



OJJDP FACT SHEET

J. Robert Flores, Administrator

July 2008 #04

Highlights of the 2005 National Youth Gang Survey

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Annually since 1995, the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) has conducted the National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS) of law enforcement agencies across the United States regarding the presence and characteristics of local gang problems. This Fact Sheet summarizes NYGS findings from the 2005 survey. The nationally representative sample included the following agencies:

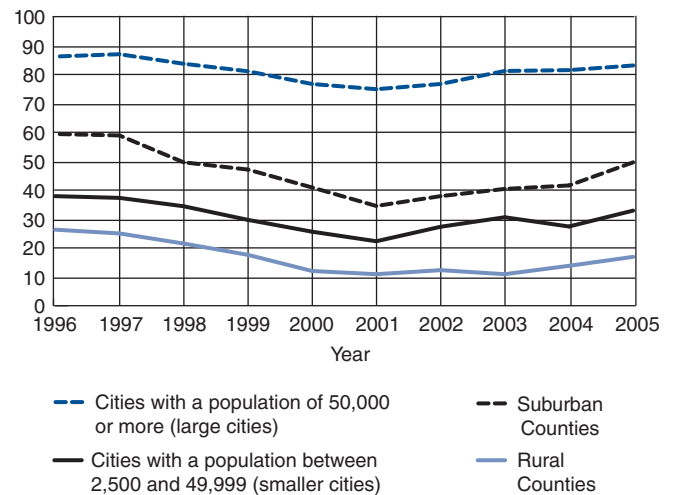
- ◆ All police departments that serve cities with a population of 50,000 or more (n=624) (larger cities).
- ◆ All suburban county police and sheriff's departments (n=740) (suburban counties).
- ◆ A randomly selected sample of police departments that serve cities with a population between 2,500 and 49,999 (n=695) (smaller cities).
- ◆ A randomly selected sample of rural county police and sheriff's departments (n=492) (rural counties).

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

Survey Findings

Of the 2,551 survey recipients, 1,798 (70 percent) responded to the 2005 survey. Within area type, 83 percent of agencies that serve larger cities, 50 percent of agencies that serve suburban counties, 33 percent of agencies that serve smaller cities, and 17 percent of agencies that serve rural counties reported youth gang problems in 2005. Figure 1 shows the percentage of law enforcement agencies, by agency type, that reported youth gang problems over the 10-year period from 1996 to 2005. A number of observations are immediately evident in Figure 1. First, the percentage of agencies in larger cities reporting gang problems is significantly

Figure 1. Law Enforcement Agency Reports of Gang Programs, 1996-2005



higher than all other area types, and is followed, in order, by suburban counties, smaller cities, and rural counties. Second, the 10-year trend in prevalence rates of gang problems is remarkably similar across all area types, albeit at different levels. Briefly stated, the percentage of law enforcement agencies reporting gang problems across all areas was highest in the mid-1990s, continued to decline until reaching a low in 2001, and has since begun to trend back upward with 2005 figures most closely resembling 1999 rates.

Based on survey results, NYGC estimates that gangs were active in more than 3,400 jurisdictions served by city (population of 2,500 or more) and county law enforcement agencies in 2005. This estimate represents a statistically significant increase over the observed 10-year low in 2001. The upward trend of agencies reporting gang problems in recent years also corresponds to notable increases in the estimated number of gangs and gang members in the United States, which, in 2005, were 26,000 and

790,000, respectively. Echoing the upward trend in the percentage of agencies reporting gang problems in recent years, the 2005 survey year marks the first year in the 2000s in which the estimate of gang membership size is above the 10-year average. This change in trend in 2005, underscored by the statistically significant increase over the 10-year low in 2001, is one to closely monitor in upcoming surveys.

A primary concern for communities is violent criminal activity by gangs, in particular lethal forms of violence generally classified as “gang-related homicides” (i.e., homicides involving a gang member as either the perpetrator and/or victim). As shown in Table 1, an examination of reported gang-related homicides in the 2005 NYGS reveals a widespread problem of gang violence that extends beyond the boundaries of larger cities. Overall, larger cities accounted for nearly 77 percent of the recorded gang homicides across the country. However, an additional 20 percent were reported by suburban counties, while the remaining two area types accounted for the remainder, or approximately 3 percent.

Table 1: Law Enforcement Agency Reports of Gang-Related Homicides, 2005

| Area Type | Number | Percent |
|-------------------|--------|---------|
| Rural counties | 13 | 0.7 % |
| Smaller cities | 35 | 2.0 % |
| Suburban counties | 359 | 20.6 % |
| Larger cities | 1,339 | 76.7 % |
| Total* | 1,746 | 100.0 % |

*Note: Total reflects only homicides reported to NYGS, and is not a national total due to missing data and sampling design.

In addition to particular survey items that measure specific aspects of an agency’s gang problem (e.g., documented number of gangs and gang members), NYGS also annually requests each agency to provide an overall general assessment of the current gang problem in their jurisdiction compared to previous years. A slight majority (53 percent) of agencies that reported a gang problem also assessed their gang problem as “getting worse” in 2005 compared to 2004. The remainder reported their gang problem as “staying about the same” (37 percent) or “getting better” (9 percent). These figures varied very little within area types.

Taken as a whole, the results of the 2005 NYGS continue to emphasize the expansiveness and seriousness of the gang problem across the United States. Following a marked decline throughout the late-1990s, gang-prevalence rates, as well as estimated total gang membership size, have trended upward in recent years, representing statistically significant increases over 10-year lows in 2001. These findings are suggestive of a resurgence of gang activity on a national level and, given the documented association

between gangs and violence, call attention to careful and measured efforts to respond to our nation’s gang problem.

OJJDP’s Gang Prevention Activities

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) supports several initiatives to prevent and reduce gang activity. OJJDP’s **Gang Reduction Program** is designed to reduce gang activity in targeted neighborhoods by incorporating a broad spectrum of research-based interventions to address the range of personal, family, and community factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency and gang activity. The program integrates local, State, and Federal resources to incorporate state-of-the-art practices in prevention, intervention, and suppression. In April 2007, Los Angeles announced the launch of a \$168 million anti-gang initiative modeled on the Gang Reduction Program.

Other OJJDP gang prevention activities include:

- ◆ **Gang-Free Schools and Communities Program** seeks to reduce youth gang crime and violence in schools and communities.
- ◆ **National Youth Gang Center**, funded by OJJDP, conducts assessments of the scope and characteristics of youth gang activity in the United States, develops resources and makes them available to the field, and provides training and technical assistance in support of community-based prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts.
- ◆ **Gang Prevention Coordination Assistance Program** provides funding to enhance coordination of local, State, and Federal resources in support of community partnerships implementing two or more of the following anti-gang strategies: primary prevention, secondary prevention, gang intervention, and gang enforcement.

The latest gang-related resources may be found on OJJDP’s Web site (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ojjdp>) by searching using the keyword “gang.”

For Further Information

For additional information about youth gangs, visit OJJDP’s Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse at <http://www.ncjrs.gov>, or contact NYGC at 800-446-0912 or <http://www.iir.com/nygc/>.

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The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the Community Capacity Development Office; the National Institute of Justice; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART).