



Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research

**The Other Family:
How Gangs Impact
Latino Families and Communities**

(RESUMEN EJECUTIVO EN ESPAÑOL)

The Other Family:

How Gangs Impact Latino Families and Communities

A report by HACER
(Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research)

2005



Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research

HACER's purpose is to increase the capacity of the Hispanic community to create and control information about itself in order to affect institutional decision-making and planning. Support for HACER is provided by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) at the University of Minnesota.

Director: Claudia Fuentes

A publication of :

HACER
330 HHH Center
301 19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
(612) 624-3326
www.hacer-mn.org

This report is not copyright protected. HACER grants permission for the reproduction of all or part of the enclosed material, except that information reprinted with permission from other sources. HACER appreciates acknowledgement, however, as well as two copies of any material thus reproduced.

Photos by: HACER, CURA, City of Minneapolis and Minneapolis Police Department Graffiti Task Force.
Translation of Executive Summary into Spanish by Alex DaHinten.

2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
RESUMEN EJECUTIVO.....	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	9
INTRODUCTION.....	12
GANGS OVERVIEW	14
<i>Gangs in Minnesota</i>	19
PROJECT OVERVIEW	22
<i>Analysis</i>	23
WHY YOUTH JOIN GANGS	24
ADULTS' PERSPECTIVES	24
YOUTH PERSPECTIVES	30
THE EFFECTS OF GANGS ON YOUTH, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY	33
GANG PREVENTION: ROLES AND PERSPECTIVES.....	36
POLICYMAKERS.....	36
POLICE.....	38
EDUCATORS.....	40
NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS.....	45
BUSINESSES AND FAITH ORGANIZATIONS.....	48
PARENTS.....	48
YOUTH.....	53
<i>Summary of Perspectives on Parents and Youth</i>	54
CONCLUSIONS	56
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	60
APPENDIX I	61
APPENDIX II: RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS	62
APPENDIX III: JUVENILE VICTIMIZATION AND OFFENDER PEAK TIMES	63
REFERENCES.....	64

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

HACER extends its deepest appreciation to the individual participants and organizations that helped make this report possible. Our thanks to Marina Brennan of La Familia; Gilbert de la O and Emily Nelson of the West Side Neighborhood House; David Thelen and George Solo of The Boys and Girls Clubs of the Twin Cities; Officer Sherry Appledorn of the Minneapolis Gang Unit; Commander Bill Martinez of the St. Paul Police Department, and Sergeant Giovanni Veliz of the Minneapolis Police Department. We also thank Alberto Monserrate of the Latino Communications Network; Marilyn Garcia and Sylvia Perez of the Saint Paul School District; David Greenberg and Annie Ericson of El Colegio; Jeff Burk of the Minneapolis School District; Katie Groh of La Escuelita, and the three public officials: Carlos Mariani, Gary Schiff, and Alice Seagren. We also greatly appreciate the contributions of the youth who genuinely and candidly shared their views and experiences with us for this report.

As always, HACER is committed to conducting rigorous research that sparks community action and improvement. We thank HACER's Board of Directors, Community Council, and Research Committee for their continual wisdom and guidance. We especially thank Maureen O'Dougherty, Ph.D., who was instrumental in the creation of this report. We also recognize the tireless efforts of HACER's staff: Project Coordinator Maria Vazquez-Calatayud, Jared Erdmann, Amy Stenoien, Elisabeth Golub, and Executive Director Claudia Fuentes, in the completion of this project.

For their generous technical support and funding, we thank The Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation, General Mills, The Mardag Foundation, The Minneapolis Foundation, the Otto Bremer Foundation, and The St. Paul Companies Inc. Foundation. We are also grateful for the continued support and guidance of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA).

Finally, HACER is grateful to the many individuals and organizations who contributed to this research project. If we overlooked any contributor, please know that we have done so inadvertently and we are truly thankful.

RESUMEN EJECUTIVO

Las pandillas¹ no son un componente de ninguna cultura. Tampoco son intrínsecas a una raza, etnia, o nacionalidad. Más bien, las pandillas se desarrollan en grupos sociales bajo circunstancias específicas. Las pandillas no son un elemento de la cultura latina, de la misma manera que no eran inherentes a la cultura irlandesa en el siglo pasado. Sin embargo, como la investigación muestra, la participación en las pandillas es un problema significativo en las comunidades latinas² de hoy día. La Encuesta Nacional de Pandillas Juveniles de 1998³ reveló que los Hispanos/Latinos eran el grupo racial/étnico predominante entre los miembros de las pandillas a nivel nacional, identificando al 46 por ciento de todos los miembros de pandillas. Este informe se concentra en el impacto de las pandillas en las comunidades latinas de Minnesota.

Raza/Etnia de los miembros de las pandillas juveniles en los Estados Unidos en 1998

Miembros de Pandillas		
Raza/Etnia	Número	Porcentaje
Hispano/Latino	255,254	46%
Africano Americano	184,467	34%
Caucásico	64,828	12%
Asiático	34,296	6%
Otro	9,672	2%
Total	548,517	100%

(Fuente: Centro Nacional de Pandillas Juveniles, 2000)

Participantes

Todos los individuos a quienes se les solicitó participar en el informe fueron informantes clave⁴ sobre asuntos de pandillas (con la excepción de un creador de políticas). Adultos, cuyas vidas profesionales los llevan a interactuar con las pandillas, particularmente aquéllos involucrados con jóvenes latinos, ofrecen sus perspectivas. Las voces de los jóvenes latinos también están incluidas. Nuestro propósito al incluir jóvenes en este informe, era para saber

¹ Las pandillas pueden ser categorizadas de varias maneras (por ejemplo, por lugar, etnia, o tipos de crimen que cometen). Nos referimos a pandillas como a un grupo de dos o más jóvenes de un vecindario, variando en edad de 8-24, quienes pueden o no, estar involucrados en actividades criminales.

² Los términos latino(s) y latina(s) se refieren a personas nacidas en Latino América tanto como a las nacidas en los Estados Unidos de América de ascendencia latinoamericana. El término latinos se refiere a hombres o a grupos combinados de hombres y mujeres.

³ Centro Nacional de Pandillas Juveniles. (2000). *1998 National youth gang survey. Summary*. Washington, D.C.: Oficina de Justicia Juvenil y de Prevención de la Delincuencia, Programas de Prevención del Departamento de Justicia de los Estados Unidos.

⁴ Definimos a los informantes clave como a cualquier individuo quien tiene elementos para comprender el asunto ya sea profesionalmente o personalmente.

porqué los jóvenes se unen a las pandillas, cuáles son sus experiencias, y cómo pueden aprender otros de esas experiencias.

Enfoque

El enfoque de “múltiples sectores” de este informe para saber del impacto de la participación de la juventud latina en las pandillas fué diseñado para evaluar la responsabilidad entre los varios sectores. La mayoría de participantes, por ejemplo, sugirieron que el asunto de las pandillas era “problema de todos.” Por lo tanto, si las pandillas son “problema de todos,” entonces es crucial que todos los grupos compartan información exacta y que decidan juntos qué puede hacerse para reducir el impacto de las pandillas en las familias y comunidades latinas. La identificación de las responsabilidades dentro y a través de los sectores para las muchas dimensiones del problema de las pandillas es también una necesidad. El sociólogo e investigador de pandillas Mike Carlie⁵ sugiere que la comprensión de un individuo de la definición de una pandilla moldea su percepción de las pandillas y su respuesta a ellas. Agrega que a pesar de que “las pandillas son un fenómeno internacional, nacional y local [...] el mejor enfoque para reducir su influencia es al nivel local.” A través de este informe esperamos estimular un diálogo productivo que conlleve a estrategias efectivas, de toda la comunidad, para reducir y prevenir la participación en pandillas entre los niños de Minnesota.

Hallazgos clave

Un destacado hallazgo de este informe fué que las pandillas son parte de la vida cotidiana de muchos niños. También encontramos una percepción entre los profesionales de que aquéllos más cercanos al asunto – padres cuyos hijos pueden estar amenazados por la participación en pandillas – frecuentemente no están conscientes del problema, o poco dispuestos a tratarlo o no pueden confrontarlo.

Este informe identifica numerosas y constructivas maneras en que varios sectores pueden tratar con este asunto:

Política pública

- Los creadores de políticas pueden reconocer que las pandillas son un problema a través de todo el estado por el que la comunidad más amplia es responsable. Pueden invertir en las familias y las comunidades apoyando esfuerzos para prevenir la participación en pandillas y proveer alternativas positivas para la juventud, que de otra manera recurren a las pandillas. También los creadores de políticas pueden pedir cuentas sobre los esfuerzos de prevención, intervención y supresión.

Departamentos de policía

- La fuerza policiaca tiene un papel central en la supresión de la actividad criminal de las pandillas tanto como en la recolección de información que puede informar a la política. Los policías también pueden contribuir a la prevención desarrollando sus papeles como personajes públicos en la comunidad. Estereotipar a la juventud latina como miembros de pandillas y usar el estilo de “policía duro” se perciben como enfoques contraproducentes que entorpecen la interacción efectiva de la policía con los jóvenes.

⁵ Carlie, M. (2002). *Into the abyss: A personal journey into the world of street gangs* [versión electrónica].

Escuelas y educadores

- Las escuelas pueden fortalecer su misión de educar a todos los estudiantes y, en el proceso, de darle una mayor prioridad a las necesidades de los estudiantes latinos.
- Las actividades extracurriculares deberían reflejar con mayor precisión la diversidad del cuerpo estudiantil. Las escuelas pueden apoyar grupos de danza folklórica, equipos de fútbol, y otras actividades.

Organizaciones comunitarias

- Comparadas con los otros sectores, las organizaciones de la comunidad tienen el papel más directo en la prevención de las pandillas. La mayoría de los informantes clave enfatizaron su contribución vital y positiva a la prevención de las pandillas juveniles y, más ampliamente, al desarrollo juvenil.
- Las organizaciones comunitarias proveen un lugar a salvo de las pandillas y un espacio muy necesitado para que la juventud pueda meterse en actividades positivas. Las reglas anti-pandillas y las destrezas de resistencia enseñadas por los centros juveniles ofrecen a los jóvenes una estructura y un método para eludir la atracción de las pandillas. Dadas las circunstancias de padres y escuelas sobreextendidos, las organizaciones sin fines de lucro orientadas hacia los jóvenes son esenciales.

Para promover una cultura comunitaria de valoración, apoyo, y participación juvenil, debemos estar dispuestos a invertir en soluciones a largo plazo para la comunidad, con financiamiento estable para el desarrollo juvenil.

Finalmente, cerramos el informe con recomendaciones que todos los sectores necesitan considerar:

Programación inclusiva

En tanto que los sectores desarrollen estrategias para prevenir la participación en las pandillas, necesitan asegurarse de que la programación sea diversa e inclusiva de toda la juventud.

Apoyo para los padres

Todos los sectores necesitan pensar seria y creativamente sobre cómo desarrollar estructuras de apoyo para los padres latinos.

Apoyo para los jóvenes que quieren abandonar a las pandillas

El problema de los jóvenes atrapados en pandillas que requieren ayuda para dejarlas sin incidentes, es realmente una necesidad no satisfecha que debe ser tratada.

Haciendo puente y colaborando

Las organizaciones no gubernamentales de orientación juvenil deberían atender la llamada para conectarse y colaborar para proveer consistentemente oportunidades y apoyo para la juventud a largo plazo.

Puesto que tomamos las perspectivas de individuos dentro del área metropolitana, la información en este informe es particularmente relevante a las Ciudades Gemelas. Sin embargo, esperamos que algunos hallazgos sean aplicables a los latinos a través del estado.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gangs⁶ are not a basic component of any culture. Neither are they intrinsic to race, ethnicity, or nationality. Rather, gangs develop in social groups under specific circumstances. Gangs are not an element of Latino culture, just as they were not inherent to Irish culture in the last century. However, as research shows, gang involvement is a significant problem in the Latino⁷ communities of today. The 1998 National Youth Gang Survey⁸ revealed that Hispanics/Latinos were the predominant racial/ethnic group among gang members nationwide, accounting for 46 percent of all gang members. This report focuses on the impact of gangs on Latino communities in Minnesota.

Race/Ethnicity of 1998 Youth Gang Members in the U.S.

Gang Members		
Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Hispanic/Latino	255,254	46%
African American	184,467	34%
Caucasian	64,828	12%
Asian	34,296	6%
Other	9,672	2%
Total	548,517	100%

(Source: National Youth Gang Center, 2000.)

Participants

All individuals asked to participate in the report were key informants⁹ on gang issues (with the exception of one policymaker). Adults, whose professional lives lead to gang interaction, particularly those involving Latino youth, offer their perspectives. The voices of Latino youth are also included. Our purpose for involving youth in this report was to learn why kids join gangs, what their experiences are, and how others can learn from those experiences.

⁶ Gangs may be categorized in several ways (e.g., location, ethnicity, or by the kinds of crimes they commit). We refer to gangs as neighborhood youth groups of two or more individuals, ranging in age from 8-24, who may or may not engage in criminal activities.

⁷ Latinos describes people born in Latin America as well as those born of Latin American descent in the United States of America. Latinos refers to men or combined groups of men and women.

⁸ National Youth Gang Center. (2000). *1998 national youth gang survey. Summary*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice Programs.

⁹ We define key informants as any individual who professionally/personally has insight on the issue.

Approach

This report's "multiple sector" approach to learning about the impact of Latino youth gang involvement was designed to assess accountability among the various sectors. Most participants, for instance, suggested that the gang issue was "everyone's problem." Therefore, if gangs are "everyone's problem," then it is crucial that all groups share accurate information and decide together what can be done to reduce the impact of gangs on Latino families and communities. Identifying responsibility and accountability within and across sectors for the many dimensions of the gang problem is also a necessity. Sociologist and gang researcher Mike Carlie¹⁰ suggests that an individual's understanding of the definition of a gang shapes his/her perception of gangs and response to it. He adds that although "gangs are an international, national and local phenomenon [...] the best approach to reducing their influence is at the local level." Through this report, we hope to spur productive dialogue that leads to effective, community-wide strategies to reduce and prevent gang involvement among Minnesota children.

Key Findings

One striking finding of this report was that gangs are part of the everyday life experience of many children. We also found a perception among professionals that those closest to the issue – parents whose children may be threatened by gang involvement – are often unaware of the problem, or unwilling or unable to face it.

This report identifies numerous constructive ways that various sectors can address the issue:

Public policy

- Policymakers can acknowledge that gangs are a statewide problem for which the broader community is responsible. They can invest in families and communities by supporting efforts to prevent gang involvement and provide positive alternatives for youth who might otherwise turn to gangs. Also, policymakers can require accountability for prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts.

