aware that the schools' gang members engaged in these criminal activities. Fewer school gang members were reported as being violent, as compared to the community based gangs, but more than half of the SRO's (54.4%) did report violent activities. Slightly more SRO's reported that school gang members were engaging in drug possession (65.7%) versus those respondents who were queried about gangs in the community (62.1%). Drug trafficking and extortion were less common among the school gang members, however 21.6 percent of the SRO's had knowledge of this activity among their gang members.

Graffiti (48%) and weapons possession (47%) were reported as being common practices of the school gang members with almost half of the SRO's seeing these activities. Property crimes were also frequent with 55 percent of the SRO's acknowledging these types of crimes. Motor vehicle theft and weapons trafficking were rarely observed among the school gang members.

**Figure 17. Percent of School Gangs Engaging in Violent and Weapon Related Crimes**

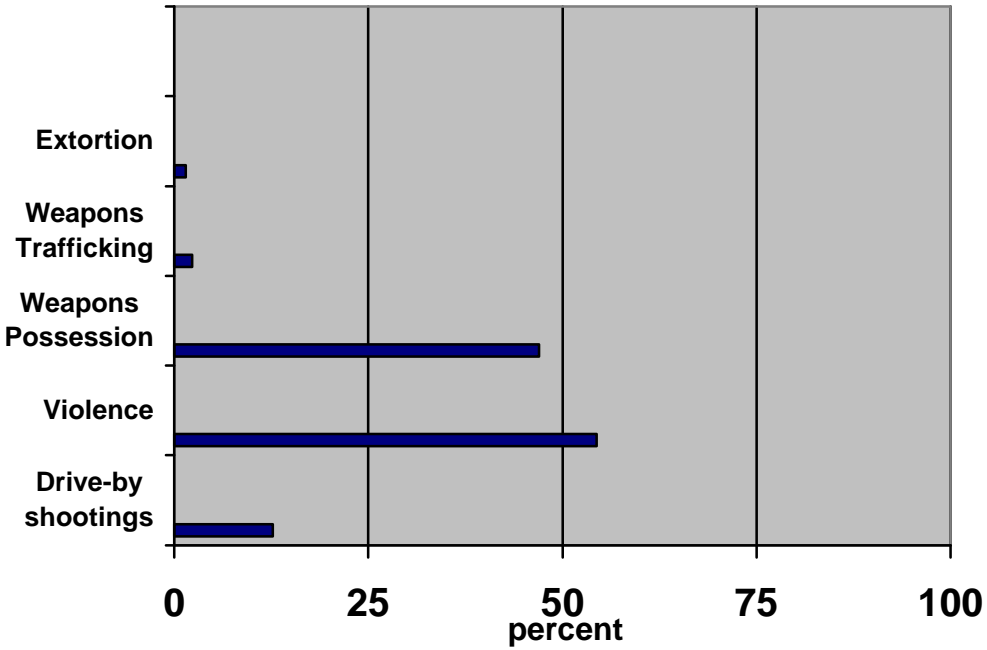
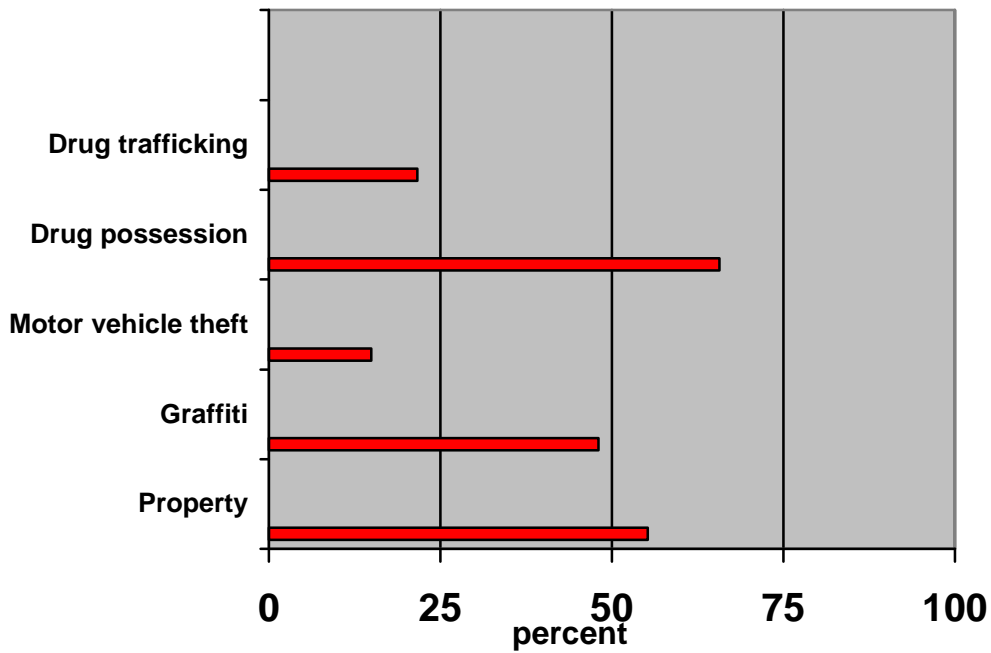
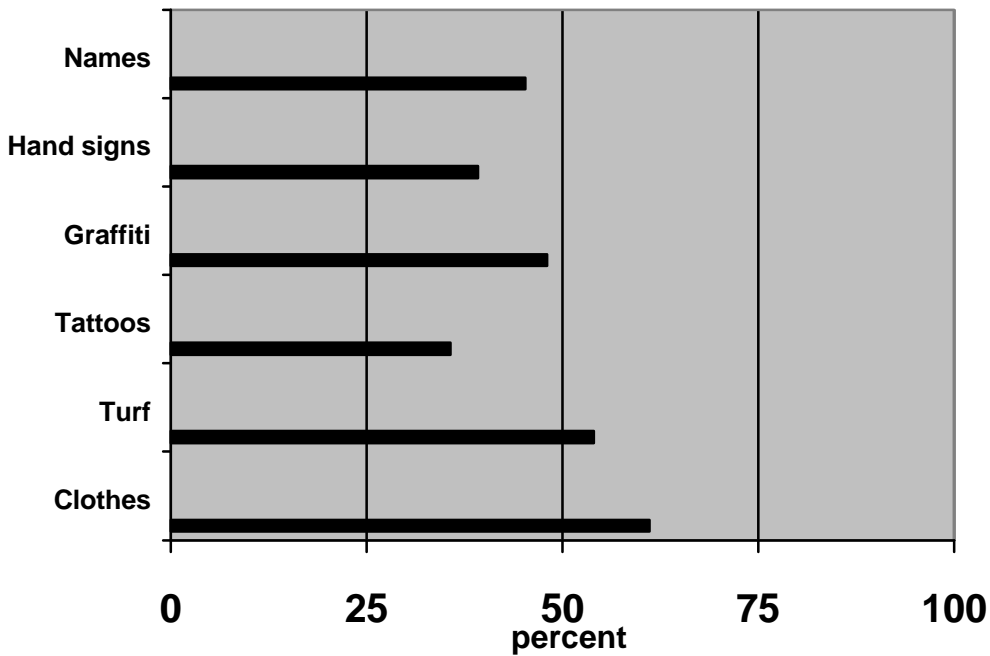


