

Gang Awareness for Police & Corrections



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Handbook and Resource Guide

Course Objectives:

Define Security Threat Groups, Gangs, and gang-affiliated behavior
Understand the relationship between internal and external gang cultures
Understand the similarities/difference of gangs as it relates to gender
Know the impact of gangs as it relates to safety and security
Know the importance of non-verbal and verbal communication

Performance Objectives:

Be able to identify and successfully manage Gangs.
To identify common gang tattoos and symbols
To effectively supervise and discipline disruptive individuals
To utilize safety and security measures – Personal Safety!
To use communication skills in dealing with different ethnic and cultural groups

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Gang/Security Threat Group Definitions

New 2008 WA State Definition of a Criminal Street Gang: A "*criminal street gang*" is any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, having as one of its primary activities the commission of criminal acts, and whose members or associates individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal street gang activity.

Security Threat or Disruptive Group: (STG) is often used in jail and prison settings because there may be disruptive groups who are a threat to safety and security who do not always fit the term "Street Gangs".

Classification

Classification and Intelligence Units often work hand in hand.

People may be arrested by police, booked into jail, processed, and classified.

Review the current charge/PC, NCIC/rap sheet, past police reports/gang files:

Seriousness of Offense

Detainer Status

Escape History

Conviction History of Violent Felonies

Incarceration Experience

Management Risk!

Inmates are then placed in the housing units based on their points/security level.

History of Street Gangs in America

Street gangs entered the recorded history of the United States as early as 1820. By the mid-1840's, many Irish immigrants began making themselves known as American gangsters. The Irish Gangs were to become the pre-eminent ethnic group involved in criminal pursuits for the next 90 years. Already, a hierarchy was evident in the 40 Thieves and the Little 40 Thieves (pee-wees). Some other gangs in the 5-Points area of New York City were the "Dead Rabbits", "Bowery Boys, and "Plug Uglies". This was depicted in the movie "Gangs of New York". By the late 1880's, however, a new group began to compete with the Irish Gangs. These were the Jewish Gangs, especially those Jewish immigrants who came from Eastern Europe. By the 1930's, they too were overshadowed by the "Black Hand" of the Sicilians and other Italian American Gangs.

It is important to note that these ethnic peoples, and any others for that matter, do not themselves constitute a criminal ethnic group, but all of the different ethnic groups did have bands of individuals who were criminally involved. It was their unique experiences in America, often growing up in the poverty of inner city slums, and the common bonding of their culture that set the stage for participation in street gangs. Law Enforcement, as well as Corrections, has found that understanding and studying these disruptive groups' activities greatly increases stability in society and in our institutions.

As you can see, gangs have been a "part of life in the big city" even before the day of Al Capone and the Prohibition Era. Gang affiliations may span many generations, for example, some Hispanic gangs can trace their roots to the 1910's with third or fourth generation members in gangs such as White Fence or Maravilla. The Post World War II Era ushered in the growth of the Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs/Biker Gangs. This group is considered by many as the new Organized Crime. The influence of narcotics played a major role in the growth of the Crips and Bloods in American cities during the 1970's and 1980's. Gang migration out of Chicago caused the BGD's and Vicelords to show up in our area and across the United States. Asian Criminal Organizations are increasingly more active and mobile. The so-called Russian Mafiya has spread their fear in and out of their immigrant community. Other new ethnic criminal groups have also made themselves known in our area as well as in various parts of the country.

Structure of a Gang

Leaders within a gang usually acquire their position based on one of two methods: Either by being the "baddest", or by possessing the most leadership abilities to meet the needs of the group. The gang's level of violence and reputation is determined by the "Hard Cores" (those most involved in illegal activity) and their ability to use the gang as a vehicle for violence. The "Hard Cores", also known as "Street Soldiers or Warriors", will often become the leaders, the most violent and street wise among the gang. They are usually the most respected of the group and by other gang members.

Except for Organized Crime, gangs are more unorganized than organized when compared to how other groups function. However, there is an informal gang hierarchy of essentially five different levels or categories of gang members. This group affiliation appears to fulfill the gang member's emotional need to belong. These group are also sometimes identified as "Wanna B's/Gonna-B's" (or soon going to be gangsters); Associates; Hard Cores (described above); Prison, and finally Organized Crime.

Again, Gangs are often identified as "Security Threat Groups" in correctional facilities. This identification is based on their attempts to disrupt the normal operation of the facility. This term also includes other organizations that are "disruptive groups," but not normally associated with the outside or street gangs. The recent rapid development and growth of anti-government militia and other hate groups (such as the "Skinheads") have become a potential threat to all law enforcement professionals. The Interstate-5 is used by many "L.A. street gang" members as the main route, from south to north, for illegal activities. Many gangs inside and outside of corrections facilities have international ties, i.e. the United Bamboo (UB) Triad and the Mara Salvatrucha (MS).

Law enforcement and Corrections are constantly gathering intelligence on these groups to try and deal with them more effectively. Worried about escalating gang violence behind bars, the Washington Department of Corrections began housing members of two rival Hispanic gangs known as the Norteños and Sureños in separate units. Corrections officials say the approach has helped reduce violence.