Police departments

- The police force has a central role in suppression of gang criminal activity as well as information gathering that can inform policy. The police can also contribute to prevention by developing their roles as public figures in the community. Stereotyping Latino youth as gang members and using a "tough cop" style are perceived as counterproductive approaches that hinder effective police interaction with youth.

Schools and Educators

- Schools can strengthen their mission of educating all students and, in the process, make the educational needs of Latino students a stronger priority.
- Extracurricular activities should more accurately reflect the diversity of the student body. Schools can support folkloric dance groups, soccer teams, and other activities.

¹⁰ Carlie, M. (2002). *Into the abyss: A personal journey into the world of street gangs* [Electronic version]. Retrieved September 20, 2004, from <http://www.faculty.smsu.edu/m/mkc096f/>

Community Organizations

- Compared to other sectors, community organizations have the most direct role in gang prevention. Most key informants emphasized their vital and positive contribution to the prevention of youth gangs and, more broadly, to youth development.
- Community organizations provide a safe haven from gangs and much-needed space for youth to engage in positive activities. The anti-gang rules and resistance skills taught by youth centers offer youth both a structure and method for avoiding the pull of gangs. Given the circumstances of overextended parents and schools, nonprofit organizations geared to youth are essential.

To promote a community culture of valuing, supporting, and involving youth, we must be willing to invest in long-term solutions for the community with stable funding for youth development.

Finally, we close the report with recommendations that all sectors need to consider:

Inclusive Programming

- As sectors develop strategies to prevent gang involvement, they need to ensure that programming is diverse and inclusive of all youth.

Support for Parents

- All sectors need to think seriously and creatively about how to develop structures of support for Latino parents.

Support for Youth Who Want to Leave Gangs

- The problem of youth trapped in gangs who require help to leave them safely is truly a vital unmet need that must be addressed.

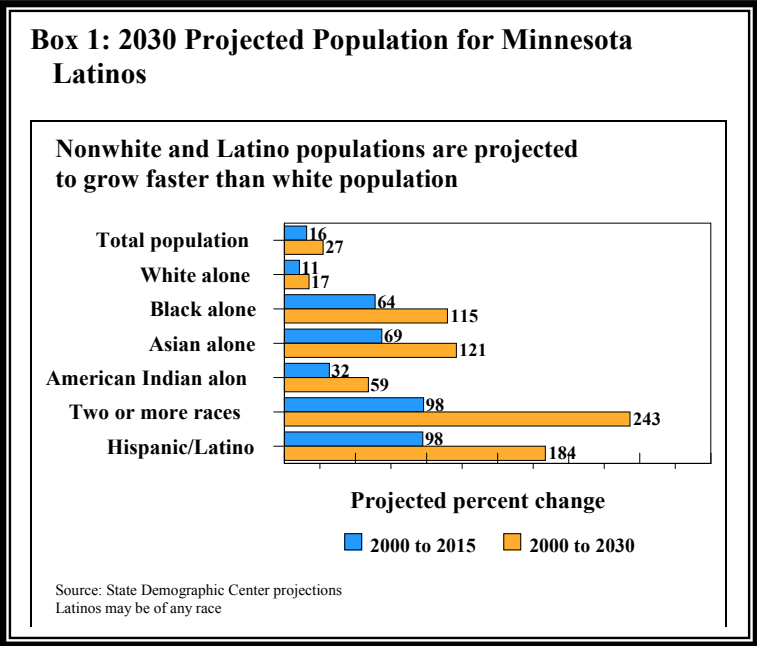
Bridging and Collaboration

- Youth-oriented, non-governmental organizations should heed the call to connect and collaborate in order to consistently provide opportunities and support for youth over the long term.

Since we drew upon the perspectives of individuals within the metropolitan area, the information in this report is particularly relevant to the Twin Cities. However, we expect that some findings are applicable to Latinos across the state.

INTRODUCTION

For most adults, gangs¹¹ and gang activities are something we hear about on the news or see in movies. As the media itself indicates, gangs are a recurring problem in the United States. Gangs are not a natural aspect of any culture. Gangs are not intrinsic to any race, ethnicity or nationality; but rather, they develop in social groups under specific circumstances. It is clear from U.S. history that gangs arise in communities struggling with their economic, social and political status. Since the last century, immigrants and other social groups with a marginal standing in the United States have witnessed the same phenomenon with their children: the rise of gangs and related violence. The other key circumstance is, of course, that gangs develop in youth, who, as we know, already struggle with issues of their identity and place in society.



This report focuses on the impact of gangs on the Latino¹² communities in Minnesota. Gangs are not part of Latino culture, just as they were not a basic quality of Irish culture in the last century. In one sense, gang activity can be seen as a turning away from the community – precisely among those who most need to feel affirmed in the immediate community and in the wider society.

But, as research shows, gang involvement is an important problem in today’s Latino

community. The 1998 National Youth Gang Survey (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1999) revealed that Hispanics/Latinos were the predominant racial/ethnic group among gang members nationwide, accounting for 46 percent of all gang members (see Table 1). Such findings are troubling indexes of the crimes, violence, and property destruction that gangs inflict. Most important, the

¹¹ Gangs may be categorized in several ways (e.g., location, ethnicity, or by the kinds of crimes they commit). We refer to gangs as neighborhood youth group of two or more individuals, ranging in age from 8-24, who may or may not engage in criminal activity.

problem is critical simply because youth constitute the future of our community and U.S. society as a whole (see Appendix I for 2000 Hispanic/Latino age and gender population pyramid in Minnesota). “Minnesota’s Latino population has grown rapidly in recent years and it is expected to almost triple over 30 years. The number of Latinos is projected to grow 98 percent between 2000 and 2015. By 2030 there will be 406,700 Latinos, up from 143,382 in 2000. Growth can be attributed to a combination of international migration, migration from other states, and a high rate of natural increase” (McMurry, 2005, p. 3) (see box 1).

This report includes the perspectives of adults whose professional lives bring them in contact with gangs, particularly those that affect Latino youth. The voices of Latino youth are also included. One striking finding of this report was that gangs are part of the everyday life experience of many children. A child may know a gang member or hear about a violent incident outside their circle of friends. A child may witness a fight at school, experience harassment for wearing gang colors, or live with the memory of a loved one who has died from gang violence.

Table 1: Race/Ethnicity of 1998 Youth Gang Members in the U.S.

Gang Members		
Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Hispanic/Latino	255,254	46%
African American	184,467	34%
Caucasian	64,828	12%
Asian	34,296	6%
Other	9,672	2%
Total	548,517	100%

(Source: National Youth Gang Center, 2000.)

Knowledge and experience of gangs is not something that affects only a few kids – it is part of their social landscape. The impact of gangs varies among youth, but gangs are something youth have to contend with – even if to ignore the pressures or the fears. Another striking finding of the report concerns adults closest

¹² Latinos describes people born in Latin America as well as those born of Latin American descent in the United States of America. Latinos refers to men or combined groups of men and women.

to the issue – parents. Professionals perceive that parents whose children may be threatened by gang involvement are often unaware, unwilling, or unable to face the issue.

This report takes a first step by contributing to a better awareness of the problem. It is our intent to spur productive community-wide dialogue that will lead to effective strategies to reduce and prevent gang involvement among Minnesota children. The report is particularly relevant to the Twin Cities because we drew upon the views of community members within the metropolitan area. However, we expect that some findings are applicable to Latinos across the state.

GANGS OVERVIEW

Gangs, or social networks that engage in secretive, antisocial, and criminal behavior, are found worldwide (Carlie, 2002; Klein, 1997; Pappas, 2001). The earliest recordings of gangs in the U.S. date from the late 18th to the early 19th century (Howell, 1998). By 1850, New York City had more than 200 active gang wars (Teeter, 1995). The following sections offer a brief introduction to gang definitions, activity, structure, and demographics. The current gang situation in the U.S., and Latino gangs in Minnesota, are also addressed.



Gangs use graffiti to claim turf, territory, and/or to communicate to rival gangs.

Definition

The definition of gangs has evolved over time (Bjerregaard, 2002; Klein, 1997). Most early literature refers to gangs as neighborhood youth peer groups who, aside from minimal delinquencies, did not participate in organized crime (Vigil, 2002). Frederick M. Thrasher, a prominent sociologist and one of the earliest researchers of gangs, believed that gangs formed spontaneously from play-groups and became integrated through conflict. Thrasher defined gangs in terms of the *process* by which they develop. He saw “tradition, unreflective internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to a local territory” as natural results produced by the collective behavior of youth (Thrasher, 1927, p. 57).

Whereas the group process characterized early definitions, in the 50s and 60s gangs conjured the delinquent images of *West Side Story*. Currently, the term gang has a negative connotation and includes a criminal component (Bjerregaard, 2002; Klein, 1997).

Researchers, scholars, law enforcement officers, and sociologists similarly use a range of definitions to describe gangs, such as:

A group of two or more individuals who share an on-going relationship with one another and support one another, individually or collectively, in the recurring commission of delinquent and/or criminal acts (Carlie, 2002).

“Street gang” is the most commonly used term in the current literature on juvenile, youth, and delinquent gangs. However, the literature indicates that there is no consensus on the definition of street gangs other than to distinguish street gangs from drug gangs, biker gangs, skinheads, taggers, and car clubs, among others (Carlie, 2002; Howell, 1994; Klein, 1997; Pappas, 2001; Spergel, et al., 1994).

The National Youth Gang Center (2000) found that 50 percent of police departments surveyed characterized “commits crimes together” as the most common criterion to identify a group as a gang. Other less common identifiers included “has a name” (19%); “hangs out together” (10%); “claims turf or territory” (9%); “displays or wears common colors or other insignias” (8%), and “has a leader or several leaders” (7%).

Gang Activity: Criminal and Non-Criminal

Perspectives differ on the *primary* activity of gangs. Some gang scholars affirm that the primary activity of gangs and their members is spent socializing, listening to music, and attending parties, that is, in non-criminal, non-violent activity (Carlie, 2002; Howell, 1998; Klein, 1997; Thrasher, 1927). Other gang researchers (especially in law enforcement) tend to place the emphasis of primary gang activity in terms of criminality (Howell, 1998).

Box 2: Criteria Used by Law Enforcement Agencies to Define a Youth Gang: Top Choices, 1998

Nationally, the most common criterion by police departments to identify a group as a gang was that the group “commits crimes together.”

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Commits crimes together	50%
Has a name	19%
Hangs out together	10%
Claims turf or territory	9%
Displays or wears common colors or other insignias	8%
Has one or several leaders	7%

(Source: National Youth Gang Center, 2000)

Longitudinal studies have found that boys who join gangs engage in more delinquent behaviors *prior* to joining a gang than boys who do not join (Gordon, Lahey, Kawai, et al., 2004; Thornberry, Krohn, & Lizotte, 1993). The literature affirms that gang members are more apt to engage in all types of criminal activity, and that criminal behaviors such as drug selling, drug use, violent behaviors, and property vandalism increase significantly when a youth joins a gang (Bjerregaard, 2002; Gordon, et al., 2004). Gang delinquent activities predominantly consist of robbing, stealing, fighting, drive-by shootings, and carrying, selling and/or stealing firearms (Bjerregaard, 2002; Spergel, Kane, Hyatt, et al., 1988). However, some researchers agree that drug-trafficking and drug-trade are *not* a component of youth gangs and attribute the gang-drug connection to media hype or to a generalization of gangs (Allender, 2001; Howell, 1994; Klein, 1997).

Gang Membership and Structure

According to research on contemporary gangs, the average youth gang member is 17 or 18 years old, but is older in cities where gangs have existed longer (Howell, 1998; Pappas, 2001). Gang scholars agree that the traditional gang has several subgroups based on age, with older youth generally higher in status (Klein, 1997; Spergel, et al., 1994; Thrasher, 1927). Most researchers divide gang membership into several levels: leadership, hardcore, associate, cliques, fringe, wannabes, and could bes (Carlie, 2002), or leadership plus regulars, soldiers, recruits, peripherals, and taggers (Wiener, 1999). Some researchers, however, divide gang membership into two categories: core and fringe membership (Klein, 1997). Relatively few gang scholars include a younger level, comprised of 10- to 13-year-olds (Klein, 1997).

Researchers disagree over gang leadership. Some argue that gangs are loosely organized in groups in which leadership is fluid (Carlie, 2002; Klein, 1997). Others believe gangs have a specific leader who determines the criminal activities (Bjerregaard, 2002; Carlie, 2002; Klein, 1997).

Gang researchers and scholars agree that gangs have evolved. Several authors have noted that modern-day gangs are changing their structure, membership, and composition (Harrington & Cavett, 2000; Howell, 1998; Spergel, et al., 1988). Gangs are becoming so diverse and are evolving at such a rapid pace that it is difficult for researchers to keep track of their defining characteristics (Starbuck, Howell, & Lindquist, 2001). Scholars differ on gang composition. While some researchers assert that gangs are racially exclusive (Pappas, 2001), others report that gangs of today are racially mixed or “hybrid”

(Starbuck, et al., 2001). According to the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention, the Midwest has a larger proportion of “hybrid” gangs than any other region (Starbuck, et al., 2001).

Female Gang Members

Although gangs have generally been comprised of males, recent literature agrees that female gang membership is increasing (Howell, 1998; Moore & Cook, 1999). In 1998, nationally, 8 percent of gang members were estimated to be female (Moore & Cook, 1999). Recent information suggests that female membership is estimated to be one-fourth to one-third of the gang membership.¹³

[D]ifferent people will perceive the problem differently. If effective solutions to a community’s gang solution are to be found, there must be a shared perception that gangs do exist (Carlie, 2002).

The definitions of the term gang vary from community to community and over time. A consensus definition of gangs – which would provide community members, police officers, and policy makers with a common means to identify gang members – is a need often cited by researchers (Bjerregaard, 2002; Carlie, 2002). A consensus definition would allow law enforcement officials and communities to accurately gauge gang presence, implement across-the-board legislation (e.g., state statutes), and provide a basis for researchers and scholars to discuss comparable subjects (Bjerregaard, 2002; Kennedy, Braga, & Piehl, 1997; Spergel, et al., 1994). Furthermore, a consensus definition on gangs would help clarify the distinction between legitimate youth groups (such as Boy Scouts, athletic teams, etc.) and traditional street gangs (Bjerregaard, 2002; Klein, 1997). Carlie posits that an individual’s understanding of the definition of a gang shapes his/her perception of gangs and response to it.



Recent national information suggests that female membership is estimated to be one-fourth to one-third of the gang membership.

