

Gang Association Among San Diego County Juvenile Arrestees: Interview Highlights

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, gangs can be defined in many ways, but most definitions refer to a group of three or more individuals who engage in criminal activity and identify themselves with a common name or sign. Over the years, research has shown that gang members commit a higher percentage of crime than non-gang members and that youth involved in gangs are more likely to engage in substance abuse and high-risk behaviors which lead to a wide range of potentially long-term health and social consequences.¹

Questions about gang membership and association are posed to arrestees interviewed as part of the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program² by SANDAG and every year since 2008 (with the exception of 2015), an additional gang addendum has been completed with those adult and juvenile arrestees reporting any affiliation. While the recently released **CJ in Brief** provides an overview of the results for both adults and juveniles, this CJ Flash focuses on what we know about youth involved with gangs and possible implications from these data.

37%

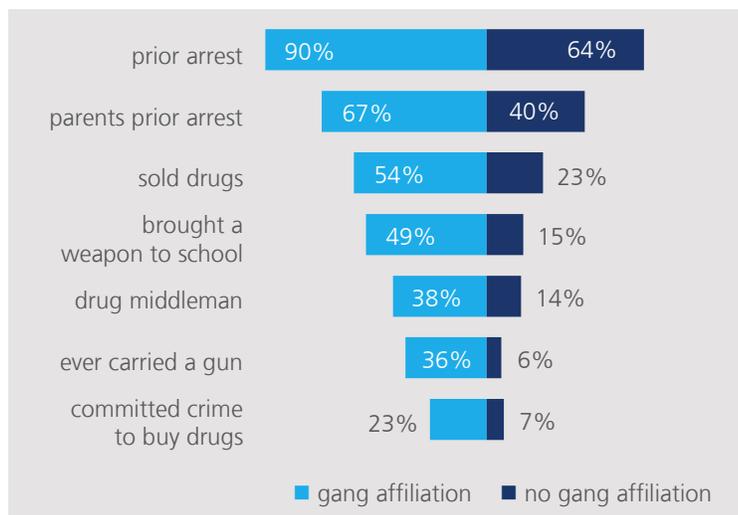
of 106 juvenile arrestees reported a gang affiliation

while most youth's association were current, most reported they were never members



how do gang affiliated juveniles differ from those who do not report an affiliation?

Consistent with prior research, youth who reported an affiliation were significantly more likely to report a history of justice system contact, foster care involvement, criminal victimization that was unreported, a history with firearms, and involvement in crime that was related to drugs, as well as prostitution.



¹ National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS). *Special Feature: Gangs*. Available online at ncjrs.gov/gangs.

² As part of the SAM program, adult and juvenile arrestees are interviewed within 48 hours of their arrest and booking into local detention facilities. More information and data from SAM is available at www.sandag.org/sam.

31% of juveniles with local gang associations said their gangs work with other gangs to make money

how do these juveniles make money with other gangs?

91%

selling drugs

18%

committing property crimes

18%

pimping/prostituting

Of the 39 youth interviewed, 28 were males and 11 were females. While it should be noted the number of respondents was small, some gender differences were notable.



While 2 in 3 (**64%**) of the males with a gang association identified as Hispanic, only 36 percent of the females did – 27 percent of females identified as Black, 27 percent as White, and 9 percent as “other”.



Females were more likely to say they joined a gang because of family involvement (**73%**), compared to males (44%) – a finding which could also relate to the fact they reported association at an earlier age than males (median of 11, compared to 13 for males).



Males were more likely to report they had been approached by someone trying to help them to end the gang association, compared to females (**33%** versus 9%).



Females were less likely to report they thought they could stop associating with the gang right now if they wanted to (67% versus 88% for the males) and fewer reported that they thought they would ever get out (**50%**, versus 81% for the males).

Collaboration among street gangs has increased...[with] the most common reason survey respondents cite for these alliances is mutual benefit, particularly to maximize profits from drug activities.

– National Gang Report, 2017³

possible implications

- Association with gangs can take many forms and happens for numerous reasons. Because gang association is correlated with other risks, it is important that interventions address the underlying risk factors of youth that could vary – one size doesn't fit all.
- Prevention efforts need to be family-focused and gender-specific should be considered when possible.
- The profit focus of gangs cannot be ignored and offering access to competitive and legitimate economic opportunities is essential.

³ National Gang Intelligence Center (2017). *National Gang Report 2015*. Available online at: <https://nicic.gov/national-gang-report-2015>.