Mexican Mafia

Also known as "La EME," this prison gang began in the Deuel Vocational Institute at Tracy, California, in late 1957. The group was initially called the "Baby Mafia" and built its infrastructure based on the Cosa Nostra, also known as the Italian Mafia. The object of this group was to control the criminal enterprises within the prison and later to control their neighborhoods, often referred to as "barrios". One of the group's founding gang leaders was Rudolfo (a.k.a. "Cheyenne") Cadena. The movie "American Me" filmed in East L.A., Chino, and Folsom Prison was loosely based on his life and Joe Morgan (JD).

By 1965, the "EME" had made many enemies of former members and "Farmeros" from Northern California. The "EME" began using the number "13" as a symbol for their organization. This symbolizes the 13th letter of the alphabet and the "rag" color used by this group is blue. In the early 1970's, the CA Prison Gang Task Force noticed the presence of the Mexican Mafia on the street. "Jimmy Joe" Lucero was considered a WA State Shotcaller and did time at the King Co. Jail as well as in federal institutions. Some EME members also have ties to the Drug Cartels. The "EME" main recruitment area in California is now Southern (SUR) California. The Sureño Movement spread in the U.S.

Sureños

Not all Sureños in the United States, 18th Street, Mara Salvatrucha, etc., join La EME. In fact, very few do, but Sureños are one of the fastest growing gangs in the United States, and are now even found in other countries. In the last 10-20 years, Sureños have jumped in a lot of Mexican Nationals (Paisas). They've also had friction with "Border Brothers".

Nuestra Familia

By 1968, the "Nuestra Familia" (Our Family) emerged as a self-protection prison gang. Many violent assaults occurred between the "Nuestra Familia" and "EME" as both struggled for power. A truce occurred and a meeting was organized in 1972. At this meeting Cadena was killed which resulted in an all-out long and bloody war. The "Nuestra Familia" was a highly organized para-military group with a written Constitution, and some reported anti-government elements. In 1982, over twenty members were found guilty (RICO statute) as involved in a "criminally run organization". The "Nuestra Familia" official color is red and they chose the symbol of Roman numeral XIV as their symbol. In 1994, another high-profile RICO trial of the "NF" leadership was held in San Jose. The basic "NF" recruitment area is in Northern (Norte) California and was run by the "14 Bonds" of the "Northern Structure" also known as "Nuestra Raza" or our race. Another RICO held on the NF finished in 2005.

Nortenos

Nortenos originally came from Northern California. Nortenos and Latin Kings appear to have an alliance, intelligence showed them together. Nortenos have been identified in Washington since the 1970s, especially in Yakima. Some join the Norteno Bigg Doggs.

Fresno Bulldogs

When inmates from Fresno, CA, went to prison in the 1960's and 70's, most of them joined the NF or sympathized with the Northern Cause. In the late 1970's and early 1980's several assaults on F-14 by NF members caused a split. The Fresno Bulldogs are violent and seldom get along with anybody. Their call sign is "barking" like a dog.

Latin Kings & Chicago Gangs

The Latin Kings started out in Chicago decades ago. They are considered a People Nation Gang and fall under the 5-point star. Around the same time period the Maniac Latin Disciples formed they are considered Folk Nation under the 6-pt. star. The Folk & People alliances are not as strong in Chicago as they once were.

Black Guerrilla Family (B.G.F.)

This prison gang started in the California Training Facility at Soledad in or around 1970. Formed to protect themselves from the "Aryan Brotherhood" and the "Mexican Mafia," they formed an alliance with the "Nuestra Familia" and began to conduct paramilitary training within the yard area of this facility. Their influence and power increased after the death, in an escape attempt from San Quentin, of BGF leader George Jackson. Following his death, members swore revenge against corrections and law enforcement officers and were involved in several murders of C/O's and several affiliated organizations were involved in shootouts with police during the 1970's in memory of Jackson. The "George Jackson Brigade," formed in Seattle, Washington, also had a radical philosophy, committed several robberies, bomb threats, and escape attempts from correctional facilities. "BGF" membership declined in the 1980's, but, there are recent reports that they are again recruiting "black street gang" members.

The Kumi African Nation Organization was started by "Mousie Brown" in Folsom Prison around 1984. At first the group was called "Bay Love", later changed to "415", then Kumi African Nation. Kumi maintain a close relationship with the Black Guerilla Family.

The Crips & Bloods

Started in the late 1960's in L.A., California, this group was originated by Raymond Washington and his followers who began calling themselves the "East Side Crips", later East Coast Crips. Over on the West Side in 1970, near 107th & Hoover, Stanley "Tookie" Williams and his followers started calling themselves the "West Side Crips". Initially, members often walked their neighborhoods with canes and used much of the non-verbals (walk, dress, language) used by Mexican gangs. The major color chosen by the Crips was blue. New South Central L.A. black gang "sets" also began calling themselves Crips and they soon outnumbered other Los Angeles Black street gangs. The Crips spread from L.A. to other parts of the U.S. including Washington State in the 1980s dealing crack.