¹³ National Youth Gang Center: Frequently Asked Questions available at <http://www.iir.com/nygc/faq.htm>

The Current Gang Situation

The 1998 National Gang Survey estimated 28,700 gangs and 780,000 active gang members in the U.S. (Moore & Cook, 1998). It revealed that all cities with a population of 250,000 or more reported gang activity in 2001 (Egley and Major, 2003). Researchers do not agree about the reasons for increased gang activity nationwide. Some attribute the increase to the “franchising-out” theory – the expansion of the more established gangs outward from cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles (Weisheit & Wells, 2001). Others attribute the increase to the “homegrown” theory – developing from members of the local communities. Gang researchers believe that many communities reject the homegrown theory because it “reflects on the inability of community institutions to control or roll back the problem” (Klein, 1997, p. 87). Still other observers of gangs attribute the current youth interest in gangs to media glorification (Carlie, 2002; Lingren, 1996).¹⁴ It is interesting to note that gang proliferation is not a constant. Howell (1998) reports that there have been four distinct gang growth and activity peaks throughout U.S. history: the late 1800s, the 1920s, the 1960s, and the 1990s.

Latino Gangs

Gangs in the U.S. historically consisted of Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Polish youth; however, in the mid-1900s, four-fifths were either African American or Latino (Howell, 1994, 1998; Pappas, 2001). Neighborhood Latino street gangs have existed for at least 75 years (Huff, 1998; Spergel, et al., 1988). The subculture of Mexican American gangs originated in the early 1900s. Scholars suggest they developed in response to the poverty, exploitation, and marginality that Mexican youth experienced (Howell, 1998, Moore & Pinderhughes, 1993; Schneider, 1999; Vigil, 1997; Wiener, 1999).

From the early 1930s to the 1950s, hostility resulting from racism and urbanization resulted in Mexican American youth adopting a unique form of dressing, speaking, and in some cases engaging in criminal activities. The mainstream media termed youth who engaged in counter-cultural activity zoot-suiters (*pachucos*) (Moore & Pinderhughes, 1993; Rodriguez, 1993; Vigil, 2002). Latino gangs captured national attention after the well-known “Sleepy Lagoon” California case of 1942 and the Los Angeles Zoot-Suit Riots of 1943 (De Leon, 2002; Moore, 1991). The media helped stereotype *pachucos* as juvenile delinquents and announced a “Mexican Crime Wave.”^{15, 16} The Mexican community united in response to the hatred and violence of the police and Caucasian citizens. As a result, the number of

¹⁴ Also see the National Youth Gang Center website at <http://www.iir.com/nygc/faq.htm>

¹⁵ Retrieved on 10/27/04 from <http://www.losangelesalmanac.com/topics/History/hi07t.htm>

Latino youth gang members increased as a form of solidarity against the establishment (Valdez, 1998; Wiener, 1999).

Current Latino Gang Information

Reports differ over Latino gang membership today. The 1998 National Gang Survey found that 46 percent of gang members was Latino, 34 percent African American, 12 percent Caucasian, 6 percent Asian, and 2 percent other (cited in Moore & Cook, 1999). Another lay scale study (Esbensen and Osgood's study, cited in Howell, 1998) found gang composition was 31 percent African American, 25 percent Latino, 25 percent Caucasian, 4 percent Asian, and 15 percent were other. The overrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos is not attributed to a special predisposition to gangs, but rather to their living in neighborhoods most likely to have gang activity (Howell, 1998). As noted earlier, most gang researchers and scholars agree that gangs, especially ethnic gangs, arise in conditions of social and economic neglect (Lingren, 1996; Moore & Pinderhughes, 1993; Spergel, et al., 1994; Thrasher, 1927; Vigil, 2002). Their realm of activity may vary, however. Latino gangs have been considered more structured and turf-oriented than other ethnic gangs (Spergel, et al., 1988).

Gangs in Minnesota

The presence of modern-day street gangs in Minnesota dates back to the early 1980s when St. Paul and Minneapolis were experiencing gang problems with members of the Black Gangsters Disciples (Harrington & Cavett, 2000; Spergel, et al., 1988). Minnesota's first contemporary gang-related homicide occurred in 1985 (Lehman, 2000; Spergel, et al., 1988).

The emergence of gangs in Minnesota is attributed to several factors. According to Minnesota law enforcement, Minnesota was an open market for drug trafficking and was seen as very profitable and unchallenged by the renamed Gangster Disciples from Chicago (Harrington & Cavett, 2000). Lenient law enforcement, attractive welfare benefits, family members moving, avoiding the Three-Strikes law¹⁷, and recently released inmates from Illinois or Wisconsin wanting to hide are among reasons cited in the literature for gang members migrating to Minnesota, first from Chicago in the 1980s and then from Los Angeles in the 1990s (Harrington & Cavett, 2000; Spergel, et al., 1988).

¹⁶ Retrieved on 10/27/04 from <http://www.calstatela.edu/orgs/mecha/zoot-suit.htm>2003

¹⁷ "The Three Strikes law significantly increases the prison sentences of persons convicted of felonies who have been previously convicted of a violent or serious felony, and limits the ability of these offenders to receive a punishment other than a prison sentence" (Legislative Analyst's Office, 1995, http://www.lao.ca.gov/analysis_1995/3strikes.html).

Today, however, Minnesota has its own “homegrown” gangs (Spergel, et al., 1988). The Minnesota gang problem varies in scope and severity across the different cities and even within cities (Carlie, 2002; Spergel, et al., 1988). Gang researchers have classified communities with gang problems as either “chronic” or “emerging.” Chronic gang problem communities are characterized as having a persistent pattern of gun violence and/or drug trafficking since before the 1980s. Emerging gang communities are associated with a pattern of “gang crime that is less organized and more recent” (Spergel, et al., 1994). Minnesota’s communities are classified as emerging (Biewen, 1996).



The presence of modern-day street gangs in Minnesota dates back to the early 1980s.

In response to increasing gang activity in the mid 1980s, the Minnesota legislature increased penalties for crimes committed for the benefit of a gang. The new statute, however, was not used until 1996, in conjunction with the newly implemented 10-Point Criteria used to identify gang members (Harrington & Cavett, 2000). In 1997, the Minnesota Gang Strike Force was created to identify, investigate, arrest, and prosecute gang members involved in criminal behavior. By 1988, 27 different gangs were identified; it is estimated that there were more than 1,200 gang members in Minneapolis and 280 gang members in St. Paul (Spergel, et al., 1988).

As of January 2003, approximately 149 gangs were active in Minnesota with an estimated 9,000 gang members. Of the 2,360 confirmed gang members, 59 percent were African American, 28 percent were White/Latino, 6 percent were Asian, and 6 percent were Native American (Budig, 2003).¹⁸ Minnesota gangs have histories of criminal activity such as assault, robbery, theft, narcotics, firearm sales and distribution, and prostitution involving adults and juveniles (Hamilton, 2004; Harrington & Cavett, 2000; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1997; The Hofstede Committee Report, 1999).

The literature acknowledges the proliferation of gangs in rural and suburban communities, but very little information about rural gangs exists (Weisheit & Wells, 2001). Studies suggest that rural gangs are different from urban gangs (Howell, Egley, & Gleason, 2002; Weisheit & Wells, 2001). Locally, rural gang issues have been on the forefront of concern for at least ten years. A 1994 Minnesota report showed

¹⁸ Also see WCCO article “Pawlenty Proposes Merging Drug and Gang Forces” available at http://wcco.com/localnews/local_story_065090049.html

that fear of gang violence was the second greatest worry of youth statewide (Marsh, 1994). Local homegrown gangs dominate the suburban and rural scene (Harrington & Cavett, 2000).

Minnesota Latino Gangs

Latino gangs have been active in Minnesota for at least 30 years. Although little documented information on Latino gangs exists prior to the 1980s; anecdotal evidence suggests that Latino gang activity existed in St. Paul's West Side as early as the 1970s.¹⁹ The earliest documented Latino gang presence, however, is 1985 (Harrington & Cavett, 2000). In 1988, the migration of Los Angeles gangs to Minnesota became evident which consisted of Latino gang members (Harrington & Cavett, 2000). Latino gangs identified by the Minneapolis Police Department include (but are not limited to): Latin Kings, Latin Queens, Brown For Life, Vatos Locos, Sureños 13, Norteños 14, Bishops, Vice Lords, Mexican Mafia, Maniac Latin Gangster Disciples, and LA 213 18's.^{20, 21} Latino gangs have also been present in rural Minnesota since 1997 (Barreto, 1997).

Gangs are an international, national, and local phenomenon, but the best approach to reducing their influence is at the local level (Carlie, 2002).

The literature on gangs highlights an immediate need for local information about Latino gangs in Minnesota. The literature agrees that youth serving agencies and communities need to consider the differences among gangs. To prevent gangs or combat gang violence, programs should address gang race, ethnicity, location, activity, and style (Klein, 1997; Pappas, 2001; Vigil, 2002). This can only be done when Minnesota communities better understand the characteristics of the gangs in their own communities.

¹⁹ Personal interview with Gilbert de la O, October, 2003.

²⁰ Minneapolis Police Department Power Point presentation on Minneapolis Street Gangs, March 2004.

²¹ Handout from a Midwest Gang Association presentation on Minneapolis gangs April 2004.

Box 3: THIS REPORT AT-A-GLANCE

As always, HACER relied on qualitative, interactive, community-based research. HACER interviewed individuals from various sectors to better examine the issue of gangs and their impact on Latino youth, families, and communities. Three policymakers, three police officers, eight educators (one focus group with five participants and three key-informant interviews), and four nonprofit organizers were interviewed. Several businessmen and members of faith organizations were invited to participate; however, all but one businessman and one religious leader declined, stating insufficient knowledge or contact with the issue. Youth between ages 12-18 (four females and three males) were also interviewed for a total of 27 participants. Individual in-depth interviews (with one exception) and the focus group were tape-recorded; interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes.

While parents are obviously key stakeholders and potentially key informants, we chose not to interview them for this study. The small scale of the study would not permit interviewing a representative sample. The alternative of seeking out key informants (parents of gang members) was rejected out of concerns for confidentiality. On the other hand, a number of the adults interviewed were themselves Latino parents, and so could draw from personal as well as professional experience.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This report is the result of multiple inquiries from a broad cross-section of individuals: youth, teachers, small business owners, and policymakers, all of whom are either Latino or have strong professional or social ties to Latinos in Minnesota. All expressed concerns about the negative impact of gang-related activities on young people (e.g., truancy), their families, and their communities. A repeated concern was the age of children who are targeted by gang recruiters – some were in the fourth grade. Clearly, fourth graders lack the developmental skills to accurately assess whether gang life is a good choice for them.

Individuals asked to participate in this report were key informants²² on gang issues. Our purpose for involving youth was to learn first-hand why kids join gangs, what their experiences are, and how others could learn from those experiences. Other key informants were adults from multiple sectors representing policy, law enforcement, education, business, faith, and nongovernmental organizations. Through this multiple sector approach, we intended to assess accountability among the various sectors. Most participants, for example, suggested that the gang issue was “everyone’s problem.” If gangs are “everyone’s problem,” then it is crucial that we share accurate information and decide what can be done to reduce the impact of gangs on Latino families and communities. In addition, it is essential that we

²² We define key informants as any individual who professionally/personally has insight on the issue.

identify responsibility and accountability within and across sectors for the many dimensions of the gang problem.

Analysis

The following questions were asked of all persons interviewed.

(See Appendix II for research instruments).

1. What are the reasons, in your understanding, that youth join gangs?
2. How are families and the wider community affected by youth joining gangs?
3. What do you think is the role of <category> in preventing youth gang involvement? (Categories included policy makers, police, school staff, non-profit organizations, parents, youth).
4. What are sectors of the community currently doing to reduce/prevent youth gang involvement, and/or what should be done in each sector to reduce/prevent youth gang involvement?

Collectively, responses to questions 1 and 2 elicited discussion on the nature and extent of the gang problem from each interviewee's perspective. Adult responses to questions 1 and 2 are presented separately from youth responses in the Results section. Question 3 sought to determine how the interviewee viewed his/her sector's responsibility for preventing recruitment into gangs. Question 4 sought to reveal how the interviewee viewed the effectiveness of current prevention efforts, and generate new strategies to more effectively reduce/prevent gang involvement among Latinos. Discussion of questions 3 and 4 shows how members viewed their own sector, and also how members viewed other sector's roles in prevention. The results of this report are organized around these same key questions.

WHY YOUTH JOIN GANGS

ADULTS' PERSPECTIVES

Community members individually and collectively generated a discussion of the reasons leading youth to join gangs. The following perspectives on why and how youth join gangs raises the issue of interpretation: simply put, which perspective is right? This report expresses the opinions of many informants. No one claims to know the objective truth. We assert, instead, that given this complex subject, each perspective is partial, and each offers particular insight. Our analyses found that overall respondent perspectives across sectors did not so much differ as add to one another. Some respondents briefly identified factors prompting youth gang involvement. Others provided in-depth analyses on one or several themes. Respondent differences were found in emphasis on the themes listed below. The collective perspectives, while partial, offer a fuller interpretation than any single explanation of the attraction of gang involvement. Views are presented in detail, so that readers can independently assess how individual perspectives adds to a fuller understanding of the problem facing Latino children.

A Need to Belong

One key theme was that gangs respond to a need to belong. Some respondents characterized the motivation to join gangs within the familiar mode of wanting a group of friends, or wanting to gain accepted social status and respect among peers and/or as responding to peer pressure.

[Youth join gangs] to be part of a group, to make a community, a place for themselves.

The whole purpose of gangs is acceptance ...[to gain] a sense of belonging, a group of people that will protect, be there for [the youth].

[Youth] probably want to belong. At least that is what I've been told.



The need to feel a sense of belonging was expressed as a motivating factor for youth joining gangs.

Protective Identity

A second theme that emerged from discussions of belonging was that gangs provide a protective identity.

Kids join gangs to feel safe and have an identity as a protection.

The issue of safety, in one sense, indicates a need for protection from violence, quite possibly from an experience of victimization, as some nonprofit organizers pointed out. Adults and youth, as we will see below, discussed the sad irony that being in a gang makes youth, families, and communities less safe.

Respondents also suggested that gang membership offers protection in a broad sense – from the socially threatening experience of being alone, of not being part of a group, of not having a secure, positively recognized identity, or, worst of all, from being among society’s unentitled. Many emphasized that youth join gangs to gain a sense of protection from feeling like outsiders in society. Said one informant:

They are Chicanos and they don’t know what that means. And there is no one guiding them in terms of what that means. So they are trying to figure it out and it comes out in this weird, aggressive, violent way.

Common sense tells us that children, particularly adolescents, have a strong need for approval and affirmation as they develop a social self in relation to others. Adolescence is a time of heightened self-consciousness and development of a “group mentality” in the search for identity. This common progression takes on another dimension with youth who are not obtaining social respect and recognition. According to the collective understanding of participants, these youth experience a need to protect themselves and seek affirmation where they can find it.



Respondents suggested that gang membership offers protection from the socially threatening experience of being alone, of not being part of a group.

