

BRIEF IN CJ



Gang Association Among San Diego Arrestees: 2017 Survey Results

OCTOBER 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 questions 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. While this instrument was not included in the 2015 survey, it was revised in 2016 with input from local stakeholders. The results from addenda administered in 2017, as well as a comparison of questions from the standard interview by whether the individual reported any prior gang association, are 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.

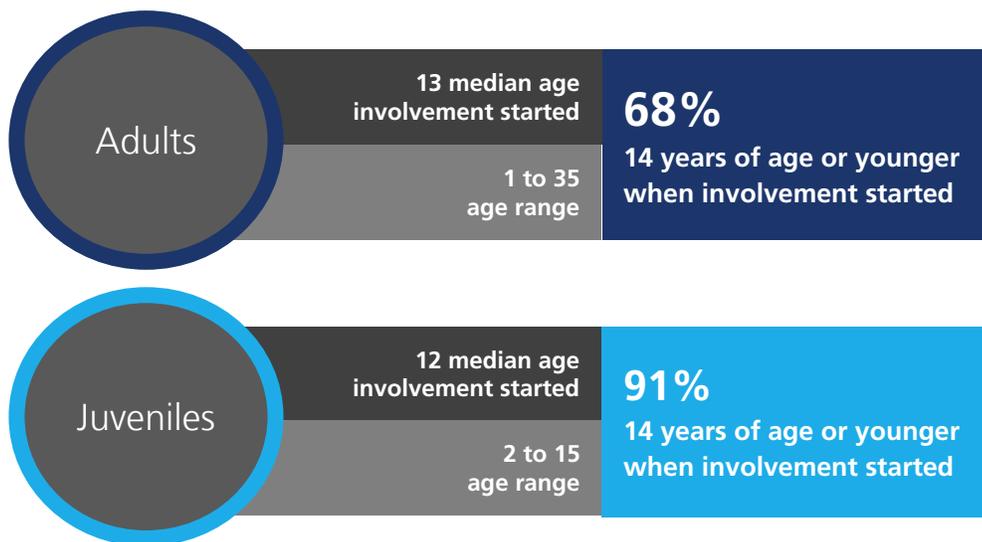
1 in 4

adult arrestees reported a gang affiliation
(26% of 484)

More than 2/5

juvenile arrestees reported a gang affiliation
(42% of 106)

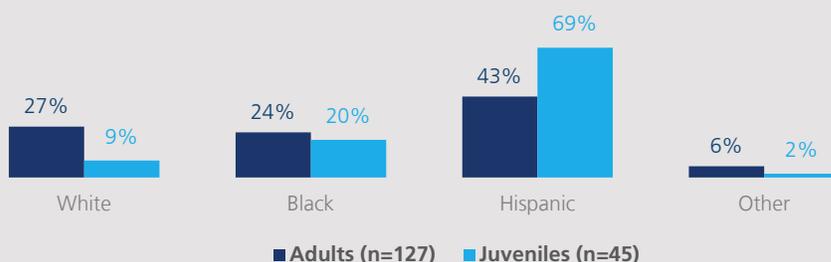
However, both adults and juveniles reported they started hanging out with the gang in middle school, on average.



Race/ethnicity

In terms of self-described race/ethnicity, the most common for both adults and juveniles was Hispanic (43% and 69%, respectively) (Figure 1). For adults, of the rest, around one-quarter were either White (27%) or Black (24%) and for juveniles, 20 percent were Black and 9 percent were White. When interpreting these statistics, it is important to consider the racial/ethnic distribution of the region.¹

Figure 1
Racial composition of adult and juvenile arrestees with a gang affiliation varied



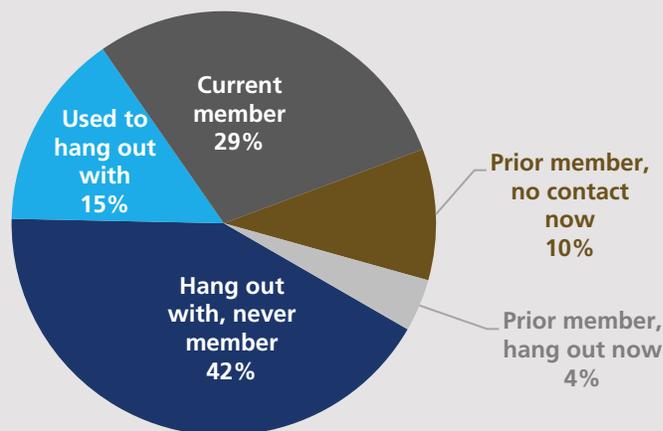
Of these juvenile (ever) and adult (past 5 years) arrestees who reported some type of gang affiliation (membership or hanging out with), 112 also completed the gang addendum: 46 percent (52) were adult males, 29 percent (32) were juvenile males, 18 percent (20) were adult females, and 7 percent (8) were juvenile females.