Crips often refer to one another as “Cuzz” and will replace “B” in sentences with a “C” or cross out the B’s in writing. They’ll also put B/K or P/K for Blood or Piru Killers. The Hoover Crips grew very large along Hoover Street. They got blamed for the death of Raymond Washington and soon started fighting East Coast Crips. Crips will kill Crips!

Eventually, many of the Hoovers decided to break off from the Crips on their own as Hoover Criminals and started wearing a lot of orange. They are big into the dope trade. The Hoovers were the subject of a major bust in King County, WA, in November, 2005.

The early 1970's, the first reported origins of the "Piru Street" gang developed into what are now commonly known as the "Bloods". Soon, "Elm Street" in Compton also identified themselves as "Bloods". Most other L.A. Black “anti-Crip sets” also started recognizing themselves as "Bloods" and symbolized their affiliation by wearing red. The Elm Pirus have been involved in an on-going war against Crips and Hoovers in Seattle, WA. Bloods usually have association with the color Red, refer to one another as Blood or Piru. Like to “flame up” in red and dis’ anything Crip. “C/K” means Crip Killer.

Black Gangster Disciples

This street gang, known as "BGD's", has survived and flourished for many years in the Midwest area of the United States. The "Black Gangster Disciples" were first identified by law enforcement in this area around the mid-1980's. A local juvenile group of "Black Gangster Disciples" followers, known as "Folk's Life," copied their handsigns, graffiti, and gang street names. They will often study secretive “literature or knowledge” whereby they gain rank. Many gang experts believe that one of the reasons for the formation of this group was for protection against the California "Crips" and "Bloods".

"BGD" involvement with the prison gang culture may be increasing with another subgroup called the "Brothers of the Struggle" (BOS). In 1989, the Seattle Police Dept.'s Drug Task Force found many active BGD members. In 1993, at a Washington State Prison, a letter was confiscated by staff that was being sent to the head of this group to ask for explicit official approval for the local group to act in concert with the Chicago headquarters. By 2005, it was reported that there were over 600 identified (self and/or by law enforcement) hard-core BGD members in Seattle. The BGD's are big into dope!

The BGD's have aligned with Bloods and Pirus and also been engaged in an on-going war against the Crips and Hoovers in Seattle's Central District area. This is different than might be found in other parts of the country. GD's in the South End, in particular “Down With Crew” or “D-Dubs” have aligned with Crips and Hoovers to battle the Central Dist.

Vicelords

Vicelords were a Chicago-style “People” group. They have many different factions and are deadly enemies of the BGD's. Vicelords got their start in the 1960's and gained control of several community programs. Vicelords came into Washington in the late 1980's to deal drugs, promote prostitution/vice. They have small numbers in our state.

Chinese Triads, Yakuza, and Asian Organized Crime

The Chinese Triad and Tong groups are centuries old, well organized, and secret. The Triad means the heaven, earth, and man. The members of this gang are formally, as with most other gangs, initiated to become members. The Tong is the meeting hall. Members of Chinese street gangs are known to provide the "muscle for the enterprise." Chinese street gang leaders are commonly called the "Dai-lo" or "elder brother". In 1993, the warring "Yang On" from San Francisco and New York based "Hip Sing" groups formed an alliance. In Portland, Oregon, the "Black Star" street gang provides "muscle" for the "Wo Hop To". In Vancouver, British Columbia, it is reported that large Chinese street gangs have caused major law enforcement problems. One of the biggest mass homicides in recent U.S. History occurred in Seattle, Washington, and is known as the "Wah Mee Massacre" in 1983. This crime was believed to be the results of street gang activity with ties to the Triads.

Recently, Viet-Ching have taken over the B.C. Bud trade in Canada. This crop can be very lucrative, Asian Organized Crime Groups control it and ship it all over the world. Triad and Tong Activities: alien smuggling, construction, security services, computer software, loan sharking, fraud, credit cards, gambling dens, prostitution, massage parlors, night clubs, restaurants, small business fronts, pirated goods, drugs, and money laundering. We've seen members of the Yakuza or Borikudan, as well as Korean and Filipino organized crime groups in Seattle.

Gambling is a Natural Target for Criminals because of the large amounts of cash. Gambling operations, including card rooms, earn large amounts of cash and present particular opportunities for skimming and money laundering. Dealers don't have to continually inventory their chips and money while they are working, providing opportunities for fraud. In addition, cheats are drawn to casinos and card rooms because of the large amount of money generated by the facilities. Dealer skimming of chips by palming or collusion is probably the greatest risk. Clubs allow employees to gamble when they aren't working, a situation that can lead to collusion. Other risks include credit abuse, card cheaters, and currency transaction violations. Because of these factors, proper operations and security are very important.