Negative Alternatives

Another sub-theme, was the lack of something to do. Thus gangs offer a way for youth to channel their energies into something – if not positive, then negative. Gangs project a sense of purpose and confidence for these undirected youth.

Gangs send a message that says, ‘hey come on, we’re willing to be your brother,’ ‘we’re going to help you get money, do this, do that.’

Gang membership appears to open up opportunities – from something to do, to brotherhood, to gaining access to fun, parties, girls, money, excitement, and status among peers.

An important concept emerging from interviews was that gang involvement occurs in response to a marginalization process in society. This experience of marginalization and related problems of identity and belonging occurs quite acutely in schools, where children spend so much of their time and which is a major environment for socialization. Latino youth, participants noted, may not feel affirmed in school because of language barriers or academic achievement, or because of their status as youth of color and/or with second class “undocumented” status. According to participants, Latinos feel like outsiders in school.

The majority of Latino youth don’t feel ownership in their school. They don’t feel they belong there. [Latino youth] feel like they’re visitors.

In addition to social processes of exclusion that occur in school, Latino youth may not see a future for themselves, lacking expectations of college opportunity and envisioning instead only dead-end jobs. Finally, regarding marginalization, some noted that Latinos, like other youth of color, suffer



Youth groups are positive alternatives to gangs. The lack of “something to do” was expressed as a common theme for reasons youth join gangs.

discrimination in public spaces, including profiling in stores or while driving. Whether one accepts or questions the reality of these claims of individual and institutional exclusion or discrimination, the issue remains that Latino youth, according to respondents, feel excluded or having an identity that is not recognized as valid and valuable in U.S. society.

Lack of recognition or affirmation of Latino youth identity prompts a search for belonging and affirmation elsewhere.

[Gangs provide] a way to feel connected – to others like them, who speak Spanish or have the understanding of being Latino or Mexican.

There is a logic: to join a Latino gang is, in a sense, an affirmation of identity (see below). To choose gang identity constitutes a choice, not an assigned label. And it is an affirmation (however distorted adults may find it) of personal and ethnic identity.

The Other Family

Another main theme that emerged in interviews was that gangs substitute for “something that is missing in the family.” The subject of parenting was treated with careful sensitivity among respondents. Most community members quickly qualified their statements about parenting, making it clear that they were not blaming youth gang involvement on bad parenting. Instead, most showed sympathy for the plight of Latino immigrant parents working 2 or 3 jobs (of low status and difficult hours) to provide for their families (including, as many noted, trendy gangster styled clothes) and to pave the way for their children’s future. Besides sacrificing their own well being, parents are left with little time for family. As a result, children may be unsupervised for extended periods of time after school. The irony of the negative side effects of overworked parents for the children was not lost on respondents.

It was with this understanding in mind that a respondent said, as many echoed:

Gangs do [for] young kids what parents probably aren’t – and that’s spending time with them. ... The gang in essence becomes their family. The reason Latinos or any other join is a sense of family structure, belonging, people they can relate to, are available always.

Another called gangs a “second family” of homeboys²³ to hang out with, whom one can trust to be there for them and enable them to “get their needs met.”

Kids may be lashing back, hoping to get that attention they feel is lacking.

The several individual discussions of the circumstances faced by overworked Latino families reveal a chain of circumstances: parents lack time for youth, youth seek out others, the generations become less interactive, and understanding and communication deteriorates. Accordingly, some emphasized problems of communication with parents, often referred to as a “disconnect.” As we know, generational conflicts are not unique to a specific ethnic group. The teen years are turbulent for many parents in the U.S. across all demographics. So, the problem is not a usual aspect of Latino parenting, but instead has arisen in this new context among Latinos.

Family Structure

The theme that gang involvement responds to something missing in family life raises an uncomfortable but relevant question: are children from unstable or dysfunctional families or single parent households more likely to join gangs than children from stable nuclear families? Although a few respondents imagined the former, more felt that family structure was not the key factor, rather that children from stable or unstable family structures could be susceptible to joining gangs. This view is significant, as it suggests a sense among respondents that parental influence diminishes when compared to the societal forces producing gangs, whether these forces are viewed as the glamorization of gangs in popular culture or as a response to marginalization. However, some studies have found that parental practices are the primary influence of youth with adolescent delinquent behaviors (Griffin, Botvin, Scheier, and Miller, 2000).

Just one interviewee rejected the influence of society. A policymaker, regretting that too much blame was placed on poverty when there are many fine poor people, felt that there are kids with “holes in their hearts,” that is, suggesting a deficiency in the child and the parents.

Adult respondents perceived those children with close relatives who are or were in gangs as more likely to join gangs. Though our minimal numbers prevent any kind of generalization, it is interesting to note that

²³ A slang term given to indicate a boy or man from one’s own city or neighborhood, or someone who is a close friend or a member of the same gang.

some youth interviewed from families with gang members were certain they would *not* join a gang. They conveyed a sense of “inoculation,” owing to greater knowledge of the damage and dangers of gangs, including family tragedy.

Pathways toward Gangs

The question of why youth join gangs raises a related one of the process leading to gang involvement. Knowing the means and mechanisms through which youth join gangs, as well as reasons why, can aid in the formation of eventual intervention programs. Informants described a variety of pathways toward gang involvement. Those with direct experience (of their own pasts as Latino youth or of youth) described a gradual process of induction. One conjured up a picture of a neighborhood where a young unsupervised and unoccupied child, say an eight-year-old, watches teens and eventually is befriended by admired older gang-affiliated youth. Others suggested the lure of easy ways to obtain what kids desire, be it money, social admiration, girlfriends, sex, or drugs (though drugs were not emphasized in interviews). Others indicated, instead, induction by intimidation. Youth wearing gang colors (and appearing Latino) find themselves asked by gang members, “Who do you claim?” in a threatening way.

This gradual process suggests an innocent child led astray. A few respondents (including police) were critical of this vision of a gang member as initially a naive child who learns only too late what gang membership means. These critics believe youth know what gangs are (i.e., criminal groups) when they join. In contrast, a few respondents reported a deliberate recruitment process by adult gang members (including from areas of high gang membership, like Los Angeles). One participant claimed that the recruiters are “savvy people preying on vulnerable kids,” who use “sophisticated methods” – from suggesting sexual advantages (and using girls) to making strong appeals to ethnicity.

SUMMARY

Altogether, these perspectives suggest that youth are themselves drawn to gangs out of a combination of individual, familial, and societal dilemmas. Respondents tended to emphasize gang involvement either as a



Interviewees suggest the induction into gangs involves a gradual process.

response to family problems or factors stemming from the wider society. There was no internal agreement over whether or not youth are exercising informed choice by joining gangs. Gangs appear to correspond, or better to respond, to a need among youth living in certain conditions. The need is felt on many levels, from deeply personal and familial to broad social realms. These needs are not unique to Latino youth, but arise out of the difficult context of immigration, in most cases, and/or among social groups relegated to “second class” status. While perspectives are, again, partial, the implication from the discussions is that gangs are a response to “the disconnect” youth feel coming from society. This disconnect occurs precisely when, developmentally, youth need to have a sense of belonging, find positive ways to channel their energies, and receive social support and respect.

The analysis of discussions of why and how youth join gangs leads to one major conclusion: by filling a social void, gangs serve a purpose. As one informant stated:

It all builds, it's just not positive.

This means that if the turn to gangs arises out of a basic need, as seems to be the case, then something positive must be substituted to fill that void and fulfill those specific needs. Only then will gangs be rendered powerless.

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

The seven youth interviewed, though few, offer valuable testimony. Youth perceptions of gangs and opinions as to what can be done about gangs – whether insightful or limited in analysis – provide a barometer of the problem. Their experiences with gangs ranged from a current member and former members (male and female) to those who were not gang members, nor wanting to be. Yet strikingly, even the uninvolved youth knew people in gangs (e.g., close relatives, a friend’s boyfriend), had heard stories of violence involving people in their milieu, and had experienced danger close at hand: a cousin in jail or dead, gunshots fired in the neighborhood, or weapons found at school. This information attests to a central insight of this report, namely, that gangs are a real and present “fact of life” for youth. The fact that nearly all encounter gangs in their own experience or in their immediate milieu, raises the possibility that no youth are in a safe zone far from the reach of gang activity.

Our report found that while youth did not present a broad sociological explanation for the purpose of gangs, their responses corroborated the adults' perspectives about the attraction of gangs and the processes involved. According to our young respondents, youth join gangs because it seems cool, it seems like a way to gain status and respect, scaring others can make one feel powerful, and there seem to be tangible benefits involved (i.e., friends to meet, places to go, girls are attracted to gang members, money comes easy, and so on). Some youth noted social pressures by peers to join gangs.

That's basically what [kids] want—respect from other people.

Giving in because there is a lot of pressure, especially in the Latino community.

You get stuck in the middle because your friends are in gangs and then some of them are not and you're like, what should I do?

A number of youth, including gang members, pointed not only to the “pull” factors (the draw of gangs) but also to a “push” factor, noting that issues with parents seem to propel youth toward gangs.

You want to belong, to be part of something. And if you can't find that with your family, you'll find it somewhere else. You'll find it the wrong way.

Less strongly, one youth noted that parents are generally fine but are busy and “don't pay close attention.” Going a step further were parents seen as too permissive.

[Parents] let the kids just leave and don't ask what they're going to do.

It's just another family.... Your family is not there or they're there [but] you just feel this other group of people are giving you something you're not getting at home, be it responsibility, respect, money, or fun or love.

Consider in this light the unique comment of one youth, who likened gang membership to “group therapy – only more extreme and it's not worth it for anybody.”

Like most adults, most youth described the sequence of events that lead to gang involvement as a gradual one, where the implications are not known from the outset. Friends were deemed a main influence. It could start from someone simply being friendly, suggesting merely to hang out. One youth recalled being

advised by a relative gang member on how to dress. Dressing like gangsters may prompt gang members to demand to know what gang they claim or otherwise bully them. If they don't ignore such pressures, youth may feel that joining will make them safe because their buddies will "have their back."

Just as some adults were skeptical of the idea of the naive joiner, so too one youth said,

You don't get there without knowing [what gangs are or do].

Yet another youth, who started claiming gang membership in 4th grade, said she hadn't known what it meant. Finally, one countered a notion of those that join as "bad seed." Instead, this youth asserted that,

[Youth] do bad things because they're in a gang, [they don't] join gangs because they do bad things.

Interestingly, youth pointed to a sequence leading youth to become more estranged from school and family and more involved in gangs. Gang membership, youth noted, seems to lead youth to distance themselves from family.

[Youth] just drift away [from family]. I think they get less close. I mean they have to be... already distant, but I think they get [even] less [close] because they start spending less time with [family] and more with the gang.

Several also noted that joining gangs goes hand in hand with trouble with school, leading to further disengagement.

THE EFFECTS OF GANGS ON YOUTH, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY

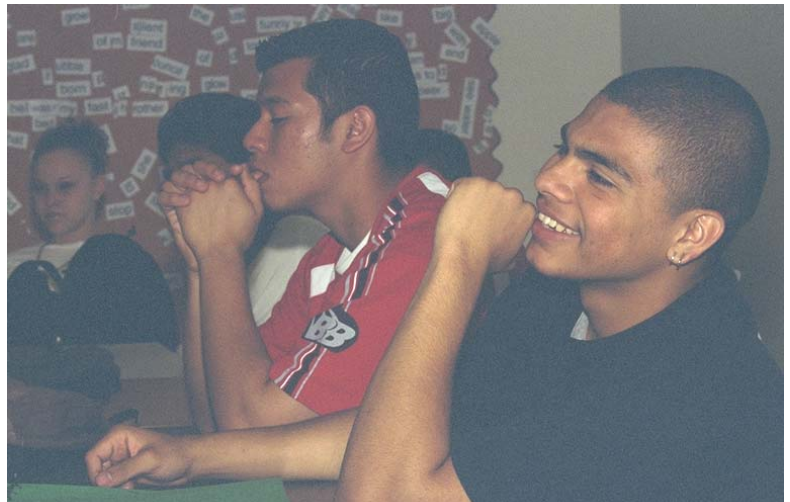
We asked all informants to discuss the effects of gangs on youth, family, and community. The following section summarizes informants' responses. Youth, policy makers, educators, nonprofit organizers, and police respondents noted several negative effects that gangs have at the three levels.

Youth were the most articulate about the effects of gang involvement on the youth themselves, both in the short and long term. Several identified immediate consequences, notably the violence of getting “jumped in”²⁴ or out of a gang. Gang involvement has special concerns for girls, for whom either initiation or leaving may entail getting raped or getting jumped.

Youth were well aware that what gangs seem to represent is not accurate or realistic. Youth pointed out that, initially, it seems that gang members will be there for them, but this is not true. Those with direct knowledge of gangs, in particular, underscored this illusion, as well as the illusion that gangs somehow solve problems, whereas in reality they make the problems one originally had seem small by comparison.

If I had problems before joining the gang], well now I have more. So it brings more problems and heavier problems than you had before.

Another youth echoed that if you have small problems or none at all, being in a gang would cause problems to “rain on you.” These problems included, notably, fear that



Youth we interviewed were well aware that the image of gangs is inaccurate.

²⁴ “Jumped in” - as part of the initiation process the prospective gang member is attacked by several or all of the gang members for a selected amount of time as a test to his/her courage. Some gangs allow the gang member to be jumped out (the act of getting attacked) for the gang member to get out of the gang.

one's own gang involvement would endanger family and friends. Targeting siblings for violence, or the homes or cars of family members constitutes a strong form of intimidation. Some gang members noted they never told their gang member "friends" where they lived. The most extreme problem, of course, is that a gang member risks injury from violence or death. Several youth personally knew or knew of gang members who had died or were in jail. Just as serious is the problem that once in a gang, getting out is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for at least two reasons. One is the tendency to "get deeper" into gangs as one's world is increasingly dominated by gang life and one is increasingly estranged from others. Another is the punishment by one's own gang members for leaving. Moreover, even if one quits being in a gang, other gang members may still attack the former member. One youth shared:

It's just like getting into something you can never get out of.

The nonviolent alternative of having a baby or getting married as a way out of gang involvement reveals the extreme pressures placed on members to stay in gangs.

The only reason they probably will have kids is either to get out of [the gang] instead of getting jumped.

Gang membership adversely affects a youth's relationship to both family and school, creating distance from both. Youth noted that wearing gang colors could lead to school suspension. Youth in gangs engage in more school truancy. Some disappear from home and school for days at a time. As a result, gang involvement can hinder opportunity. To avoid gangs, some youth must transfer to another school; thus gangs are disruptive for those who wish to avoid or end gang involvement. Those with criminal records find it hard to obtain employment or get into school.



Youth participants viewed graffiti, such as the above in a Minneapolis neighborhood, as offensive to the community.

What's really hard is that [gang members] have [criminal] records and it's hard for them to get a job and do stuff that other people would normally do. It affects them getting a job, probably getting into college, of course, because of their grades and everything.

