

A Bibliography of Youth and Street Gang Problems
Gang Research, and What Works

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Preface

At both the adolescent and adult levels, ongoing gang involvement often facilitates or demands individual participation in violence, drug use, and drug trafficking—and these crimes often occur. In short, gang activity and its associated violence remain a significant component of the U.S. crime problem. Growing requests for guidance from juvenile and criminal justice system components prompted us to develop a repository of studies that could provide guidance and support in preventing and controlling gang violence. With that demand in mind, we set out to update the gang bibliography that we had maintained earlier at the National Gang Center. The intended audience is state and local juvenile and criminal justice officials and legislators, school administrators, and concerned citizens. In addition, the Office of Justice Programs can use this bibliography to guide researchers who wish to submit applications—to explain more succinctly how their proposed search could add knowledge and best practices to the existing body of gang research. In the long-term, we are hopeful that this gang research bibliography will help substantiate and expedite the work of all assiduous gang researchers.

The impetus for generating an up-to-date bibliography of gang research emanated from the National Gang Center's recognition several years ago that gang problems in the United States were not diminishing, and it was apparent that state and local governments needed more assistance with growing gang activity. To expand the National Gang Center bibliography, we first extracted bibliographies from numerous seminal gang research publications that made a unique contribution to the body of knowledge concerning gang involvement. On an ongoing basis, we extracted unique references from online publications for which we had subscriptions. We also searched accessible publications of leading gang researchers and various gang research groups that contain many trustworthy findings which mainly emanated from numerous rigorous gang studies. We added references generated from their work to the gang research bibliography that we had begun compiling at the National Gang Center, including published youth and street gang studies on a variety of topic areas along with additional research findings that were not yet accessible. Next, we extracted references published to the internet by the National Criminal Justice Reference Service.

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Introduction

In the first “national” gang survey, Walter Miller (2001) combined data on nearly 1,500 cities that reported gang problems at any time between the 1970s, 1980s, and the late-1990s to examine nation trends across those three decades. In the space of just twenty-five years (1970–1995), the number of cities that reported gang problems increased more than sevenfold, from 201 to 1,487, “reaching unprecedented levels” (p. 42). In the 1970s, only nineteen States reported youth gang problems. By the late 1990s, all fifty States and the District of Columbia had reported gang problems. The number of cities reporting youth gang problems rose from 270 in the 1970s to 2,547 in 1998—an increase of 843 percent. The number of counties reporting gang problems rose from 101 in the 1970s to 1,152 in 1998—an increase of more than 1,000 percent. In the 1970s, the West led the Nation, while the South ranked lowest. By 1998, the South had risen to second place, with a thirty-threefold increase, while the number of gang cities in the West had increased only by a factor of four.

Owing to sustained growth in gang activity from the 1970s onward, gang violence in the United States reached a crescendo in the period from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. The increasing availability of automobiles, coupled with the use of more lethal weapons, fueled the growth of drive-by shootings, a tactic that previously took the form of on-foot, hit-and-run forays. Gangs of this era seem to have both younger and older members than before, more members with prison records or ties to prison inmates. A major development in the 1970s was a substantial increase in the availability and use of firearms gang violence (Miller, 1982/1992). In Chicago, early gang fights in hand-to-hand combat soon involved high-caliber, automatic, or semiautomatic weapons (Block & Block, 1993).

Across the United States, the larger cities clearly demonstrated more rapid onset of gang activity, consistent with diffusion of the gang culture outward from springboard cities in each major region of the United States. Yet, compared with those in later-onset jurisdictions, gangs in the very large early onset cities (with populations of one hundred thousand or more) had older members, were of a more homogeneous racial/ethnic mixture, more involved in drug trafficking, and more involved in violent crimes, including homicides (Howell & Moore, 2010).

The 1992 Amendments to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, as amended, granted new Part D gang programming and research authority to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. This authority included the collection and dissemination of information on gangs. The then Acting OJJDP Administrator, John J. Wilson, directed the establishment of a National Gang Center to conduct a National Youth Gang Survey. The survey would systematically gather information on cities and counties’ gang activity, thereby enabling researchers to connect prior gang activity with current criminality. Barbara Tatem Kelley prepared the task force report that advanced establishment of the National Gang Center forward.