Original Loko Boyz

A dominant "Cambodian street gang," this group is extremely mobile and willing to work with other gangs, usually within their culture on illegal activities. First spotted in Tacoma, many other Asian Blood affiliates in Washington like the Oriental Fantasy Boyz (OFB), Loko Asian Boyz (LAB), and Lil' Ruthless Boyz (LRB) are "spin-offs" from this group. The movie "The Killing Fields" won Academy Awards for Hang S. Ngor who survived the Kmer Rouge Communists and refugee camps, but was killed in the U.S. by OLB members. Although current statistics are not available, the whole criminal justice community is well aware of the increase in the activities of Asian disruptive groups.

Asian Boyz

This gang is primarily made up of Cambodian and Vietnamese males and started in CA. They have Crip affiliation and have been known to travel to Vancouver, B.C.

Tiny Rascal Gang

Originating in Los Angeles and Long Beach, California, this group composed of predominately new Cambodian immigrants and is believed to be responsible for a vast organized crime network. Their colors are black and gray and are usually independent from Crips and Blood. In Seattle some TRG are claiming Crip and some Bloods. The females are called Lady Rascal Gangsters (LRG). This group is reported to be at war with the "Mexican Sur 13" group in Southern California and in Washington. Future impacts on the region and possible wars on the street may involve more disagreements between SE Asian and Hispanic gangs.

Filipino Gangs

The Ungoys and Tulisans are old-line "organized street gangs" are from the Philippines. It was first reported that "Pinoy" criminal activity began in the Seattle area during the 1970's. There was constant gang fighting for control of Filipino union and gambling rackets. Most of these older gang members are no longer active in gang fighting. "23rd Diablos", "Flipside", and "Pinoy Royale" groups have also been identified in our area. "Zimangots" and "Flipside" are the only WA Filipino gang very active at this time.

Samoan Gangs

These "street gangs" originated in the South Sea Islands, in Hawaii, and in California, as well as in the Puget Sound area and are often used as enforcers. A local Samoan street gang is known as the "United Blood Nation". The "Mad Pak" were renegade UBN's. The "MP's" are reported to have been involved in a series of drive-by shootings and homicides. The "Sons of Samoa" are also reported to be involved in serious crimes on the West Coast. SOS have been involved in shootouts with police and threats to harm officers. The "Dog DNA Trial" in Seattle, WA, involved a Samoan gangster double homicide. The victim's dogs were also shot. DNA from these animals helped convict the suspects. Both members also wrote extensive gang graffiti on King County Jail walls. This information, along with monikers, enemy "crossing out", and "gang lists" can be very helpful to the investigations units of police and corrections.

Aryan Brotherhood and Aryan Family

Originating in California correctional facilities, membership spread rapidly to other states, counties, and federal institutions. The "AB's" and the Mexican Mafia have a truce that involves drug trafficking within many institutions. "AB" members have been booked into custody at local facilities. There have been two recent RICO cases against the AB. A new California group called the "Nazi Lowriders" (NLR) was the fastest growing STG in

that state but now is split in factions. PEN1 is growing. In WA, "Peckerwoods" became known as the "Woodpile" and with some Skinheads and other Aryan STG's forming the Aryan Family. AF members at Clallam Bay Corrections Center carved AF into a Black gang member they targeted. An Aryan Family member was involved in a AB homicide in Lompoc Prison, CA. The AF have also been involved in bank robberies and other crimes.

Aryan Nation and Hate and Anti-Government Groups

Based on the philosophy of separatism and exclusion, this group originated in the Hayden Lake, Idaho region. Its founder was the deceased Reverend Richard Butler. Every year "White Supremacist Conferences and Events" were held on the former "AN" compound. Due to a recent lawsuit, the AN lost its assets. The "National Alliance" is another hate group. The Posse Comitatus originated in Portland, Oregon. This group advocates for anti-federal government militia and has sympathizers in groups so-called the "Patriot Movement. "The Order", "The Freeman," "European Kindred", "Volksfront", "Aryan Knights", "Creator Movement" and many other groups are identified as "White Supremacist". They are very disruptive to the criminal justice system. They view officers as traitors to the founders of the Constitution and America. The White Aryan Resistance is Tom Metzger's group, the White Aryan Resistance or "WAR", and has also known to be active in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere. Many local members of the "Skinheads" have been known to be targeted for recruitment by many SWP groups.

Skinheads

Originating in England in the 1970's, this group began as followers of the "post-Mod Era". Many followed a "racist rock" band called the "Screwdriver," whose members allegedly shaved their heads. In the United States, it is a myth that all "Skins" shave their head and wear military-like clothing. The philosophy of racist Skins is based on the teaching of an Aryan supremacy philosophy. A rival group are the "Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice", also known as "SHARPS" are Anarchists. Another group "Trads" are Traditional Skinheads which are independent from the other two groups.

Outlaw Motorcycle Clubs (Bikers)

The "Gypsy Jokers" have been documented in WA State since 4/1/56. They started on the streets and soon were seen inside "The Walls". Along with the "Lifers Club", the organizational structure of the "Bikers Club" at the Walla Walla State Prison was controlling for many years. Bikers are high profile on the street wearing their colors openly, but often low-profile in custody. The goal being to "do your time, get out, and make money again". By 1994, the Hell's Angels came into Washington and have been in a recruitment battle with the Bandidos as both clubs are "patching over" other clubs to gain numbers. This has been an international war! Bikers have been known to do counter-surveillance and use police scanners. They often go on runs/events in colors. Sonny Barger, longtime CA HA and now Arizona resident is still involved in the gang. Outlaw Bikers are often both paranoid of Law Enforcement and hostile towards them.

