

Table of Contents

List of Figures	iii
List of Tables	v
Executive Summary	vi
Literature Review	1
What is a gang?	1
How prevalent are gangs?	4
Why do gangs arise ?	7
Who joins gangs and why?	9
What are the demographic features of the American street gang?	11
What are the structural features of the American Street gang?	13
What types of criminal and non-criminal activities do gangs engage in?	17
What is the relationship between gangs, drugs and violence?	18
What are the methods for addressing the gang issue?	19
What are the recommended best practices for dealing with the contemporary gang issue?	21
What is known about contemporary gangs in North Carolina?	24
Methods	26
Results	28

Respondent demographics	28
Perceptions of youth crime within the community	30
Perceptions of youth crime in the schools	36
Youth gangs in North Carolina	37
Youth gangs in the community	38
The evolution of youth gangs in the community	41
Attributes of youth gangs in the community: Age	42
Attributes of youth gangs in the community: Race/Ethnicity.....	42
Attributes of youth gangs in the community: Gender.....	43
Attributes of youth gangs in the community: Criminal Activity	44
Attributes of youth gangs in the community: Identifying Features.....	45
Youth gangs in the schools.....	46
The evolution of youth gangs in the schools.....	47
Attributes of gangs in the schools: Age.....	48
Attributes of gangs in the schools: Race/Ethnicity.....	48
Attributes of gangs in the schools: Gender.....	49
Attributes of gangs in the schools: Criminal Activities.....	49
Attributes of gangs in the schools: Identifying Features.....	51
Discussion and policy recommendations.....	52
References.....	56
Appendix A	61
Appendix B	70

List of Figures

Figure 1	Average Number of Years Working with Youthful Offenders by Respondent Occupation.....	29
Figure 2	Respondent Perceptions of Youth Offenses within the Past 5 Years.....	31
Figure 3	Today's Typical Offender is more Violent than the Typical Offender of Five Years Ago.....	31
Figure 4	Today's Typical Offender is more Likely to have a Firearm than the Typical Offender of Five Years Ago.....	32
Figure 5	Today's Typical Offender is more Likely to use Drugs than the Typical Offender of Five Years Ago.....	33
Figure 6	Today's Typical Offender is Younger than the Typical Offender of Five Years Ago.....	33
Figure 7	Today's Typical Offender is more Likely to Offend as Part of a group than the Typical Offender of Five Years Ago.....	34
Figure 8	Percent Reporting Satanic Activity and the Presence of Hate Related Groups.....	35
Figure 9	SRO's Perceptions of School Related Offenses within the Past Five Years.....	36
Figure 10	Respondent versus Official Agency Position on the Recognition of a Gang Presence in the Community.....	39
Figure 11	Agency Response after a Gang Presence was Identified in the Community.....	40
Figure 12	Racial/Ethnic Composition of Gangs in the Community.....	43
Figure 13	Percent of Gangs Engaging in Violent and Weapon Related Crimes.....	44
Figure 14	Percent of Gangs Engaging in Property and Drug Related Crimes.....	45
Figure 15	Percent of Gangs with Specific Identifying Features.....	46

Figure 16	Racial/Ethnic Composition of Gangs in the Schools.....	49
Figure 17	Percent of School Gangs Engaging in Violent and Weapon Related Crimes.....	50
Figure 18	Percent of School Gangs Engaging in Property and Drug Related Crimes.....	51
Figure 19	Percent of School Gangs with Specific Identifying Features.....	52

List of Tables

Table 1	Estimated Magnitude of Gangs in the United States.....	6
Table 2	Survey Mailing and Return Rates by Criminal Justice Profession/Department.....	28

Executive Summary

The issue of youth crime has become one of the most pressing problems at both the national and state level. Juvenile crime has increased since the 1970's with more juveniles being arrested, more being arrested for violent offenses, and many more children getting involved in criminal activity at younger ages. Drugs and an easier access to obtaining firearms have been posited as being causal factors for this increase in youthful criminal behavior.

The Governor's Office, the Governor's Crime Commission, the Office of Juvenile Justice, the General Assembly and the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety have all recognized the changing nature of youth crime in North Carolina and have made this issue a top priority for the new millennium. Positive proactive responses have been directed at developing programs, providing additional financial resources and implementing contemporary policies and legal mandates and revisions.

The purpose of this report is twofold: to identify current and historical perceptions about North Carolina's youth crime and to identify the nature and extent of a lesser studied phenomenon – youth gangs and their influence on the community and in the schools. Members were selected from the entire criminal justice continuum from School Resource Officers to court counselors and detention and training school facility directors and were administered a mail survey which sought to ascertain their perceptions of youth crime and youth gangs. A total of 433 surveys were returned with an overall response rate of 38.1 percent being attained.

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.

Respondents were also asked a series of questions which enabled them to draw comparisons between today's typical 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.

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%).

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. The 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.

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.

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 $\frac{1}{4}$ 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 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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

SRO's 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.

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.

- K** 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.
- K** 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.

-
- K** 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.
 - K** 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.
 - K** 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.
 - K** 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.
 - K** 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.
 - K** 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.
 - K** 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.

- K** 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.

- K** Follow the best practice recommendations as outlined by the National Youth Gang Suppression and Intervention Research and Development Program.