Youth noted two main ways that gangs impact the community: graffiti is offensive to the community; and gang violence creates an atmosphere of fear, constraining children's feelings of safety outside or at school. In addition, they noted that businesses suffer when gangs hang out nearby, as people avoid their stores. Finally, both youth and adults raised the worrisome prospect of gang members raising children.

[People in the community] go outside and they see all the tagging on the wall...it's not cute. When I was younger I remember [hearing] gun shots all the time. When I'm outside playing around...you hear gun shots and you have to run inside...It's not as bad here as it is in other places, but you do get scared. You don't feel comfortable where you're living.

Policy members noted the impact on families, which can be torn apart or held together by gang problems. Gangs put the community as a whole in danger.

[Gangs] will only get worse if you don't tackle [the problem] at its root.

It was difficult, however, to sustain the sense of urgency necessary to address the problem. Educators noted that gangs are associated in kids' minds with fear, intimidation, anger, and violence, thus suggesting that such negative preoccupations are, in themselves, a problem. Nonprofit organizers emphasized both the family stress caused by gang involvement and the impact of crime on communities. If a community is viewed as unsafe, it spirals downward. Police officers noted that the community "takes the fall-out" in financial losses and property damage.

GANG PREVENTION: ROLES AND PERSPECTIVES

This section presents the responses from interviews on the question of what role policymakers, police, schools, nonprofit organizations, parents, and youth have in gang prevention. Evaluations of current practices in relation to youth led to implicit or explicit recommendations. In each subsection below, we begin with the views expressed by members of the sector in question. The perspectives of other sector members follow. To avoid repetition, we grouped similar responses.

POLICYMAKERS

Policymakers concurred that their first role in addressing gang prevention is to “understand the magnitude of the problem,” as one stated. Two policymakers envisioned a crucial role of:

Answer[ing] the question of what the city is going to do to reduce the gang problem in Minneapolis ten years from now. We are not doing that.

This respondent noted that many white policymakers believe that gangs are “part of the landscape,” that is to say, a chronic problem that is impervious to change. It would then be a leap for such policymakers to believe that something can be done to prevent gangs. Policymakers also identified the importance of funding a variety of organizations and functions, including the police, parks, schools, nonprofit organizations, and data gathering (such as the statewide Minnesota Gang Strike Force). In contrast, another policymaker held to a limited government role, noting that, “[T]he expectation for government to be the responsible person or entity is impossible.” This respondent dismissed the role of intervention, speaking instead of family dynamics, “A lot of the source[s] of our problems do come from a home environment and some things we can’t control. In a legislative government we can’t cure dysfunctional families.”

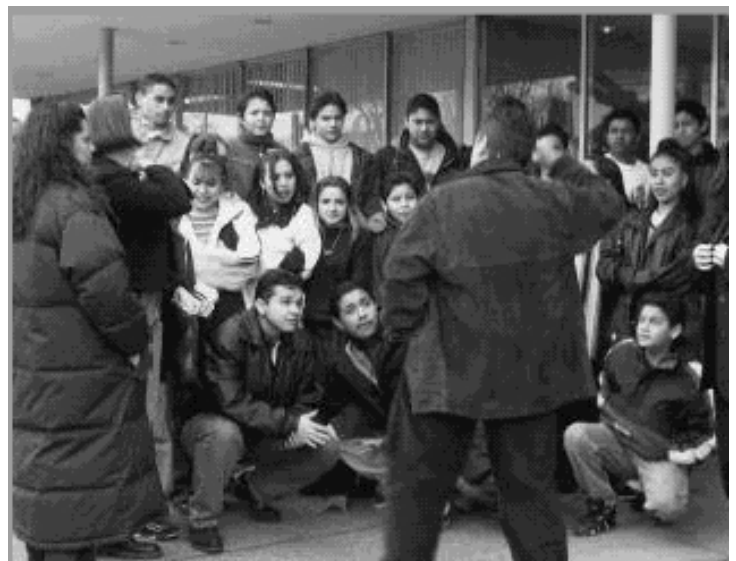
Two policymakers stated that elected officials were not doing enough to address the gang problem and that efforts by various sectors directly involved with youth were hampered by budget cuts affecting the police, the Minnesota Gang Strike Force, parks, schools, and youth programs.

[Policymakers should] resist the temptation that somehow this isn't a communal responsibility. Our role is to frame the reality of the problems around gangs as a statewide, community-wide issue... Our next role is...twofold: one is to provide for the public safety... and there are progressive ways [to] do that, [and second] make sure that effective programs are properly resourced and connected... [in turn] we should expect a high level of accountability back from those that we are resourcing.

Another policymaker wanted to see government officials make a “real commitment to shrinking the size of gangs” and suggested that, toward this end, the local region could benefit from looking into best practices found effective in other parts of the country. These policymakers believed that there is little an individual can do to counter the problem, and that many must join in the effort. In contrast, the third policymaker interviewed did not recommend programming or funding, but rather, that parents and churches should be responsible for gang prevention. Finally, policymakers stated that they currently are obtaining good data from the police on the gang problem. They added that more sources of information (possibly provided by intervention programs or direct information from the community) would enhance their understanding and, in turn, indicate ways to address the problem.

Policymaker Roles, Perspectives across Sectors

Police officers offered brief and highly individual discussions of policymakers' roles in addressing the gang problem. One skeptic held that policymakers only give “lip service” or a “quick fix.” Another asserted that the community should request services, rather than the government imposing programs, warning



Policymakers we interviewed identified budget- cuts as a hamper to youth services.

that a top-down initiative might not create what the community wants or needs. One officer believed a related engagement was needed across sectors. This officer said, “We’re in this together.”

Educators also offered very individual perspectives. Policymakers, said one, were responsible for providing programming and should provide more youth programming. Another stated that since 9-11 discrimination against Latinos has grown, seen as a blurring of the boundaries between Latinos (undocumented and citizens) and an overall lack of support for the undocumented. A third respondent noted that policymakers were not hearing parents’ voices. Last, one school employee stated that policymakers were the “most important sector,” responsible both for funding and for rules that schools were bound to follow. This respondent believed that schools were hindered in their governance of children, with teachers having too few rights and schools lacking the authority to impose penalties that would have real effects (such as loss of food stamps) if children miss too much school.

Nonprofit organization members, in contrast to the policy and school sectors, presented a unified view of the role of policymakers: to allocate funds to schools, nonprofits, and communities to create programs, particularly after-school programs for youth. One respondent said that specific funds should be allocated for immigrant and minority youth. Another reported that programming for youth would lessen the need for policing. A number of respondents complained of budget cuts. One stated that this fiscal policy created a situation in which nonprofit organizations are forced to compete for funds rather than complementing one another. Another respondent worried that cutting programs for kids whose parents were busy working created a dangerous situation. Referring to gang prevalence, this community organizer said, “We’re paying the price of budget cuts.”

Youth believed it was not the role of policymakers to prevent gangs, but rather entirely up to kids if they join them.

POLICE

The police officers interviewed presented varying views regarding the role of their sector in prevention. Some believed the police lack the time and personnel necessary to engage in prevention. However, some useful preventive measures being taken by the police were noted: the Police Athletic League (PALS), a diversion program for at-risk youth (such as youth who are truant, or with academic or other problems); tattoo removal programs, and school liaisons. One officer stated that such programs are effective but have

been cancelled due to budget cuts. Police officers identified the lack of Spanish-speaking officers and lack of multicultural understanding of Latinos as a serious hindrance. It was suggested that police need to correct stereotypes of Latino youth (namely, assuming that they are in gangs). Police officers interviewed included a school liaison, who contrasted the “tough cop” style as needed on the street with the “good cop” style needed in the schools. Police liaisons in schools are charged with developing relationships of mutual respect with youth, while, at the same time, commanding respect as authorities. One officer stated forcefully:

[Adults] will not get far if the interaction with the kid is adversarial.

Negative stereotypes – among the police and others in society – create barriers to success. Such people think “why these and not others” and see gangs as composed of individuals gone bad.

Police, as one noted, need to show youth that there is follow-through in the wider system. This allows youth to see, through the implementation of policies, that adults are paying attention and that there are consequences for misbehavior. The investment in children through coordination of policies and programming will pay off later.

Police Roles, Perspectives across Sectors

All sectors identified the role of police in the suppression of gang activity – or immediate prevention of crimes – as first and foremost, before prevention of gang involvement. Policymakers noted that in addition to this reactive role, the police also aid policymakers through the Minnesota Gang Strike Force, which tracks gang membership. Funding was cut drastically, however, in 2003.

The police tend to receive ample criticism and corrective recommendations from those outside their forces. This report was no exception. Interviewees from all sectors concurred that police officers could and should extend their role beyond suppression to prevention. They could achieve this by building relationships with the community and by acting as positive role models and respected adults in the community.

Informants indicated a need for change in the ways police officers interact with youth. With varying degrees of criticism, several asserted that the police do not have a positive relationship with the Latinos,

who fear and avoid them. Some criticized what they characterized as harassment of Latinos, who are perceived negatively as youth of color. Nonprofit organizers said critically:

[The police] could understand why kids join [gangs] and could be better role models instead of treating people of color [poorly].

[It is the police's] responsibility to treat young people respectfully so that they don't create this animosity.

Others emphasized that the “tough cop” style was counterproductive:

[The police] push kids away instead of building relationships.

If you're real tough and intolerant, you will lose [kids]. [This is] sad because [by not interacting positively with kids] police miss an opportunity to get kids on the right path.

Collectively, youth had several ideas on the role of police or in critique of them. Youth informants said that the police could do more in-depth investigations, and they could talk not only to those who get into trouble but also to others. Some youth criticized the police.

[The police make] guys tougher by bad mouthing them, by knocking them to the floor, so kids get mad. Instead of police scaring them, those guys get more courage to do more.

One youth, who admitted not liking police, said police have racist stereotypes based on clothing or appearance.

Members of various sectors recommended that to counter gang involvement, the police need to become known in the community so that they are seen as acting on behalf of the community rather than against it. Specifically, it was recommended across sectors that the police should avoid provoking antagonism with Latino youth, strive to improve communication with youth, and build positive relationships with them.

EDUCATORS

Educators held a variety of positions regarding the role of schools in deterring gangs. They suggested that the schools' central responsibility is to provide an education to all youth, a mission that entails reaching those who may be disengaged from school at a young age and lack a sense of their future. In this respect,

after-school programs that provide leadership and help students academically can double as deterrents to gang involvement. Keeping schools safe is another huge responsibility. Most educators also asserted that it is the role of schools to “challenge the behavior” by clearly and consistently sending the message that gangs are not acceptable. Forbidding gang symbols inside school boundaries is one way to achieve this.

Making children aware of the consequences of gang involvement is another gang prevention technique in schools. One suggested a shock method of taking children on field trips to juvenile detention centers or a morgue. Another suggested that parents, not just youth, need to feel the consequences of disregarding school rules, notably absenteeism. Others noted the need for mentors and adult supervision.

The greatest debate concerned the role of schools in intervention. Many felt that schools were not responsible for getting kids out of gangs. Some objected to identifying gang members. Some pointed out that precisely because schools forbid gang symbols and because a strong code of silence exists among youth, positive identification is not reliable. (One student informant believed it was usually possible to distinguish a wannabe from a real gang member and identify when a fight is a gang fight.) One informant emphasized that labeling is problematic – “diagnosis” lies with the police, not schools. While positive identification was generally not viewed as a school role, sharing concerns with parents was a possibility. Another suggested making Latino parents comfortable with schools so that they could voice their concerns publicly. Finally, the issue of a child moving to another school to avoid gangs and start again with a “clean state” arose as another important and thorny subject for schools to address.

It is interesting to note that educators differed in their own relationship with the issue of gangs. Perspectives expressed ranged from a position of distance (claiming “no experience with gangs” and no need to be concerned as the job description was academic) to insisting that education should be emphasized in the Latino community as the best shot at a better future rather than irrelevant to their circumstances. A third position was a self-



Gang awareness and consequences of gang involvement are gang prevention techniques which schools can provide to children.

critical admission that educators do not yet have enough experience with the Latino community, but are concerned to develop it.

School Roles, Perspectives across Sectors

Policymakers and police officers stressed assigning feasible roles to schools, given the multitude of responsibilities schools already have. One police officer, who stated that even school staff need to understand why kids join gangs, added sympathetically, “How much more do you strap the schools to take care of?”

Schools can also take on the role of informing parents and the community “of what they see going on that parents might miss.” Some felt that schools provide a preventive role by informing parents about gangs in general. An informant noted that schools in Chicago send out informative brochures to parents, whereas this “basic education” does not occur here. A few believed that schools could identify at-risk children, that is, those being recruited into gangs. One policymaker, however, noted that schools might be hesitant to provide information, as that would label children, and by extension, the school. If a school acquired a reputation for having gangs, people might not want their children to attend that school.

Schools can also offer prevention by inviting local law enforcement officers and community groups into schools. School facilities could be used for after-school programs for youth.

[The school role is] to create an environment where learning becomes a strong counterweight to getting involved in gangs.

[Youth could] explore being a teen in a positive way.

However, a policymaker recalled that the state has eliminated funding for after-school programs. Two police officers also emphasized the need for school-related



Concerns that schools need to develop a deeper understanding of cultural issues and a stronger commitment to teaching Latino students were shared.

programs, including in-school programs like drug and gang awareness education and after-school programs for Spanish speakers and other recreational activities. Opportunities cited, such as meeting the Minnesota Twins, “did wonders” for (underprivileged) children. Some officers emphasized that more funds should be allocated to after-school programs.

Nonprofit organizers were the most critical of schools, finding them lacking in commitment to their Latino students and to the gang problem within the community. Most critical was one assertion that although schools have an important role, they are not doing all they can to prevent youth from joining gangs.

[Schools should be] helping kids make better choices, but [schools] are doing nothing. They think it's the kids' problem.

A number of respondents claimed that school staff wrongly assume, by students' use of gang colors, that students are gang members. This is especially unfortunate, as Latinos already experience discrimination.

Schools are warehouses for kids divided along racial lines [and a] good environment for gangs.

One police officer also emphasized unequal treatment of Latinos was a problem in schools. This informant said there is a “disconnect” with the community, coupled with discrimination toward minorities, including Latinos. According to this same source, unfair treatment occurs through unequal practices and by omission – inattention to the needs of Latino students.

Nonprofit members and a police officer voiced concerns that schools need to develop a deep understanding of cultural issues and a stronger commitment to teaching Latino students, rather than focusing on teaching white students in academic and extracurricular programming. Many noted that Latinos do not feel included, even feel “ostracized,” in an environment that doesn't try to be inclusive. Some sensed a lack of recognition on the part of school staff of “how it feels to be an outsider.” Rather than schools altering their environments to be inclusive and accommodating of Latinos, it is expected that Latinos will assimilate – simply join existing groups, for instance. This practice follows the dominant (white) mainstream of U.S. society in expecting immigrants to assimilate on the terms of the mainstream, rather than the mainstream being flexible and open to modifying itself to accommodate its diverse members.