In recent years, the remarkable advancements in research on female gang involvement are especially noteworthy. Until recently, that body of research was rather sparse, hampered by a lack of both federal and local funding—in large part because of the assumption that young women would avoid criminal activity and likely would not be welcomed by male-dominated gangs—hence, it was anticipated that female samples would be small. However, the recently published female studies are far more rigorous and expansive in topic coverage than originally

imagined. A rapidly growing cadre of prominent female gang researchers—including Judith Aldridge, Emma Alleyne, Margaret Braun, Beth Bjerregaard, Ann Campbell, Dena Carson, Meda Chesney-Lind, Elizabeth Deschenes, Laura Fishman, Adrienne Freng, Amamda Gilman, Mary Harris, Alison Hipwell, Karen Joe-Laidler, Joan Moore, Juano Medina, Cheryl Maxson, Jody Miller, Dana Nurge, Vanessa Panfil, Rebecca Petersen, Dana Peterson, Carlotta Raby, Vanessa Panfil, Carolyn Smith, Stephanie Wiley, Jane Wood and many others have generated a substantial body of female gang research that is remarkable both in quality and topic coverage and continues to grow rapidly, yielding more than 200 publications to date.

We are confident that this extensive gang research bibliography can help expedite the work of all interested gang researchers. A large volume of new references was recently added to the gang research bibliography that we had begun compiling several years ago at the National Gang Center. The enormous body of youth and street gang research generated to date has greatly enhanced our understanding of gang origins, expansion, ongoing criminal activity, and the successes and failures of gang prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies and programs. Thus, OJJDP can use this bibliography to advance the work of gang researchers who are prepared to launch new studies that would expand the existing body of gang research.

Gang research continues to expand internationally. A recent European assessment of gang problems worldwide (Richardson, Newman, Berry et al., 2023: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-023-09574-w>) revealed that since the advent of the new millennium, there has been a steady increase in the number of gang studies published each year. Overall, since the year 2000, most gang studies have been conducted in North America ($n = 208$), along with a few in the United Kingdom and South America.

The gang research catalogued herein contains noteworthy studies published worldwide, commencing with a 1926 study (E.S. Bogardus, *The City Boy and His Problems: A Survey of Boy Life in Los Angeles*). The compilation of gang research that follows has the potential to guide communities future gang research, policies, and practices, owing to the array of entrees from several high-quality methodical studies that are referenced in this broad collection. Communities can also benefit by replicating key features of successful gang prevention and intervention programs that are now available. We have organized this large body of gang research as follows:

Defining and Recognizing Gangs and Gang Members

United States Gang History: Scope and Seriousness

Gang Problems in the United States

Other Gang Research Worldwide

Female Gang Research and Needed Programs and Services

Street Gang Dynamics During Adolescence and into Adulthood

Gang Deterrence and Suppression Strategies with Varied Outcomes

Pathways From Juvenile Delinquency to Gang Involvement and Violence in Adolescence

Social Media, Cyber-Banging, Internet Banging, Net Banging, and Gangsta Rap

Gang Social Network Analysis

Four Gang Programs with Substantial Evidence of Effectiveness

Defining and Recognizing Gangs and Gang Members

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Four Gang Programs with Substantial Evidence of Effectiveness

1. Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) (Very strong evidence: Proven effective in several geographically and demographically diverse cities in multiple states)

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2. Functional Family Therapy-Gang Adaptation (Remarkably effective in an historic gang problem city: Philadelphia, PA)

Thornberry, Terrence P., Kearley, B., Gottfredson, D.C., Slothower, M.P., Devlin, D.N., and Fade, J.J. (2018). Reducing Crime Among Youth at Risk for Gang Involvement: A Randomized Trial. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 17, 953-989.

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3. Comprehensive Gang Program Model (demonstrated effective in Chicago, Ill, Riverside, CA and Mesa, AZ).

Spergel, Irving A., Wa, M., & Sosa, R.V. (2006). The Comprehensive, Community-wide, Gang Program Model: Success and Failure. In J.F. Short and L.A. Hughes, *Studying Youth Gangs*, P.203-224. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

Spergel, Irving A. (2007). *Reducing Youth Gang Violence: The Little Village Gang Project in Chicago*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

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4. Gang Reduction and Youth Development Program in Los Angeles County

Herz, D.C., Chan, K., Lee, S. K., Ross, M.N., McCroskey, J., Newell, M., & Fraser, C. (2015). The Los Angeles County Juvenile Probation Outcomes Study. The Advancement Project.

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Abrahamse, Allen F. and Greenwood, Peter W. (2003). *Reducing Gun violence: Results from an Intervention in East Los Angeles*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

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