

CJIN BRIEF



Gang Association Among San Diego Arrestees: 2016 Survey Results

MARCH 2018



Research findings from the Criminal Justice Clearinghouse

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Introduction

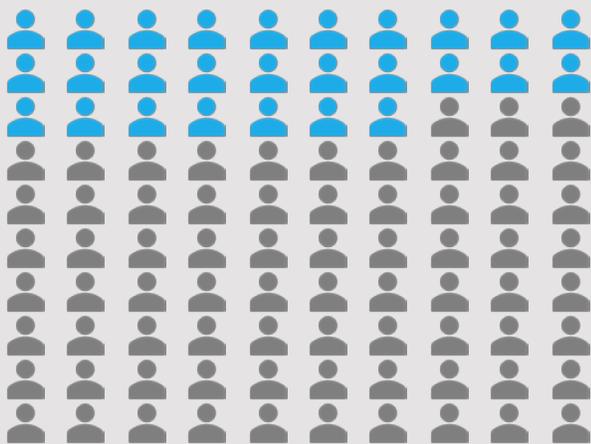
Over the past several decades, research has repeatedly shown the nexus between gangs and crime. While attention has more recently been focused on how individuals are identified as gang members and how this documentation may vary over time, the question of why individuals choose to join gangs, how gang association can be prevented, and how interventions can best be targeted are still important ones to ask.

Beginning in 2008, adult and juvenile arrestees interviewed as part of the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program who reported any gang involvement (juveniles) or involvement in the past five years (adults) were asked an additional set of questions about gangs (i.e., the gang addendum). While this instrument was not included in the 2015 survey, it was revised in 2016 with input from local stakeholders. The results from this addendum, as well as a comparison of questions from the standard interview by whether the individual reported any prior gang association, is reported here.

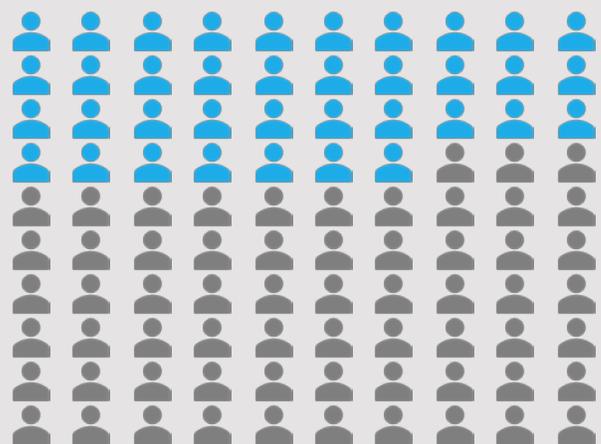
What do we know about the characteristics of arrestees who reported a gang affiliation?

AGE Juvenile arrestees were more likely to report a gang affiliation, compared to adult arrestees.

27% of 491 **adult arrestees** reported a gang affiliation



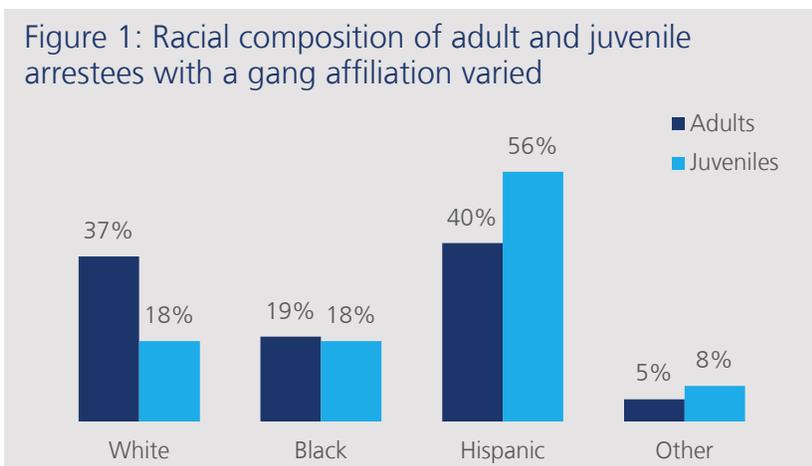
37% of 106 **juvenile arrestees** reported a gang affiliation



However, both adults and juveniles reported they started hanging out with the gang in middle school, on average.