The 5%'ers

The Five Percenters are a predominately African-American racist group. They do not believe that God is a person that cannot be seen, or a mystery person. Individuals in this group in this group believe they are God! They consider themselves as a true religion, but have been designated by many state DOC systems as a Security Threat Group. The 5%'ers started in 1964, in Harlem, New York, as a radical off-shoot of the Nation of Islam. They sometimes call themselves "The Nation of Gods and Earths". There is no gang initiation to come into being a Five Percenter. The only initiation that one must have is the true dedication to the group. They have ruthless discipline within their structure. Many are college educated, but most members come from the ghettos of the underclass. Their objective is to build a Nation within a Nation. Like most Muslims, they do not believe in eating pork. They believe pork is a filthy animal and have been disruptive in institutions over this issue.

Their teachings say, "I am the original man, I am the Asiatic Blackman. I am the maker, the owner, the cream of the planet earth, Father of Civilization, and God of the Universe". The 5% have developed a science and language of their own to break things down and draw things up from a mathematical stand point of view because they believe that everything in life is based upon mathematics. They are anti-white. They believe that five percent of Blacks will "inherit the earth". They teach that 85% of African-Americans are blind, deaf and dumb. They believe 10% of the earth are rich 'white' slave makers of the poor. The other 5%, "them", are the real and true original men of God.

New Emerging Immigrant and Native Gangs

Several new groups have been appearing in WA during recent years. These groups often work with Russian or Eastern European youth car theft rings or deal with Asian gangs who are into car theft, get parts off a stolen vehicle and swap parts and sell the vehicle with a good title according to the vehicle's identification number (VIN). They will sell the lower end vehicles on used car lots. A lot of FSU (Former Soviet Union) criminals like guns and aren't afraid to take on officers, especially the older ones who were brought up under the Soviet regime. In Russia, mob figures are estimated to control as much as 50% of the Russian economy. Some of the older "Russian and Eastern European Mafiya" types are involved in fraud and money laundering. Eastern European thinking is different in that they may use "Spiral Thinking" to get to their point.

East African Posse and East African Gangsters have made their presence known, and at first were mostly involved in petty thefts and misdemeanor assaults. They now have graduated to more serious felony crimes. West African Gangs, especially Nigerians have been known to be involved in credit card fraud. These Native African groups often do not get along with African American gangs.

Native American Gangs have been showing up on the Indian Reservations of our state as well as in urban areas. Many like "Native Pride" are independent. Many Native gangs will claim Blood as with the "Native Gangster Bloods" or sometimes they will claim

Crip. Our Canadian neighbors have also experienced Native Prison Gangs. In Arizona, the “Warrior’s Society” has been influential in some areas.

SKATERS, STONERS, GOTHS & THE OCCULT

These are non-traditional groups. They go by peer names and try to differentiate themselves from an image as just another street gang. Their philosophy and motivation can differ greatly from street gangs, but their criminal potential, and propensity for violence can be as great. The Rave Party shooting in Seattle in March, 2006, shows that drugs, alcohol, and sex can all play a role. They can become gangs! Peers and mass media systems are avenues for spreading sub-culture fads and philosophies.

Music has been a common influence on all gang lifestyles. The belief that the “end is near” may push youth toward ritual crimes: rape, child abuse, murder, animal sacrifice, graveyard desecration, and a personal relationship with the devil or “psychic powers”. The occult provides youth with the same benefits as a street gang: belonging, power; a structure and explanation for past and future, a label and identity; and the right to rebel against accepted order, pursue anti-morality and challenge anti-accepted authority.

Sadism and masochism (S&M), suicide, death-fixations and Satanism are common components. Drug symbols or paraphernalia, heavy metal music heroes and the idolizing of mass-murderers are other stoner images. Most youth do actually not act out the musical fantasies, but some do. Stoner gangs tend to be multi-racial in areas that are racially mixed and are especially strong in the suburbs and middle-class areas. There is less emphasis on image or a dress code, it is more about “attitude” and get high as often as possible. As a whole, the group’s mentality is less about ethnic identity or territory and more about personal expression and exploring the forbidden (rebellion).

FEMALE GANG MEMBERS

There are subtle and sometimes overt differences between females and males. Males are about 90% of the hard-core gang members with the percentage of females growing. They have traditionally been associated with gangs through their male counterparts by which the males would use them to hold weapons or drugs. Females in an individual or group setting are more likely to open up to their feelings, this be a good start at understanding, thinking about choices, and gaining informants especially ex-boyfriends!

Males tend to posture more, especially around peers. Females can be manipulative and often start criminal acts by shoplifting, while boys often steal cars or go joyriding. Females are likely to be the subject of sexual & physical abuse. They were sometimes sexually assaulted during an initiation process to become a member. More recently, females are being beaten and “jumped in” to all-female gangs just like male gangs with the same hierarchy and structural roles.