¹ According to regional estimates, 46 percent of the region’s population is White, 33 percent Hispanic, 5 percent Black, and 16 percent Other.

Almost three-quarters of those interviewed reported current contact with a gang (74%), but only 43 percent said they were ever a member and only 29 percent they were currently a member (Figure 2).

Figure 2

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



TOTAL: 105

Friends and family were the top two reasons (reported by 55% and 31% respectively) for why these individuals became involved in a gang. One in three (33%) also said they became involved because of peer involvement and a sense of belonging.

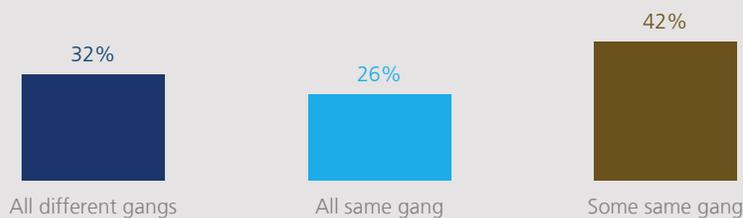
Interestingly, just over half (52%) reported they had family members in a gang, only one-quarter (26%) reported they were all in the same gang – most reported that some if not all were in different gangs (Figure 3).

3 in 4

(73%) report they got involved with the gang because of family, friends, or both

Figure 3

Around one in four arrestees report their family are all in the same gang



TOTAL: 56

Of those who reported family involvement in a gang, the majority (68%) said this involvement by family was current and when asked which family members were involved, the most common responses were cousins (54%), siblings (41%), and their father (26%).

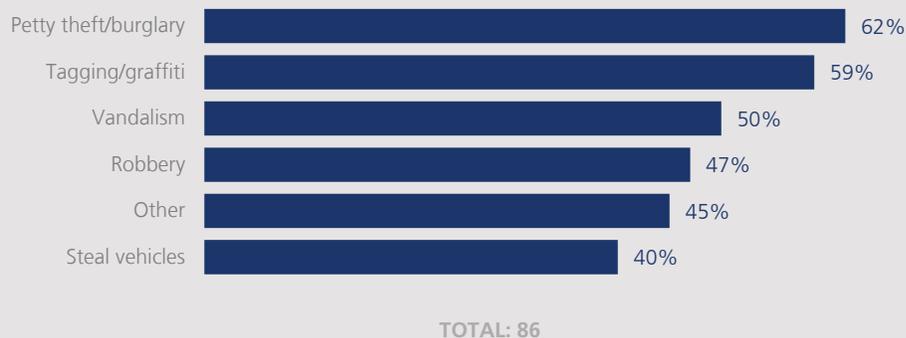
What do these individuals report doing together?

When the 44 individuals who reported ever being a member were asked what they had to do to get into the gang, 27 percent said they did not have to do anything, 64 percent were jumped in (given a “test” of some type to see what it takes to be a member), and 14 percent said that they had to commit a crime.

Of the 86 individuals who answered a question regarding what they do with the gang they affiliate with, 88 percent reported doing some type of illegal activity, including tagging/graffiti, vandalism, committing robberies, dealing drugs, and stealing things, including vehicles (Figure 4). Other activities noted by 39 of the arrestees included using drugs (15), dealing drugs (11), just hanging out (10), fighting (6), shooting guns (3), and gambling (2).

Figure 4

Arrestees with gang affiliations reported committing different types of illegal acts



Overall, almost one in every two (47%) gang-affiliated arrestees reported working with other gangs to make money. As Figure 5 shows, the most common way involved the sale or distribution of drugs.

Figure 5

Most common partnerships to make money



- When asked how they communicate with other people in the gang, the most common answers were in person (55%), by phone (38%), over text (19%), or through a smartphone application (10%).
- Of the 30 individuals who reported using smartphone applications to communicate, 77 percent said they use Facebook, 43 percent Snapchat, 20 percent Instagram, 7 percent Twitter, and 3 percent WhatsApp.
- The majority (77%) said they had never been taxed by the gang or taxed others, 14 percent had taxed others, and 9 percent had taxed others and been taxed themselves.
- Three in five (60%) said that the gang has official meetings. When asked how often they met, 38 percent said monthly, 22 percent weekly, and 29 percent less often.
- Only about one in ten (9%) said they pay dues to the gang.

