



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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Highlights of the 2002–2003 National Youth Gang Surveys

by Arlen Egley, Jr.

Since 1995, the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) has conducted the National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS), an annual survey 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 2002 and 2003 surveys. The following agencies were included in the nationally representative sample:

- ◆ All police departments serving cities with a population of 50,000 or more (*n*=626).
- ◆ All suburban county police and sheriff’s departments (*n*=742).
- ◆ A randomly selected sample of police departments serving cities with a population between 2,500 and 49,999 (*n*=545).
- ◆ A randomly selected sample of rural county police and sheriff’s departments (*n*=492).

Survey recipients were asked to report information solely for youth gangs, defined as “a group of youths 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 2,405 survey recipients, 2,275 (95 percent) responded to the 2002 and/or 2003 survey (1,524 responded in both survey years), and the remaining 130 (5 percent) did not respond in either survey year.

Table 1 shows, by agency type, the percentage of respondents who reported gang problems in the 2002–2003 survey period. All responding agencies serving cities in the largest population group reported youth gang problems in the study period, as did

Table 1. Law Enforcement Agency Reports of Gang Problems, 2002–2003

	City population				County type	
	250,000 or more (<i>n</i> =70)	100,000–50,000– 249,999 (<i>n</i> =164)	50,000– 99,999 (<i>n</i> =392)	2,500– 49,999 (<i>n</i> =545)	Suburban (<i>n</i> =742)	Rural (<i>n</i> =492)
Did not respond	4.3%	1.2%	5.9%	5.1%	6.7%	4.9%
No	0.0	7.9	23.7	63.1	52.0	80.7
Yes	95.7	90.9	70.4	31.7	41.2	14.4

a large majority of agencies in the next largest population group. Gang problems were least likely to be reported in cities in the smallest population group and, especially, in rural counties.

Table 2 shows, by agency type, the distribution of annual maximum reported numbers of gangs, gang members, and gang-related homicides¹ among agencies reporting gang problems in the 2002–2003 survey period. Most notably, agencies serving cities in the largest population group reported numbers very different from those of all other areas: approximately 6 out of 10 reported more than 30 gangs in their jurisdiction, and an equal percentage reported more than 1,000 gang members. In contrast, a majority of agencies serving rural counties and cities in the smallest population group reported 3 or fewer gangs and 50 or fewer gang members. Agencies in suburban counties reported substantial

¹For a discussion regarding measurement issues of gang statistics, see C. Maxson, G.D. Curry, and J.C. Howell, “Youth gang homicides in the United States in the 1990s,” in *Responding to Gangs: Evaluation and Research*, edited by W. L. Reed and S. H. Decker, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, 2002, pp. 107–137 (available online at www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/190351.pdf).



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Table 2. Annual Maximum Number of Gangs, Gang Members, and Gang-Related Homicides in Areas Reporting Gang Problems, 2002–2003

	City population				County type	
	250,000 or more (n=67)	100,000–249,999 (n=149)	50,000–99,999 (n=276)	2,500–49,999 (n=173)	Suburban (n=306)	Rural (n=71)
Number of Gangs						
No data reported	6.0%	7.4%	7.2%	9.2%	12.7%	4.2%
3 or fewer	4.5	8.7	23.2	57.8	27.1	53.5
4–6	1.5	17.4	27.9	20.2	18.3	29.6
7–15	10.4	30.2	30.4	9.8	21.9	9.9
16–30	16.4	21.5	8.3	2.9	10.1	2.8
More than 30	61.2	14.8	2.9	0.0	9.8	0.0
Number of Gang Members						
No data reported	13.4	15.4	18.5	26.0	34.0	18.3
50 or fewer	1.5	12.1	26.4	55.5	27.5	59.2
51–200	6.0	20.8	29.3	12.7	19.0	21.1
201–500	9.0	20.1	13.0	5.8	7.8	1.4
501–1,000	9.0	14.8	8.3	0.0	2.9	0.0
More than 1,000	61.2	16.8	4.3	0.0	8.8	0.0
Number of Gang-Related Homicides						
No data reported	19.4	6.7	5.8	2.9	14.1	11.3
Zero	6.0	33.6	60.9	85.0	59.8	76.1
1–2	9.0	27.5	24.6	10.4	14.4	12.7
3–9	26.9	24.2	8.3	1.7	10.1	0.0
10 or more	38.8	8.1	0.4	0.0	1.6	0.0

variation in these numbers; in addition, more than one-third did not provide estimates of the number of gang members in their jurisdiction.

As table 2 shows, more than one-third of the agencies serving cities in the largest population group reported an annual maximum of 10 or more gang-related homicides. Relatively few agencies serving rural counties and the cities in the smallest population group reported a gang-related homicide in the study period.

Overall, these findings provide evidence that, in large part, gangs, gang members, and gang-related homicides are predominantly concentrated in larger cities.

For Further Information

For further information about youth gangs, call the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s (OJJDP’s) Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse at 800–851–3420 or contact NYGC at 800–446–0912 or www.iir.com/nygc/.

Arlen Egly, Jr., Ph.D., is a Senior Research Associate with NYGC, which is operated for OJJDP by the Institute for Intergovernmental Research in Tallahassee, FL.

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 National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.