DEVELOPMENT OF GANGS

Youth gangs have existed across time and all cultures. Youngsters have always formed groups, and not always for the most productive purposes. The context of gangs has varied over the years in prevalence, structure, criminal and violent character. Some gang structures developed for political reasons or an allegiance that people felt to an association or cause. Many immigrant populations banded together to support one another for their common cause or economic situation.

Many factors can effect the spread of gangs in a community such as:

Quality of Life Issues

Employment Rates

Relocation

Outside Friction

Crime and Violence

Drugs Sales

Schools

Family

Overall, youth gangs today are said to be larger, more violent, better organized, have older members, have access to sophisticated weaponry, and can be heavily engaged in drug trafficking or other illegal revenue bases than in the past. Based on this, awareness, fascination, and fear of these groups have risen amongst the general population. Youth (under 18) actually only make up about 20-25% of the average gang, but this age group can be “more at risk for violence as they often have more to prove”.

Today, children as young as 7 or 8 are sometimes lured into gangs and commit crimes and acts of violence usually associated with older, more sophisticated troublemakers. These are the Baby Gangsters (BG’s). Gangs are now run more by “economic and business” lines than turf. The drug business can afford to recruit and train its “employees”. Illegal businesses are the largest employer of youth age 14-18, even more than fast food restaurants! These are the Young Gangsters (YG’s). It is true many of the Original Gangsters were from California or Chicago, but most gangs are now homegrown and most of our gang members grew up in Washington. Gangs are becoming more and more hybrid, multi-racial, and are accepting of different ethnicity that can fit into their gang cultural identity, and add to the organization, especially in Washington State.

Some indicators for gang involvement may include:

- *Poor progress, lack of achievement, or truancy in school*
- *No indication of hobbies, active sports, etc., during leisure time*
- *Frequent contact with school officials and/or the police*
- *Draws gang symbols or insignias or puts tattoos on self*
- *Problems maintaining relationships with family*
- *Drug or alcohol problems or dealing*
- *Resides in neighborhood where gangs exist*

GANG COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

Street gangs communicate through their actions, language, clothes, hand signs, graffiti and tattoos. Unlike the gangs associated with organized crime which prefer anonymity (low-profile), street gangs need and seek recognition. They want recognition from the community and from rivals. The gang's image and reputation (threat) requires that others know of, and fear them.

Monikers

Gangs usually adopt a group name that is related to their neighborhood, street or region. Most gang members will also adopt a nickname or "street name". The name usually fits the physical characteristics or personality of the individual.

Graffiti

Verbal as well as non-verbal gang communication is ever present and takes a variety of forms. Wall writings, known as graffiti or "tags", are certainly the most visible to those east aware of the culture. Inscriptions in the form of graffiti can be found in every large city in the United States, like Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, and Everett. Much of this can be attributed to gangs. In particular, Black and Latino gangs will use this method to advertise their gang. Each gang will have their own style, sophistication, and philosophy. Graffiti can claim territory, the gang's status, make gang membership lists, be "rest-in-Peace" memorials, advertise gang exploits, and/or offer challenges to rivals.

Black gangs tend to have less detail, but more profanity and insults than the Hispanic/Latin gangs who often have very intricate designs. Hispanic gang graffiti is called, "placazos" or "placa" meaning sign or plaque in Latino gangs. Most writing will contain the gang's name or logo, the street name of the author, expressions of power ("rifa" to rule), and the duration of control ("por vida" "p/v" forever). There may be a greater representation of what gang this clique is connected to (13 or XIV – see Hispanic gangs).

Any group who wants to challenge the authority of the gang will mark over or change the graffiti. Graffiti left unmarked or changed reaffirms the gang's control over the area. Restrooms are commonly marked with the gang information. Cars often get marked as well when stolen by the gang. Normally, the closer one moves to the center of a gang's area, the more unchallenged graffiti can be found. Conversely, as one moves away from the center or core area of a gang's power and territory, the more rival graffiti and cross-outs are observed. Contested areas are common and whenever both gangs are in the territory at the same time, confrontation can occur, to include riots and homicides. Gangs in Washington are less established than Los Angeles or Chicago gangs. Asian gangs tend to be less "territorial" about a region of the city. They often mark businesses that the group frequents. Many times communities will remove the graffiti immediately to keep their schools and community centers from being a claimed or contested.

Hand Signs

Another non-verbal method of communication is that of flashing gang signs (handsigns). The purpose of these signs is to identify the user with a specific gang or send a message. Gang hand signs have certain things in common with graffiti. Where graffiti is often a challenge to rival gangs completed at night by unseen gang members, flashing or tossing gang signs is a face-to-face challenge. Confrontations frequently begin with gang signs being flashed between rivals. This escalates into verbal and physical violence.

There are other “signs” that go beyond the hands – pants legs rolled up to show which gang someone is from, right for “Folk”, left for “People”. Body language, mad dogging, or other actions can initiate a challenge. Different gangs use different communications, however, hand signs are very common.

