



# CRIMINAL JUSTICE FAX



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## Gang Activity Generates Coordinated Local Responses

The issue of gang violence and the reverberating impact it has throughout the San Diego Region has garnered both local concern and action by law enforcement, community members, and public officials. During the first half of 2006, homicides rose by 51 percent in the San Diego region, compared to January to June 2005 (from 43 to 65), with an increase of only 2 percent in total violent crimes<sup>1</sup>. In addition, for those homicides committed in 2005 in the City of San Diego with known motivation, 18 percent were attributed to gang activity. The San Diego Police Department has documented over 3,500 gang members in their City alone, comprising 85 different gang sets. Of these gang members, approximately five percent are juveniles.

Research has shown that gang members are likely to offend more frequently and commit more serious crimes than non-gang members<sup>2</sup>. In fact, local data collected as part of SANDAG's Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) project on a sample of youth booked into Juvenile Hall showed that almost two-thirds of those youth interviewed reported that they were or had been a gang member<sup>3</sup>. As Table 1 shows, these youth were more likely to report risky behavior than non-gang members, including fighting and attending school while under the influence and possessing a weapon.

**Table 1**  
**SELF-IDENTIFIED GANG MEMBERS MORE LIKELY TO BE ENGAGED IN RISKY BEHAVIOR**  
**COMPARED TO NON-GANG MEMBERS**

	Gang Member	Never Gang Member
Attended school while drunk or high	45%	28%
Got in a fight while drunk or high	45%	16%
Rode in a car with a driver who had been using drugs or alcohol	51%	31%
Engaged in drug-related illegal activity	98%	81%
Committed auto theft	36%	33%
Possessed an illegal weapon	53%	26%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28 - 104</b>	<b>15 - 61</b>

SOURCE: SANDAG: Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) Project 2006.

These data are providing valuable information to assist the region's aggressive efforts to both prevent and curtail gang violence in its communities<sup>4</sup>. For example, the City of San Diego formed the Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention comprised of law enforcement, community agencies, faith organizations, justice entities, and public officials to collaborate on developing solutions to address gang violence. As a member of the Commission, SANDAG will be exploring ways to support the collection of data and analysis on gang activity, such as the use of the SAM project, to help inform the Commission in its development of a coordinated strategic plan.

<sup>1</sup> Burke, C. (2006). CJ Bulletin Crime in the San Diego Region: *Mid-Year 2006 Statistics*. San Diego, CA: SANDAG.

<sup>2</sup> Webb, V., Katz C., & Decker, S. (2006). **Assessing the Validity of Self-Reports by Gang Members: Results From the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring Program**. *Crime & Delinquency*, 52, 232-252.

<sup>3</sup> Definitions of what constitutes gang membership can vary and affects the proportion of juveniles described as gang members. Some of these include official police documentation and self-report.

<sup>4</sup> The region has taken a multi-pronged approach to addressing the issue of gangs, from community task forces to increased surveillance and interventions by the justice system.