Schools, like the police in this respect, are evidently seen as “fair targets” for criticisms. Though criticisms were leveled, so, too, were constructive suggestions. Schools need to address cultural barriers by becoming more diverse in staff – through hiring more bilingual and/or bicultural instructors, and by communicating with the community with notices in Spanish. Schools need to modify their teaching for diverse students while not short-changing them with lowered expectations. Teachers need to be educated on the signs of gang membership and to be more aware of their students’ behaviors. Staff need to keep an open mind about the youth, as they are unaware of what youth experience at home. Administrations also need to address the practice of transferring problem students to other schools.

One participant, who knew of an exemplary Latino cultural program in a high school, stated that just as long-term students have the opportunity to be in activities geared toward them and their interests, so too should Latino students have organizations and programs that are specifically for them. Nonprofit organizers also expressed a number of ways that schools could develop a positive environment that truly affirms and supports the diversity of Latinos and respects them, and thereby gain their attention. Spanish should be promoted as well. To be able to speak Spanish (and feel affirmed in this, not as outsiders) and have a voice as Latinos through such a program would be exciting and empowering. Programs need to be “for keeps,” not transient and based on political winds.

Youth also expressed criticisms and views of what schools should do to address the problem. One expressed a sense of invisibility owing to the large school size. This same youth believed no one notices anything. Another youth was concerned that labeling someone as being in a gang could provoke problems. However, this youth doesn’t feel safe in school, due to an incident with a weapon and the occurrence of fights. Another suggested that schools should have meetings to discuss how bad gangs are – that is, if they really care about families, the youth noted. Youth agreed that schools must not allow any gang activity.



Latino youth we interviewed expressed concerns about gangs in Twin Cities’ schools.

Many sectors acknowledged that schools (like parents) are overwhelmed with problems. However, the main mission of schools – to educate all students – can act as a preventive measure, as can after-school programming. In addition, schools have a role in challenging the behavior and norms surrounding gangs and in educating students and parents about gang issues.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Members of nonprofit organizations presented a number of linked roles in youth development overall, and gang prevention in particular, with detailed descriptions of how these work in ongoing organizational activities. Key were adults in supportive roles, giving youth attention, and determining boundaries, while also allowing them to experiment. Such organizations build rapport with youth, with respectful interactions that also require that youth act responsibly and respectfully of others. More than one person noted that kids react if not respected. By developing rapport and having conversations with youth, adults help youth process what they are going through and aid in decision-making. Without processing their experiences, such as being attacked, without working on anger management, on resistance skills, and so on, youth may make unfortunate decisions, such as getting involved in revenge or other violence. Programs intended for Latinos help youth feel listened to and understood. As one put it,

From the limited experience I have with youth...it's better to talk to them [than to avoid them out of fear]. They need to know that adults are watching and that we care.

Also pointed out was that youth need to believe in adults' ability to intervene (on their behalf). The adults in such organizations can provide an important example of effective and supportive intervention.

These organizations, with their after-school programs, operate at a crucial time for the well being of youth. Some noted that there



Community organizations offer a safe space and help kids stay out of trouble.

is really no place for these kids in society, and they need a space, physical and social, of their own. Such spaces are important given the lack of outdoor safety, such as in parks, where people, including youth, don't feel comfortable with aggressive youth using bad language and acting in intimidating ways. Community organizations' spaces offer a safe space away from trouble and help kids stay out of trouble. The staff of nonprofit organizations also keep track of youth and keep them accountable.

Organizations concurred in implementing strong anti-gang policies, such as forbidding signs in their areas. Many noted the need to send a consistent message against gangs, including by immediately removing graffiti. A rule followed in at least one organization, of not acting in a way that could prejudice the safety of group members, provides youth with an understandable and acceptable structure for behavior.

In many ways, nonprofit organizations identified steps they take to prevent youth from gang involvement. The following statements by nonprofit organizers captures many of the elements offered by nonprofit organizations to youth:

You can't save every kid on the block, but you can save the majority of them.

[If adults] aren't on the same page, kids will think they don't care.

It is interesting to note that much of what these organizations offer is what all youth seek, namely, ways to channel their energies, explore who they are, and to develop autonomy as they move toward adulthood, yet with adult guidance.

The most dangerous thing is a lot of spare time. Don't mistake me, you don't want to control their time, you want the kids to dictate what they want to do, you want to make it fun, interesting, a program they'll look forward to coming back to, give them influence in what they do. You can create the activity but give them influence.

Nonprofits also offered self-critique: principally, the need to build community and a partnership across organizations working with kids. Organizations need to develop consistent policies and communicate better among themselves. They need to jointly solve problems that arise over individual children. In these ways, nonprofit organizations could provide effective follow-through in the community.

Nonprofit Organization Roles, Perspectives across Sectors

Policymakers identified prevention as an important role of nonprofit organizations. One participant stated,

[These organizations] create opportunities for youth to be involved in positive acts, help with self-esteem...[provide a] refuge, an outlet for their confusion, for their exploration.

Like the nonprofit organizers themselves, two policymakers emphasized the need for coordination among nonprofit organizations – and beyond, with schools, the police, social services, and parents coordinating opportunities and resources. One recommended a five-year plan of resources and programming for the several sectors. In contrast, one policymaker stated emphatically, “[It is] NOT your responsibility as a nonprofit to pick up the pieces of lives that are a mess, but we do have to, as a society, love and be concerned and try to help those kids.”

This policymaker did not favor nonprofit programming for gang intervention. Expressing frustration with public funding for some programs, this respondent stated, “We just become great enablers of some activity.”

Police officers, to varying degrees, acknowledged that nonprofit organizations have a role in preventing youth gang involvement by keeping youth off the streets and providing alternative activities. One put forth a strong sense that the programs are indeed effective and should not be seen as expendable. Another mentioned referring kids who want to get out of gangs to such organizations. Nonprofits, are, however, limited in their effectiveness by limited resources and their instability, that is, their vulnerability to changing government winds and priorities, as one officer found.

Unlike other sectors, educators did not present a strong or consistent view of the role of nonprofit organizations. Two, however, mentioned some positive aspects, including the value of tattoo removal programs and mentoring for boys, and social workers who deal with anger management. One was skeptical of nonprofits saying, “[Nonprofits] try but are just a Band-Aid.”

Another school informant could not distinguish what services the various nonprofits offered, so could not effectively refer youth to them. Apparently, given this sketchy perception of nonprofits, these educators did not have a sense of the role schools could take on.

With the exception of schools, other sectors (including the businessman and priest interviewed) recognized the strong and direct preventive role nonprofit organizations provide through the structuring of a space for teens with supportive adult interaction, supervision, and guidance. Their main recommendation was greater coordination among these organizations and public commitment to their operation through restored, long-term funding.

BUSINESSES and FAITH ORGANIZATIONS

As noted in the Project Overview, with two exceptions, business people and members of faith organizations approached for interviews declined, owing to limited contact with the issue of youth gangs. We did ask members of other sectors what they believed the roles of these sectors were in preventing gangs.

Businesses: Informants agreed that the role of businesses was not proactive. However, as members of the community, they should be welcome to join the discussion. Businesses were advised to immediately remove gang graffiti. Failing that, they could become targets of crime and/or unwittingly contribute to gang activity. Going a step further, informants suggested that businesses could offer youth employment or internship opportunities, and in so doing, keep youth occupied and serve as mentors.

Faith Organizations: There was no consensus over the role of faith organizations in the prevention of crime. Some doubted their effectiveness at deterring youth already on the road to gang involvement, and suggested, instead, that faith organizations could best work with parents, especially considering that many Latinos have great respect for religion. Others noted that faith organization work with youth, and, as such, offer a potentially strong countercurrent to gangs, both through internal activities and by increasing outreach.

PARENTS

Members of all sectors interviewed were asked to consider the role of parents in preventing gangs. All sectors recalled the central role parents play in children's life.

[Parents are] obviously the best people to address the problem with their parental roles.

Parents are the primary, most important influence, potentially the strongest link, police officers noted. A business member interviewed offered a wise qualification of parents' roles. Yes, it is their responsibility, he acknowledged, but they are trapped.

Yes [the responsibility] is on them, but if we wait...we'll lose another generation.

Almost without exception, the 20 adults interviewed identified a main impediment for parents – lack of time. Their work responsibilities are overwhelming and keep them from having time with their children. Many recalled the issue of parents working two to three jobs and the lack of daycare, resulting in children left home on their own and parents unaware of their daily activities. Interviewees identified two key results: parents being out of touch and/or (seemingly) unaware or unwilling to face the possibility that their children may be in gangs.

A second, and related issue, is a communication problem with children. The question of whether parents are truly unaware of children's gang involvement or know but are "in denial" provoked discussion across all sectors. School sources underscored that parents resist believing that their children might be in gangs.

A policymaker noted that immigrant adults tend to be unfamiliar with gangs, as they are not part of their culture, but rather have been part of American life for centuries. Police officers reported examples of parents not reading (or not attending to) the signs of gang involvement that can be found in their homes.

Some nonprofit organizers were also skeptical of the idea that parents are truly



Parents are the most important influence, potentially the strongest link, in preventing gangs. However, interviewees believed parents are in a bind.

ignorant of gangs (in relation to their children), since people tend to have either personal experience with gangs, or have relatives or friends who have been involved. Instead, the many issues parents face, not only with work, but also personal problems (from mental health or domestic abuse to housing problems) lead them to put children in the background, in this person's perspective.

Then [parents] say 'where did it go wrong,' – [parents] didn't see it coming.

Thus parents, from this perspective, contribute to the problem of gang affiliation through their lack of knowledge, time, and energy. Also noting parents' tendency to deny, or to say that kids are simply gang "wannabes," one nonprofit interviewee asserted of youth interested in gangs:

If they're wannabes, they're gonnabes.

Such an attitude on the part of parents when faced with claims about their children's' bad or shocking behavior is unsurprising, one common to parents of any background. Some respondents, however, suggested that parents might be in the dark because their children keep silent about gangs, possibly to keep families safe. A youth participant shared that he doesn't tell his parents of his gang involvement for fear of an extreme reaction, such as yelling at him or sending him away to Mexico, rather than talking to him about the issues he is facing. Others mentioned that some parents are clearly aware of the problem, as shown by their deciding to remove a child from a school, or move across town or even across country to get their kids away from gangs.

As a whole, interviewees across sectors provided similar views of how parents are currently dealing with the issue of gangs. The critiques were clearly presented not to blame parents, but as indications of more and less effective ways to work with youth. One school informant advised: "[Rather than] find out the hard way, [parents need to] take control, because right now the kids are the ones that are in control."

For one policymaker, the problem Latino parents face is one common to many contemporary parents. This respondent, quickly added,

[The role of parents is to provide] strong parameters and guidance for [kids] which is hard to do because [youth] don't want it, number one, and they won't listen to you, number two – although they do [listen], but they play like they don't.... Teens are not the most loveable group of people – teens don't give back right away.

Several participants made note of two very different but ineffective strategies parents may use to deal with teens. A policymaker believed that some parents “want to cut their kid slack,” that is, are more permissive, while others are severely restrictive and try to keep children at home. Educators also believed there was a problem of parents not setting limits (“kids don’t pay any price”).

Nonprofit personnel, like others, noted how important parents are in gang prevention – by being role models, by bonding and communicating with children. They also recognized the great challenges, owing to work obligations. As one noted,

Parents will get defensive if we say that’s one reason kids join.... It’s not only Latinos; other adults don’t communicate with kids. It’s hard to improve the relationship when struggling with bills.

This respondent made a simple, constructive suggestion:

I think that even five minutes of talking to your kids can make a big difference. Five minutes a week or twenty minutes a week, you know, just talking to them about a serious topic that they want to talk about without yelling.

Indeed overall, a key problem is lack of communication, or worse, negative communication by parents who are too quick to judge children, yell at them, or threaten punishment. This strategy “shuts down the line of communication.” Educators and nonprofit organizers asserted that some parents react too strongly (perhaps violently) to children who confide about gangs. Kids then tend not to confide in parents, since they expect that parents will only “jump down their throats” or otherwise punish them. At its worst, such reactions can contribute to pushing the child further toward gangs (who may appear to be more understanding and accepting). “Putting pressure on kids” does not help, many agreed.

[Parents] need to listen without yelling. [Parents need to] try to build communication and not judge right away.

Some speculated that the undocumented status of some parents was a deterrent to preventive involvement. Parents might feel worried to hear of potential legal problems with youth or feel unempowered in relation to their children, who may see them through the lens of the majority as lower in status. Language and cultural barriers across generations magnify the generational divide. Lack of time together, owing to schedule differences, exacerbates the communication and “tracking” problems. Nonprofit organizers also

suggested ways to support parents. It would be valuable for parents to come together and talk about the issue and voice their concerns to policymakers. Neighborhood clubs can be a channel for problem solving.

Youth perspectives on parents tended not to be couched in remarks qualifying criticism of parents. Youth offered vital input of parents, although blunt.

Parents care but don't pay close attention, so youth look for attention elsewhere. [Parents] don't communicate enough. Parents should get closer to their kids and just listen to them and just trust them first before accusing them of something...and do more stuff with them.

Another youth suggested, similarly, that parents should talk to their children about gangs, not with a “just say no” message, but instead, “talk it over.” This youth, amusingly, but somewhat sagely, suggested parents could handle it by saying,

Well, when you're 18 you can join a gang if you want, but not before. [This way] when you're 18, you're going to realize it was a bad, stupid [idea].

In short, blaming parents is counterproductive, just as it is counterproductive for parents to blame their children, thinking that will deter gang involvement. A church member interviewed recalled encouragingly that “parents do know their kids, need to have dialogue with them, do things together.” Police recommended that parents need to become more involved, first by becoming more aware of gang signs (in a broad sense) with their own and neighbors’ children. Second Latino men need to “be more visible with our youth, we need to do more mentoring and role modeling.”



Improving the parent-child communication is seen as one of the most important keys to preventing gang involvement.

It's important for those at home to influence youth by giving them "confidence, usefulness, belonging, [and] understanding." The broader community of adults needs to be supportive of parents, by mentoring youth or offering other resources when parents have obstacles that prevent them from effective parenting.