Tattoos

Tattooing as a custom is of ancient origin and is certainly not limited to gang members or the criminal element in society. However, studies and field experience show that gangs use tattoos as a method of communication and identification. Common tattoos include the member’s gang or street name, gang affiliation and accepted gang symbols. Tattoos are often on the arms, shoulders, web of the hand and chest so others can see them. The wearing of a tattoo helps the gang member achieve the respect of the gang when he/she is not with the other members.

If the gang is feared and has a reputation of violence, that may protect them in other arenas. In contrast, there are some groups are more “low-profile” and reserved with tattoos. Anyone who takes on a tattoo without the permission of the gang will receive dire consequences! Also, some gangs allow more individualism and freedom and don’t “require” permanent tattoos or identification with the gang. Asian gangs are often an example of this, but an eagle or tiger may indicate activity. Tattoos can tell you a lot about an individual and their history, what they are thinking, where they have been, what they are all about.

Dress

Gang members may reinforce their sense of belonging by adopting a gang style or color of dress. Many members are proud of their gang and openly display their membership through unwritten dress codes, however some members are not as exclusive in their dress. The gang style is now “en vogue”. You can no longer predict tell somebody is a gang member by clothing alone, but there may be indicators. First is color that may tell you the type of gang (Crip-Blue, Blood-Red, Sur-Blue, Norte-Red, etc.), but will not tell you which set or clique they belong to in particular. The second, may specifically identify the set. SF for Seven-Four Hoover, KC for Kitchen Crip, etc. Styles do change over time. Many gangs today, however, do not require a “uniform” or similar dress and the growing “individuality” trend amongst gang members is now norm. They also realized law enforcement could easily target them by colors and so could their enemies!

Gang Territories and Conflicts

It is critical that you know of the gangs that operate in and influence your community and/or institutions. Again, Washington gangs are often very transient. There are pockets of gang activity, but often as police suppression moves in to deal with the “hot area”, the gang members will move on to another area. New gangs form often and other may fade away. Conflicts and alliances change with time. Here, we can only give you general information and history about these groups. Your local law enforcement and gang task group is the best source of information of what to look for. As a member of the Criminal Justice Community, you already provide and have access to a wealth of information on this problem!

Gang Slang/Language

Often you’ll get an idea of the meaning of what gang members are saying from the context:

*Say Homes, did you get wet yet?
Tell me Homeboy have you smoked any PCP?*

*Man this cluck was out of pocket, so I checked her, you know fo’ sheezo. Square Beezy!
This Crack Cocaine Addict was talking crazy, so I hit her, for sure. Strictly business!*

Yo homey, Dizzy D from 253 dropped a dime on 206 Cuzz and Popo popped a cap at Cuzz while he laid drag on a freak sitting on a Benzo.

Hey partner, Dizzy D from Tacoma snitched on a fellow member from Seattle and the cops shot at him while he was talking to a good looking “chick” who was sitting on a Mercedes Benz.

*Slob was bangin’ with his Ace, was packing a breakdown, gat, fo-five, and double duce.
The Blood gang member was fighting (kicking butt) with his main man who was carrying weapons: a shotgun, machine-gun, 45 caliber pistol and a 22 caliber pistol.*

While we was at the gig a squab broke out between Crabs and Ru’s and a big crow jammed me up – talking head about his 20 cents – some bo I owed him. So you know I’m down for mines and tha’ cheddar, pulled trey eight and lit up high roller, foo fo real!

While we were at the party, a fight broke out between Crips and Bloods and a big, Black dude confronted me, telling me I owed him \$20.00 for some marijuana he fronted me. I’m deeply committed for the gang and money so I reached for my .38 caliber and shot the foolish dealer!

*Buster, chill out! We’re making bank with the O.G.!
Wanna B, relax. We’re making “money” with the guy who can get us in the gang.*

Ice is illin' – while he was holding down this mark caught ice putting a rush on this mud duck who's a head hunter. Ice was molded. Trip was, he was out recruitin', ran into this blob lookin' for his lizard butt who Ice was talking to. Blob gave Ice red eye and started bumping titties while eses was in their G-ride Triple-D'd in tha' lot.

Ice screwed up. While he was taking care of his turf, a wanna-be Crip caught him putting the moves on an ugly girl who likes to give head. Ice got caught. The funny thing is, Ice was out looking for good looking babes when he ran into the wanna-be who was looking for his girlfriend, who turned out to be the girl Ice was talking to. The wanna-be stared at Ice and started a fight while Mexicans sat watching sitting in their low-riders sporting Dayton's outside.

WHY DO GANGS EXIST?

There are many theories on why affiliation with gangs occur; some of the reasons are:

Identify or Recognition:

Membership allows the member to achieve a level of status that he/she feels is impossible outside of the gang culture.

Protection:

Members join because they may live in a gang area and are subject to violence by rival gangs. This promotes fear. Gang membership guarantees support in case of attack and/or retaliation by rivals.