Adults	Juveniles
Median age involvement started	
13	12
Age range	
4 to 49	1 to 16
Percent 14 years of age or younger when involvement started	
62%	90%

RACE/ETHNICITY In terms of self-described race/ethnicity, adults who reported a gang affiliation were more likely to be White, compared to juveniles, and Hispanics were more likely to be represented among juveniles with a self-reported gang affiliation (Figure 1).



Of these juvenile (ever) and adult (past 5 years) arrestees who reported some type of gang affiliation (membership or hanging out with), 89 also completed the gang addendum: 40 percent (36) were adult males, 30 percent (27) were juvenile males, 17 percent (15) were adult females, and 12 percent (11) were juvenile females.

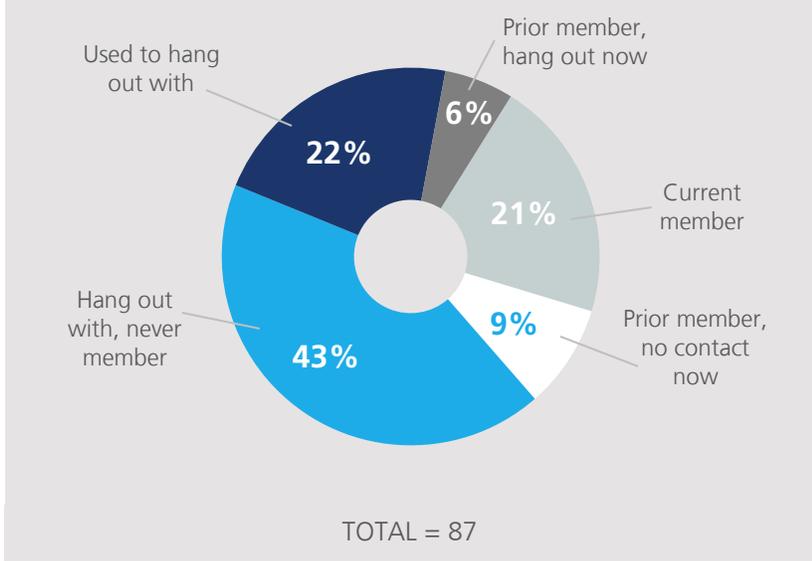
Over two-thirds of those interviewed reported current contact with a gang (69%), but almost the same percentage said they were never a member (64%). Only about one in five (21%) of those interviewed said they were currently a member (Figure 2). There was no difference between adults and juveniles or across genders in the type of involvement or prior membership.

Regardless of their current status,

2 in 3

of the arrestees who reported ever having a gang association said it was current.