YOUTH

The perspective of youth was almost diametrically opposed to that of adults. Youth interviewed felt that joining or not joining gangs was entirely the responsibility of youth and no one else. That said, youth did mention some ways others could be involved. Gang awareness prevention was noted. The police could develop better relationships with youth. Nonprofit organizations can talk about gangs, work on anger management, and generally, keep youth busy and out of trouble. As noted earlier, youth did identify parents' roles – in communicating with children, treating them fairly without prejudging them, and spending more time with them. Harsh reactions seemed a poor deterrent to most informants. Instead, getting close to teens and communicating with them as near equals was the recommended method. For their part, youth could talk to others about how bad gangs are and tell them not to give in to peer pressure and that it is okay not to join.

Youth Roles, Perspectives across Sectors

Overall, adults asserted that, first of all, adults must step up to the plate and support youth. Thus one policymaker said,

I don't want to put a lot of responsibility on the kid ... who never had the support or the chance to do otherwise. They didn't have the adults in their lives to show them another way. They didn't have adequate schooling or teachers who cared, so yet it starts with self-esteem with kids, but...so often self-esteem is faith in yourself that others allow you to have. Nobody grows up with low self-esteem until they're told they're worthless by adults over and over again. I think as hard as it is kids do need to trust adults and find an adult they can trust and talk to that adult about what they are experiencing.

Adults should then work with them to help them do what youth should do – be active, be students, develop skills to move ahead. This is the prime way of avoiding gangs. Resistance skills can also be taught as a support. Others recommended more role models, especially by teens, since "teens will listen more to teens than any others."

A police officer noted that the responsibility of youth is to stay in school.

[Youth] need to start to allow themselves to have an attitude of hope and attitude of relationships with adults, they don't want you to care about them, it's too much for them to deal with and they will do everything to swat you away from them.

Another officer emphasized that youth need to let adults in and allow them to help. Another said youth need to be leaders, not followers. They can “be a role model to younger siblings.” They need to keep active, such as through joining after-school programs or sports.

Youth need to know that there's a bigger picture...it's not just about your small world, this is about the whole world.

Youth are the victims, not just the perpetrators, nonprofit organizers emphasized. They are victims of racism, of their parents' undocumented status, and more. Acknowledging the many pressures on youth to join gang and difficulty in saying no, nonprofit organizers emphasized first that youth could learn to avoid the pressures on them, but need help to develop such resources in themselves – in resistance skills. Nonprofit organizers envisioned a strong role for youth as potentially the best at prevention, through peer education.

It'd be great if [youth] did have more power in prevention.

Finally, many underscored that while it is easy to join a gang, getting out is very hard. It should, therefore, be a priority to think of ways to solve this problem and support youth in this effort.

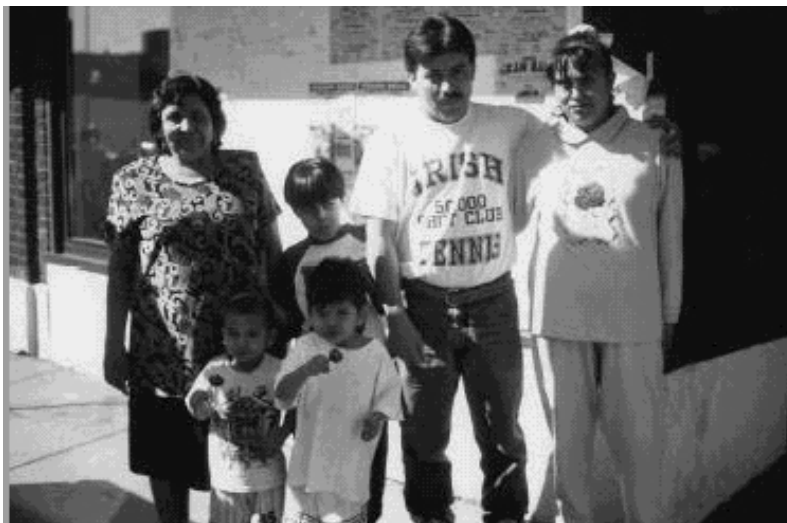
Summary of Perspectives on Parents and Youth

Before addressing conclusions and recommended actions, it is important to reflect on the people concerned – Latino youth and their families. With so many perspectives on this sensitive issue of the responsibility of parents and children for gang involvement, one might not expect consensus. However, there was considerable convergence of opinion on the problem parents and youth face and ways to address it.

All individuals interviewed recognized that parents are the key figures in childrens' lives, with the responsibility for care and guidance. They regretted that Latino parents are caught in a bind – in which

working for their families prevents parents from having sufficient time to spend with their children. Keeping this difficult context in mind, several recommended ways that parents could prevent their children from gang involvement. Remaining “in denial” or reacting with censure at the very mention of gangs were two nonproductive strategies. Instead, many participants suggested that the most important productive strategy is open communication. Parents need to create bridges of communication where youth can feel free to speak openly. In this situation, they will be more open to parents’ counsel. Parents need to learn to be aware of the signs of gang activity in their children and within their homes, and to address it. Finally, many emphasized the need for communication across the community. By coming together and opening the issue to discussion, parents can find support and begin to create a community-wide system of intervention.

Young people moving toward adulthood understandably yearn for autonomy. It was, therefore, not surprising that youth felt that gang prevention was up to youth themselves. However, they did echo many suggested prevention strategies – from gang prevention awareness in schools and at nonprofit organizations to respectful treatment by police and parents communicating concern, not anger. Many adults stressed that they need to broadly support youth by helping them develop a sense of identity, hope, and purpose. Learning gang resistance skills was seen as leading toward this broader goal of youth development. Finally, youth can and should be empowered as potentially strong advocates of gang prevention.



Nonprofit organizers stated that youth are not only perpetrators, but also victims, of racism, their parents’ undocumented status, and more.

CONCLUSIONS

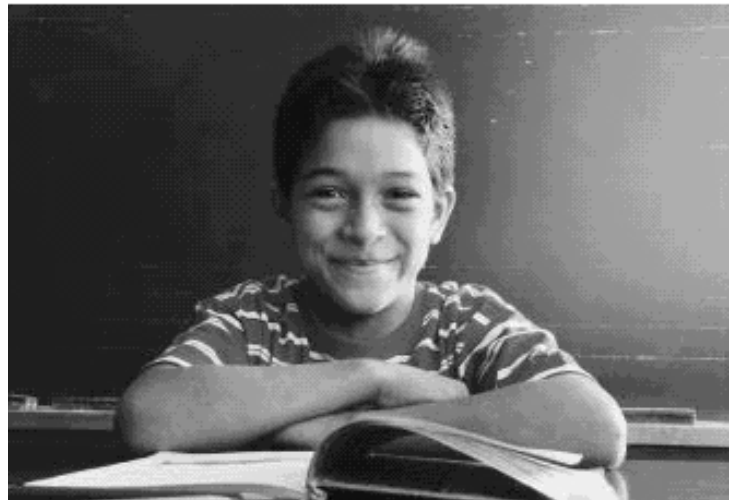
Children have to experience, I always say, three basic things. One is love and tenderness – and they belong together. The second is respect – that they see people respect each other and that they are respected. And three: stimulation. That is what children need to grow up.²⁵

It was evident throughout this research that stakeholders of various sectors lacked consensus on their roles and those of other sectors in preventing youth gang involvement. If progress is to be made, the various sectors of society need to establish guiding principles on how to prevent and intervene in youth gang involvement. These discussions need to occur within and across the sectors to build political will and community strategies to protect youth from gangs and to coordinate strategies to counter gangs. The following are roles and actions identified through this report as ways the various sectors can address the issue constructively.

Public Policy

Policymakers have three major active roles in gang prevention. First, they can make the case that gangs are a statewide problem for which the broader community is responsible. Second, they can invest in families and communities by supporting efforts to prevent gang involvement and provide positive alternatives for youth who might otherwise turn to gangs. Third, they can require accountability for prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts.

All sectors agreed that children need to have “something to do” with appropriate supervision.



Childhood development programming provides positive activities for children.

²⁵ Gisela Konopka, a German Jew who survived the Nazis and gained worldwide recognition at the University of Minnesota for her work in adolescent development.

While there is consensus that early childhood development programming is essential to the well being of families and the community, a parallel public policy commitment does not exist to support youth development. With 8 million children ages 5 to 14 spending time without adult supervision on a daily basis, after/out-of-school programming is essential (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1998). Currently, structures for adequate child engagement are insufficient and need to be fortified. Extensive literature indicates that after-school programs help children achieve better grades in school and have a positive impact on their self-esteem and social adjustment (Witt & Baker, 1997). After-school programs also keep kids safe and out of trouble while parents work (see Appendix III for juvenile victimization and crime peak times and see Snyder & Sickmund, 1999); they are cost-effective (Aos, Phipps, Barnoski & Lieb, 2001); and they receive wide public support (Lake Snell Perry & Associates, Terrance Group, and Afterschool Alliance, 2002).

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2001) found that effective after-school programs can yield a benefit-to-cost ratio to taxpayers and crime victims of \$1.87 to \$5.29 for every dollar spent. The Rose Institute (2002) found that quality after-school programs could reduce costs related to welfare, crime, and education for an average net benefit of between \$79,484 and \$119,427 per participant over a lifetime.

Police Departments

The police force has a central role in suppression of gang criminal activity as well as information gathering that can inform policy. Budget constraints hamper police efforts and keep staff limited with insufficient bilingual and/or bicultural officers.

The police can also contribute to prevention by developing their roles as public figures in the community. Stereotyping of Latino youth as gang members and the “tough cop” style are perceived in the community as counterproductive approaches that hinder effective police interaction with youth. Training in diversity and communication are both needed so that the police can become role models who develop relationships of understanding and mutual respect with the Latino community, including youth. One successful approach that connects Minneapolis police officers with Latino youth in a structured environment is the Youth Citizens Academy program. This initiative involves a Spanish-speaking officer and a civilian staff person who coordinate weekly learning sessions with youth from a local church-based after-school program. Now in its second year, the Youth Citizens Academy has demonstrated that the young boys and

girls have learned a variety of public safety topics through activities which engage them in constructive dialogues with the participating police officers. The officers also benefit from the opportunities to interact with Latino (and other minority) youth in a positive setting.

Schools and Educators

Schools are nearly overwhelmed with responsibilities, thus making it hard to ask them to take on yet another task. However, schools can be part of the prevention effort precisely by strengthening their mission of educating all students, and in the process, make the educational needs of Latino students a stronger priority. In particular, schools need to make a commitment to counter the often noted “disconnect” of Latinos in response to the overt or covert messages within U.S. society that education is not for them. Teachers, guidance counselors, and other staff need to reinforce their efforts to meet the challenge of engaging disengaged youth, including Latinos. The literature clearly shows that school connectedness acts as a protective factor for youth (see, for example, Resnick, 1997 and Bonny, 2000).

Extracurricular activities need to become more responsive to the diversity in the student body. At a time of overall declining school enrollment, it is obvious that Latinos bring funds into the school system and should benefit from allocation of existing funds. The expectation that Latinos can simply join existing programs or activities overlooks the fact that such programming was developed in response to the culture of mainstream students. As such, it is often unresponsive to diverse groups like Latinos, and can even have an unintended effect of exclusion. Schools can start to address this problem by determining the interests of Latino students and creating recreational programs (with staff) to meet those interests. Minnesota schools that have successfully connected with Latino students have developed initiatives such as folkloric dance groups, soccer teams, and other activities. Another positive step is to designate a space in schools for Latinos. To dedicate human and economic capital and physical space to/for Latino student activities sends a



Minnesota schools need to connect with Latino students by providing extra curricular activities that meet the needs of the Latino youth. Providing space for folkloric dancing is one way schools can be responsive to the diversity in the student body.

clear message to the whole community that the school is committed to and inclusive of its student body. Needless to say, this kind of initiative is ideal for any/all diversity within a student body. There is particular resonance for students experiencing a lack of belonging.

Schools can also act to prevent gangs through school policies and community education. Educators can challenge the notion in popular culture and among youth that gangs are cool by keeping clear and consistent messages and rules against gang activity. Schools can also educate staff, parents, and students about gangs.

To ask that schools identify students involved in gang activity would be fraught with problems. Schools can, however, assess school connectedness and should inform parents when concerns arise over students. Finally, the practice of transferring students out of schools – whether to avoid gangs or problem students – arose as an unresolved issue.

Community Organizations

Compared to other sectors, community organizations have the most direct role in gang prevention. Most informants emphasized their vital and positive contribution to the prevention of youth gangs and more broadly to youth development. The spaces community organizations provide are a safe haven from gangs and a much-needed space for youth to engage in positive growth activities. The anti-gang rules and resistance skills taught by youth centers offer youth both a structure and methods for avoiding the pull of gangs. Given the circumstances of overextended parents and schools, nonprofit organizations geared to youth are essential. The adults in them are skilled at relating to youth. Youth workers understand how to communicate constructively with youth, so that youth can open up to them and benefit from the guidance of mature, nonjudgmental adults.

To promote a community culture of valuing, supporting, and involving youth, we must be willing to invest in long-term solutions for the community with stable funding for youth development. Recent budget cuts are seriously hampering the gang prevention efforts of community organizations. Youth development is a vital social good; it is also cost effective. A conservative estimate of \$2.55/hr per youth (average cost for youth programs) for 1,200 hours per year to develop youth into economically and socially viable adults can result in a gain of \$10.51 for every dollar invested (Newman, Smith, & Murphy, 2001).

RECOMMENDATIONS

We close with recommendations that all sectors need to consider:

Inclusive Programming

- As sectors develop strategies to prevent gang involvement, they need to ensure that programming is diverse and inclusive of all youth.

Support for Parents

- All sectors need to think seriously and creatively about how to develop structures of support for Latino parents. There is need for community-based parent support systems that are responsive to the circumstances of overextended parents. There are existing family-communication programs that could be adapted in culturally appropriate ways for Latino Families (for example, “Creating Lasting Family Connections,” which is geared to African-Americans).

Support for Youth Who Want to Leave Gangs

- The problem of youth trapped in gangs who require help to safely leave gangs is truly a vital unmet need that must be addressed.