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

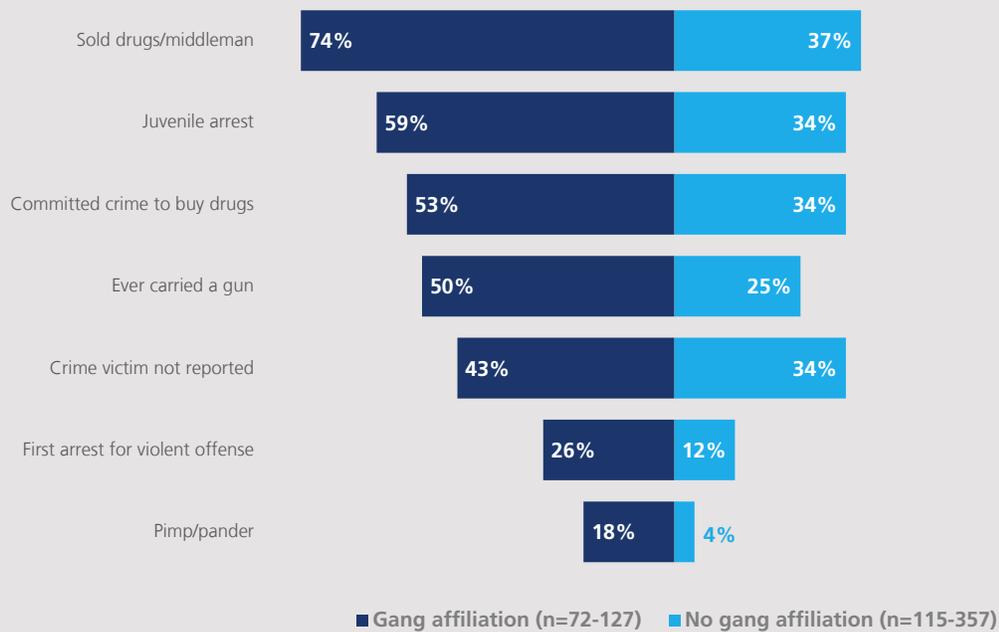
- Two-fifths (40%) report there are female leaders in their gang.
- One in five (21%) have moved to different parts of San Diego County because of law enforcement activity related to their gang. When asked where they moved from, 9 said the Central region, 7 the South region, 4 the East region, and two the North region. When asked why they moved, increased attention from law enforcement was the most common answer (75%), followed by they wanted to make a positive change (20%).
- Almost two in five (38%) have been involved with gangs in jail or prison.
- Forty-two percent (42%) reported they had been documented as a gang member by law enforcement, gang conditions as part of probation supervision (33%), or been supervised by the Gang Suppression Unit (29%).

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 to those who did not, a number of interesting differences were noted that could impact policy and practice. As Figure 6 shows, adults with a gang affiliation were significantly more likely to report involvement in drug distribution, a history of justice system contact as a juvenile, committing a crime to be able to buy drugs, a history with firearms, criminal victimization that went unreported, a first arrest for a violent offense, and involvement in prostitution.

Figure 6

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

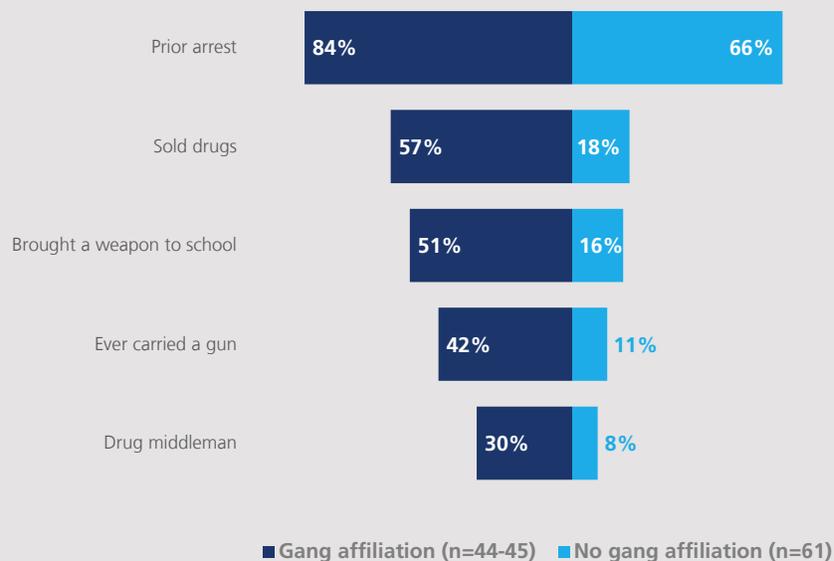


NOTE: Significant at $p < .05$ level.

The juveniles who reported a gang affiliation also differed from the juvenile arrestees who did not report an affiliation, including a prior arrest history, involvement in selling drugs, and involvement with weapons, including guns (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Juvenile arrestees with a gang affiliation differ from other arrestees in certain ways



NOTE: Significant at $p < .05$ level.

What do these individuals see for themselves long term?

One in four (25%) 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, 7 said family, 5 said friends, 4 said an intervention group, 4 said church, 2 said counselors, and 1 said someone in law enforcement.

Twenty-six percent (26%) of the 72 individuals still involved with a gang said they currently want to get out or stop hanging with the gang and two-thirds (67%) said they would eventually get out or stop hanging out with the gang. Eighty-six percent (86%) said they could leave now if they wanted to.

When the 71 adults who had discontinued their gang association were asked the reason why, the number one reason, reported by half (54%), was that they were just tired of the lifestyle.

Takeaway

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.

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%).