Figure 2: Most arrestees report hanging out with a gang, but not being a member



4 in 5

(80%) report they got involved with the gang because of family, friends, or both

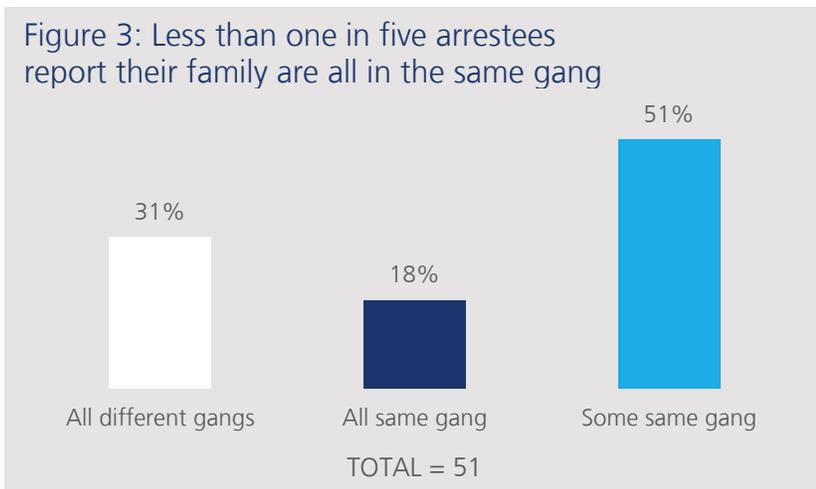
Friends and family

are the top two reasons (reported by 58% and 41% respectively) for why they became involved in a gang. One in three (32%) also said they became involved because of peer involvement and a sense of belonging.

Interestingly, while 3 in 5 (60%) reported they had family members in a gang, only a small percentage (18%) reported they were all in the same gang – most reported that some if not all were in different gangs (Figure 3).

Of those who reported family involvement in a gang, the majority (69%) said this involvement by family was current and when asked which family members were involved, the most common responses were cousins (60%), siblings (46%), and their father (35%).

Figure 3: Less than one in five arrestees report their family are all in the same gang



less than

1 in 5

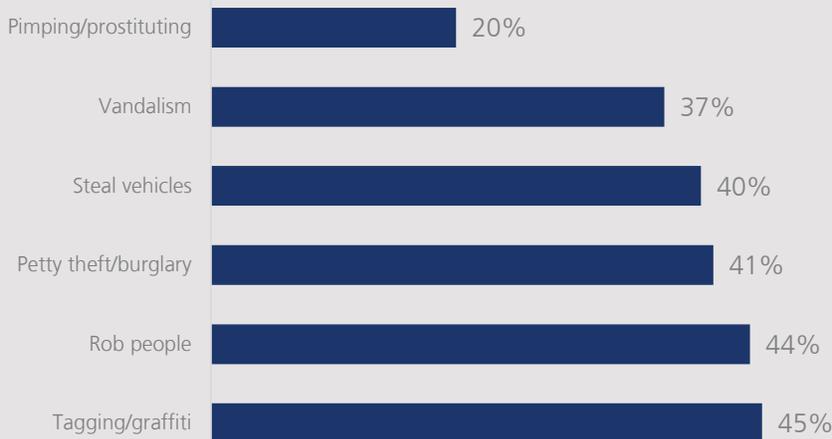
(18%) report their family are all in the same gang

What do these individuals report doing together?

When the 30 individuals who reported ever being a member were asked what they had to do to get into the gang, around one-third (30%) said they didn't have to do anything, 53 percent were jumped in (given a "test" of some type to see what it takes to be a member) and 27 percent said that they had to commit a crime.

Of the 75 Individuals who answered a question regarding what they do with the gang they affiliate with, 68 percent reported doing some type of illegal activity, including tagging/graffiti, committing robberies, and stealing things, including vehicles (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Arrestees with gang affiliations reported committing different types of illegal acts



Tagging, robbery, and property crime among most common crimes arrestees report doing with their gangs.

2 in 5 gang-affiliated arrestees (41%) reported working with other gangs to make money

- Most common partnerships to make money included dealing, selling, or transporting drugs (81%), committing property crime (35%), and pimping/prostituting (16%).
- When asked how they communicate with other people in the gang, the most common answers were in person (47%), by phone (47%), or in text (23%).
- Around one in three (31%) report they use different types of smartphones or other apps to communicate with their gang, with the most common being Facebook.
- The majority (76%) said they had never been taxed by the gang or taxed others.
- Just over half (55%) said that the gang has official meetings. When asked how often they met, 41 percent said monthly, 26 percent weekly, and 32 percent less often.
- Only about one in ten (11%) said they pay dues to the gang.

According to arrestees, many local gangs are organized and will work with other gangs to make a profit.