Brotherhood/Sisterhood:

The gang serves the function as an extension of the family and may provide companionship lacking in the member's home environment. Membership meets the need some for acknowledgment, personal security (both physical mental, and economic), loyalty, and a set of values with behavior codes.

Intimidation:

Members are forced into joining by their peer group. Intimidation techniques can range from verbal threats, extorting money, or physical assault.

OTHER CAUSATIVE FACTORS

In addition to the above indicators, youth(s) may have low motivation, education, and occupational goals. They may exhibit signs of drug and alcohol use. Again, these are only indicators and can not be considered inclusive to all. The use of threats, use of intimidation, fear, and rumor are "basic tools" used by gang members.

Firearms are also frequently used by gang members. Drive-by shootings sometimes thought to be a phenomenon of the "1990's street gang culture", were used in the early 1900's by the Cosa Nostra and other criminal groups. Usually a drive-by shooting occurs where members from one gang will seek out the homes, business, vehicles, or hang-outs of rivals. By using weapons, they will "drive by" and shoot at the rival member. Sometimes, the "suspect" member will yell or shout the attacking gang's name or slogan so that the "victim" is challenged to retaliate.

Remember: Very few gang members (unless they are new to the criminal justice system) will self-admit versus ten years ago when everybody wanted to be "known as a gangster". Most of the "real gangsters" today know they can be tracked by DOC and the police (FIR) so often they won't self-admit, or will give bogus affiliation to throw you off track, or simply have nothing to prove by self-admission since everybody on the street knows what they're all about (reputation). Always follow your agency's criteria and SOP, and trust your own instincts or if in doubt, call a supervisor!

GLASSAR'S REALITY THEORY

Youth would not be involved in the gang if it was not meeting a need in their life. According to Dr. Glasser, all people have basic needs that they consciously strive to achieve to Survive: Power, Freedom, Fun, and Belonging.

Power: Through rank, power over others, ability to demand and receive respect. Intimidation and influence over others. It is an organization with structure, roles and established boundaries to respect. To gangs, guns equal power!

Freedom: Access to money and opportunities not otherwise achieved, obtain a sense of control over their own destiny. Empowered to do "forbidden" things and experience things at an earlier age and do whatever you want.

Fun: Risk-Taking, having things they enjoy and want, pleasure-seeking behaviors, impulsive, "extreme" emotional sensations, to be entertained.

Belonging: Many gangs are known as "families" and will have names according to family units (Big, Momma, Tiny, Baby, etc.) Bonding, good or bad, does occur.

WHO'S IN A GANG?

Myth:

All youth have parents that are addicted to alcohol or drugs.

All gang members have been verbally or sexually abused.

All gang members come from poor and illiterate families.

All gang members come from single family "dysfunctional households".

All gangsters are young, African-American or Black, and "live in the ghetto".

All gang members are drop-outs and don't attend school.

All gang members that speak Spanish are from Mexico.

Truth:

Parents are all different. No one factor alone can indicate who will join a gang.

Many gang members have families who are loving and caring.

Gang members are from a variety of backgrounds, middle-class, wealthy and poor.

Gang membership can come from married and apparently functional families.

Gangs come from diverse and multi-ethnic backgrounds.

Gang members can be out of school, as well as those who attend school daily.

Gang members may speak a variety of languages and exhibit leadership skills.

Prevention

GREAT and DARE programs are good examples of prevention programs. Police Athletic Leagues (PAL) is another and there are other ones in the community.

Intervention

There are some good youth-at-risk programs in Washington State. Those that are successful often have a law enforcement component in them to ensure if youth does not comply there are. Intervention is long term but can have good results.

Suppression

Law enforcement is very good at suppression of the crime element (gangs, drugs, and guns) if given the right support by management. The community and even gangsters want suppression of the most violent offenders.

Security: PREVENT HOSTILE SITUATIONS WITH PREPARATION

- a. Prepare yourself mentally for the possible event of any hostile situation or a situation that may occur. Remember, you will have to write your reports later.
- b. Use professionalism, observation, and listening skills when dealing with offenders.
- c. Develop non-verbal “secret signals” with your co-workers to call for assistance.
- d. Have a personal stress management program. Don’t be afraid to ask for help!
- e. Obtain information from resources within your agency that are familiar with the population. Remember, there is no single one expert in any area.
- f. Be confident in personal safety, Defensive Tactics, and know your “Use of Force Continuum”. Know “Security and Inmate Behavior Management” techniques.

Safety Precautions To Be Considered At All Times:

Nothing is routine, no two situations are alike.

Behavior is not always predictable.

Be aware of “Mentally Ill” person’s actions.

Be aware of “Domestic Violence” situations combined with drug and/or alcohol.

Be aware of “Manipulation” that can place you or another person in danger.

Be aware of gang members. Violence is always a possibility! Be alert! Be safe!

SUMMARY

The faces of gangs are constantly changing and it can be extremely difficult for Law Enforcement and Corrections staff to deal with gang sophistication and manipulation. Remember, you are the person that will deal with these individuals on a day to day basis. Becoming familiar with the identification and management of all "disruptive individuals" can greatly improve your ability to perform and increase safety in the community!

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