Figure 18. Percent of School Gangs Engaging in Property and Drug Related Crimes



As Figure 19 demonstrates relatively no noticeable differences existed between the gangs and gang members in the schools and those in the community on their identifying features. Slightly more SRO’s reported a higher prevalence of the use of hand signs and distinctive names or nicknames.

**Figure 19. Percent of School Gangs with Specific Identifying Features**



**Discussion and Policy Recommendations**

The study findings indicate a shift in how members of the criminal justice system perceive youth crime in the community and in the schools. Youth criminality was perceived as having increased over the past five years with youthful offenders becoming younger and more involved in violent crime, drug-related crime, property crime, and more likely to possess a weapon. An increase was also noted in the extent to which youthful offenders are committing crime as a collective group with more group criminality being perceived today than in years past.

The survey findings indicate that at least 332 gangs are active in North Carolina's communities and schools with at least 5,143 members. This finding documents an increase in the number of gangs and gang members since the beginning of the 1990's.

This increase could be explained by a number of factors including: an increase in the general and youthful populations, a large influx of persons from major metropolitan areas, the increasing media coverage of gangs and their activities and perhaps the crack cocaine epidemic of the early 1990's. It is plausible that youth gangs were formed to protect drug territory and to assist the older drug dealers with drug distribution and the other aspects of their work in this area.

North Carolina's youth gangs are similar in many respects to the gangs of other areas with their features and criminal activities being identical to those as outlined by prior gang research. The state's youth gangs are primarily composed of young males in their mid to late teens and early 20's. These gangs are not limited to the impoverished inner city areas; they are emerging in the suburbs and rural areas of smaller towns as well. Female gangs and gang members exist and just as the national trends implicate the gangs are becoming more racially integrated.

However, there are several distinct differences between the gangs in North Carolina and the gangs of the larger cities such as Chicago or Los Angeles. North Carolina's gangs rarely engage in drive-by shootings, appear to have loose, if any, ties to prison gangs or other adult organized crime syndicates and are less likely to form super alliances such as the Bloods, Crips and Folk Nation. As the state's gangs become more established and have developed a temporal history it is possible that these phenomenon could become more commonplace in the future. Future gangs will probably be less territorial with their "turf" becoming computerized with the members utilizing the Internet to plan meetings and other criminal activities. Future gangs will become more enterprising capitalizing on "high tech" opportunities and engaging in more sophisticated and harder to detect crimes.

In order to adequately address the issue of gangs in the communities and schools state and local policy makers and criminal justice professionals should take a rigorous proactive approach and implement the following recommendations.

- Deny the denial. Agencies must identify and gather intelligence information on groups that are likely to become gangs at a later date in the future. Agencies must acknowledge a gang presence in their community and not ignore the issue. Typically, agencies deny gangs until a serious gang related crime occurs which brings this issue under public and media scrutiny. It is far easier to acknowledge and address the issue of gangs **before** such an incident occurs than afterwards.
- Lose the “West Side Story” mentality. Agencies must realize that not all gangs are found in poor inner city areas and that not all gangs maintain “turf” or even readily distinguish themselves in some manner. There is no single stereotype which is applicable to all youth gangs. Agencies which look for the stereotypical gang and gang members may only be hitting the tip of the proverbial iceberg.
- Adequately match resources and needs. Agencies should establish procedures and programs which correspond to the level of gang activity in their respective jurisdictions. Some agencies, with a minimal level of gang activity, may only require intelligence information, while agencies with a full blown problem may need to establish inter, or intra, departmental gang task forces.
- Utilize existing technology. Agencies should incorporate the use of the Internet into their gang tracking initiatives as well as use it as a vehicle for sharing information with other agencies. Agencies should utilize digital cameras for photographing gang members and their graffiti. The issue of establishing a statewide gang information database should be revisited and encouraged.
- Program evaluation efforts should be intensified. Research and program evaluations should be conducted which seek to determine the efficacy of existing gang intervention and prevention programs. This work should identify what works and under what conditions these programs have proven to be successful. Exemplary programs should be replicated in other areas.
- Research and intelligence gathering should be conducted for non-traditional youth groups. The current study identified the existence of skinheads, paramilitary organizations and hate based groups within the state. Efforts should be directed at studying these groups before they become more pervasive in order to be adequately prepared to develop intervention and suppression strategies.
- Monitor gang organizational ties and migration patterns. More work should be aimed at exploring the extent of gang allegiances to other local, state, and national gangs. Gang immigration and emigration patterns should be scrutinized closely in order to prevent the formation of super gangs.
- Collaboration efforts must be intensified. Schools, law enforcement agencies, probation and court counselors’ offices must communicate and share information on gangs and gang members. Agencies should avoid becoming protective of ,and territorial with, their gang knowledge, information and expertise.

- Target at-risk children. Efforts should be made to identify those children who possess some, or all, of the warning signs for future gang involvement. Programs should be developed specifically for these children which include a gang resistance, or gang awareness type, component.
- Involve those individuals who are directly affected by the gangs. Community residents, who are terrorized by gangs, parents, former and current gang members should be involved in gang education, prevention and intervention programs and projects.
- Follow the best practice recommendations as outlined by the National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Research and Development Program.

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( Appendix A )



















( Appendix B )