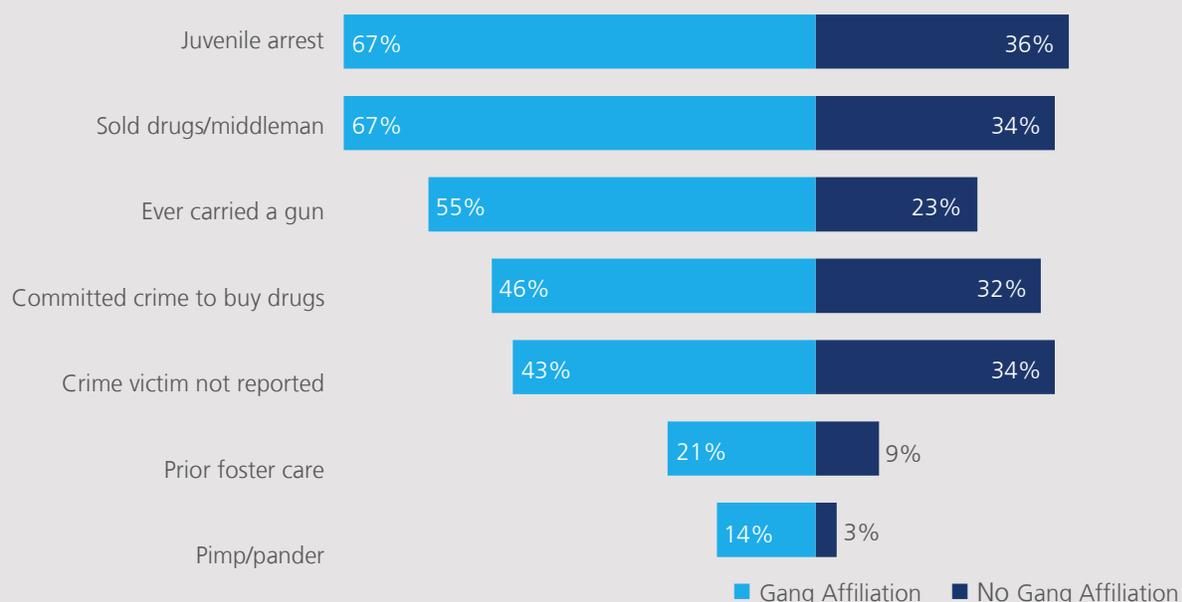
What else do we know about local gangs from these interviews?

- Almost two in five (39%) report there are female leaders in their gang.
- Around one in ten (12%) have moved to different parts of San Diego County because of law enforcement activity related to their gang.
- Around one in five (18%) have been involved with gangs in jail or prison.
- One in three (34%) reported they had been documented as a gang member by law enforcement, had gang conditions as part of probation supervision (38%), or been supervised by the Gang Suppression Unit (34%).

How do arrestees who reported a gang affiliation vary from those who did not report one?

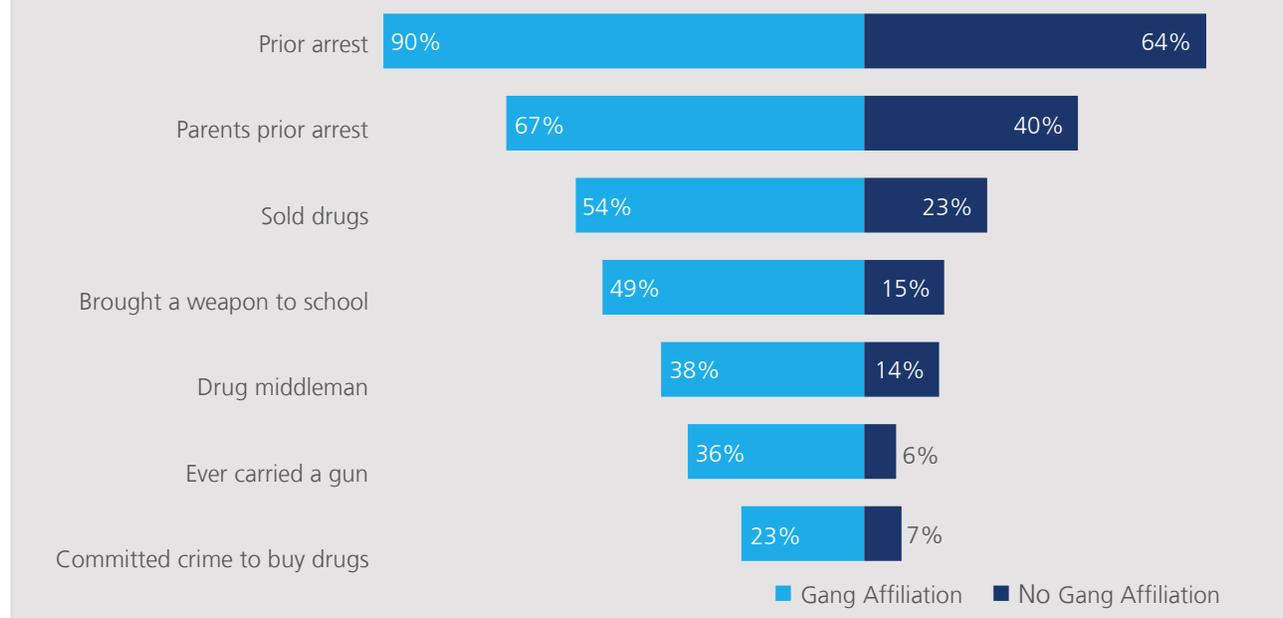
When data from the main adult SAM instrument were compared for those who reported a gang affiliation (131) to those who did not (360), a number of interesting differences were noted that could impact policy and practice. As Figure 5 shows, adults with a gang affiliation were significantly more likely to report a history of justice system contact as a juvenile and foster care system involvement, criminal victimization that went unreported, a history with firearms, and involvement in crime that was related to drugs, as well as prostitution.

Figure 5: Adult arrestees with a gang affiliation differ from other arrestees in certain ways



The 39 juveniles who reported a gang affiliation also differed from the juvenile arrestees who did not report an affiliation (67), including a parental history of justice system contact, personal experience with weapons, including guns, prior arrests, and involvement in drug use and drug distribution (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Juvenile arrestees with a gang affiliation differ from other arrestees in certain



What do these individuals see for themselves long term?

Only about 1 in 6 (16%) of the adults and juveniles who completed the gang addendum said they had ever been approached and offered help to get out of a gang. When asked who offered help, 5 said family, 4 said friends, 3 said counselors, 3 said an intervention group, 2 said church, and 1 said someone in law enforcement.

Around 1 in 3 (32%) of the 47 individuals still involved with a gang said they currently want to get out or stop hanging with the gang and three-quarters (76%) said they would eventually get out or stop hanging with the gang. Ninety percent (90%) said they could leave now if they wanted to.

When the 82 adults who had discontinued their gang association were asked the reason why, the number one reason, reported by half (50%), was that they were just tired of the lifestyle.

Take aways

- With most gang affiliation starting before high school, it is essential that targeted prevention occurs to youth at highest-risk for gang associations in elementary and/or middle school.
- Gangs commit many crimes for profit, including involvement in drugs and pimping/prostituting. While offering alternatives to a potentially lucrative criminal lifestyles is not easy, it is important that our communities work collaboratively to offer alternatives to at-risk youth.
- The relationship between youth with a history of foster care involvement being more likely to report a gang affiliation is something that deserves additional conversation and attention.
- Even though gang association is related to the family and friends individuals have, most individuals who associate with gangs say that they envision this association ending at some point. This may be reflected by the greater frequency with which juveniles reported gang affiliation (37%), compared to adults (27%).