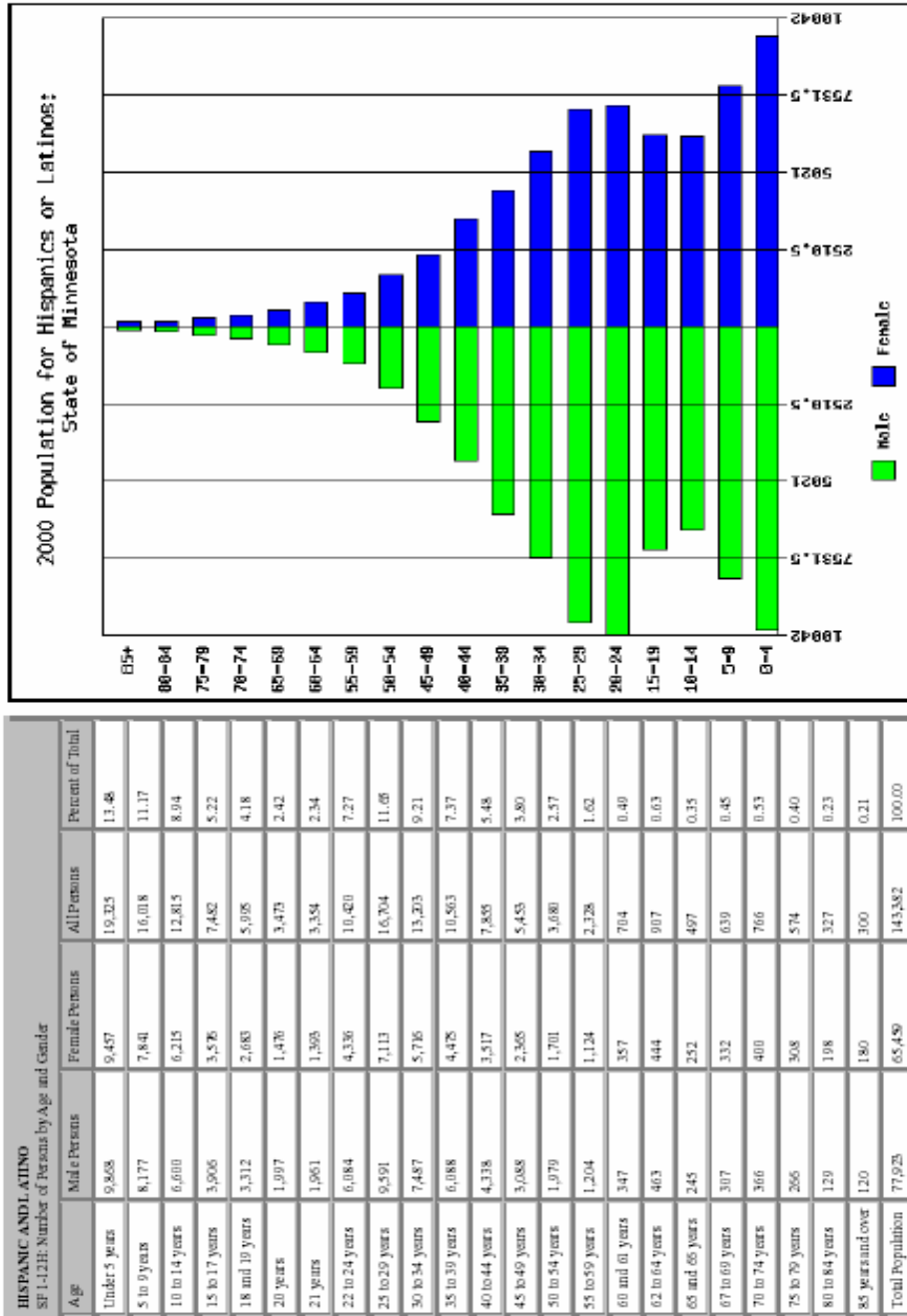
Bridging and Collaboration

- Youth oriented non-governmental organizations should heed the call to connect and collaborate in order to consistently provide opportunities and support for youth over longer periods of time. This can be accomplished in very concrete ways. For example, the leader of a “girls group” geared for girls in middle school could collaborate with a program that provides activities for girls in junior high and make referrals. This call for collaboration is often heard, yet the individuals involved often see this as another task on a growing “to do” list. However, if the leadership of these organizations—including funding organizations—acknowledge the necessity of bridging and collaborating, and then dedicate a percentage of program resources, both human and financial, specifically for this purpose, the likelihood is greater that collaborations can be implemented.

Appendix I

Provided by Datnet www.lmic.state.mn.us/datanetweb

POPULATION PYRAMID FOR STATE OF MINNESOTA: HISPANIC OR LATINO POPULATION PROFILES: PERSONS BY RACE, AGE, AND GENDER



Chicago Latino Affairs Council, 385 Park Street, Suite 210, St. Paul, MN 55103
(651) 206-9387 chic.lac.state.mn.us www.chic.lac.state.mn.us
Population pyramid created by MN Planning

Appendix II: Research Instruments

Individual Interview Questions

1. What are your experiences with Latino gangs?

a) Do you see a lot of gang activity within your organization?

For youth workers, police officers, youths (and/or others that may be able to provide info).

a) Do you think you would be able to tell if someone was affiliated with a gang? (If yes, continue to next question. If no, skip 1b and go to question 2.)

b) Information on a national level provides these signs/characteristics to describe a person who is affiliated with a gang. Which of these do you think are true for Twin Cities' gang members?

2) What do you think comes to kids' minds when they think about gangs?

a) In your experience what are the reasons youth join gangs?

b) People have said that the kids who join gangs could have gone either way, what do you think?

3) How do you think families are affected when a family member is in a gang?

4) How do you think the community is affected by youth joining gangs?

5) What do you think the role of the following sectors of the community is in preventing youth gang involvement? What are the following sectors currently doing to prevent youth gang involvement?

1) Policy makers?

2) Police department?

3) Educational system?

4) Non-profits?

5) Businesses?

6) Churches?

7) Parents?

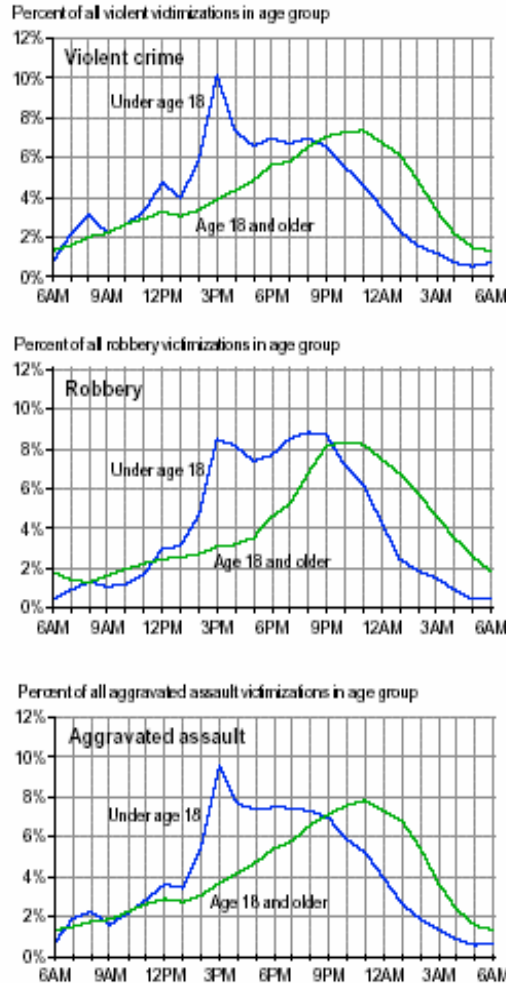
8) Youth?

5) What do you think the different sectors [mentioned above] can do to reduce the number of kids joining gangs?

6) Is there anything else that we have not mentioned that you would want to add?

Appendix III: Juvenile Victimization and Offender Peak Times

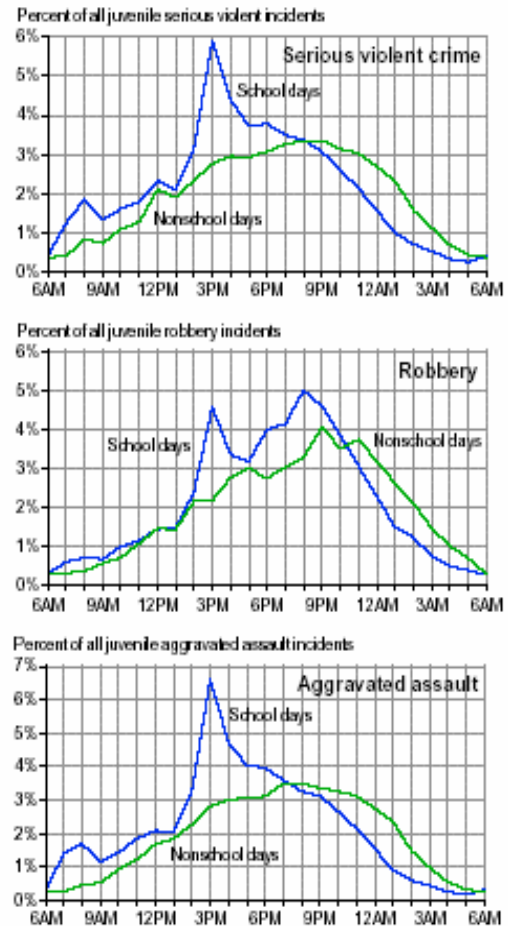
The violent victimization of juveniles is greatest between 3 p.m. and 9 p.m., while adult victimizations are most common between 9 p.m. and midnight



Note: Violent victimizations include the crimes of murder, violent sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault. Data are from 12 States (Alabama, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Dakota, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia).

Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System master files for the years 1991–1996 [machine readable data files].

Serious juvenile crimes cluster in the hours immediately after the close of school



- On school days, robberies and aggravated assaults by juveniles both peak at 3 p.m.; unlike aggravated assaults, robberies also peak at night.
- The temporal pattern of juvenile violence on nonschool days is similar to the overall pattern for adults; juvenile violence peaks at night on nonschool days.

Note: Serious violent crimes include murder, violent sex assaults, robbery, and aggravated assault. Data are from 12 States (Alabama, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Dakota, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia).

Source: Authors' analyses of the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System master files for the years 1991–1996 [machine-readable data files].

Snyder, H.N., & Sickmund, M. (1999). *Juvenile offenders and victims: 1999 national report*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. Available on-line at <http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/nationalreport99/toc.html>

REFERENCES

- Allender, D. M. (2001). *Gangs in middle America: Are they a threat? - history, migration, and structure*. The Federal Bureau of Investigation Law Enforcement Bulletin. Retrieved August 25, 2004, from http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2194/is_12_70/ai_82757208/print
- Aos, S., Phipps, P., Barnoski, R., & Lieb, R. (2001). *The comparative costs and benefits of programs to reduce crime*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Available on-line at <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/crime/pdf/costbenefit.pdf>
- Barreto, W. (1997). *Analysis of the current geographical patterns of the Hispanic population in Minnesota*. Unpublished senior paper, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.
- Biewen, J. (1996, October). *Out of the gang*. Minnesota Public Radio. Retrieved March 22, 2004, from http://news.mpr.org/features/199611/01_biewenj_gang/
- Bjerregaard, B. (2002). Self-definition of gang membership and involvement in delinquent activities [Electronic version]. *Youth & Society*, 34, 31-54.
- Bonnie, A. E., Britto, M. T., Klostermann, B. K., Hornung, R. W., & Slap, G. B. (2000). School connectedness: Identifying adolescents at risk. *Pediatrics*, 106, 1017-1021.
- Brown, W., Fratesm, S. B., Rudge, I. S., & Tradewell, R.L. (2002). *The cost and benefits of after-school programs: The estimated effects of the after school education and safety act of 2002*. Claremont, CA: Rose Institute. Available on-line at http://rose.research.claremontmckenna.edu/publications/pdf/after_school.pdf
- Budig, T. W. (2003). *House judiciary and finance committee gains overview of gangs during testimony*. Retrieved September 1, 2004, from <http://www.hometownsource.com/capitol/2003/january/16gangs.html>
- Carlie, M. (2002). *Into the abyss: A personal journey into the world of street gangs* [Electronic version]. Retrieved September 20, 2004, from <http://www.faculty.smsu.edu/m/mkc096f/>
- De Leon, A. (2002). *Handbook of Texas online: Pachucos*. The Texas State Historical Association. Retrieved August 27, 2004 from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/PP/pqp1.html>
- Egley, A. & Major, A. (2003). *Highlights of the 2001 national gang survey* (Fact Sheet #200301). Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved August 18, 2004, from <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/fs200301.pdf>
- Federal Bureau of Investigation. (1997). *Violent Crimes and Major Offenders*. Statement of Chief Steven R. Wiley. Washington, D.C.: Federal Bureau of Investigation.
- Gordon, R. A., Lahey, B. B., Kawai, E., Loeber, R., Stouthamer-Loeber, M., & Farrington, D. P. (2004). Antisocial behavior and youth gang membership [Electronic version]. *Criminology*, 42, 55-89.
- Griffin, K. W., Botvin, G. J., Scheier, L. M., and Miller, N. L. (2000). Parenting practices as predictors of substance use, delinquency, and aggression among urban minority youth: Moderating effects of family structure and gender. *Psychology of Addictive Behavior*, 14, 174-184.
- Hamilton, C. (2004). *Bill battles growing problem*. Duluth NewsTribune. Retrieved September 1, 2004, from <http://www.duluthsuperior.com/mld/duluthtribune/8088605.htm?template+contentModules/pri>
- Harrington, B. & Cavett, K. (2000). *G is for gangsta. Introductory assessment of gang activity and issues in Minnesota* [Electronic version]. Retrieved August 27, 2004, from www.oralhistorian.org
- The Hofstede committee report: Juvenile prostitution in Minnesota. (1999). Retrieved October 6, 2004, from <http://www.ag.state.mn.us/consumer/pdf/hofstede.pdf>
- Howell, J. C. (1994). *Gang fact sheet #12*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved August 18, 2004, from <http://www.ncjrs.org/txtfiles/fs-9412.txt>
- Howell, J. C. (1998). *Youth gangs: An overview* (NCJ 167249). Juvenile Justice Bulletin Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved September 29, 2004, from <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/jjbulletin/9808/contents.html>
- Howell, J. C., Egley, A., & Gleason, D. (2002). *Modern-day youth gangs* [Electronic version] (NCJ #191524). Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved March 22, 2004, from http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2002_06_1/contents.html

- Huff, R. (1998, October). *Comparing the criminal behavior of youth and at-risk youths*. Research in Brief. National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved August 23, 2004, from <http://www.ncjrs.org/txtfiles/172852.txt>
- Kennedy, D. M., Braga, A. A., Piehl, A. M. (1997). The (un)known universe: Mapping gangs and gang violence in Boston [Electronic version]. In D. Weisburd & T. McEwen (Eds.), *Crime Prevention Studies: Vol.8, Crime Mapping and Crime Prevention*, pp. 219-262 Retrieved September 9, 2004, from [http://www.popcenter.org/Library/CrimePrevention/Volume%2008/The%20\(Un\)Known%20Universe--Mapping%20Gangs%20and%20Gang%20Violence%20in%20B.pdf](http://www.popcenter.org/Library/CrimePrevention/Volume%2008/The%20(Un)Known%20Universe--Mapping%20Gangs%20and%20Gang%20Violence%20in%20B.pdf)
- Klein, M. (1997). *The American street gang*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lake Snell Perry & Associates, Terrance Group, and Afterschool Alliance. (2002, November). *American voters: Afterschool must remain a priority*. Afterschool Alert Poll Report. Washington, D.C.: Afterschool Alliance. Available on-line at http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/school_poll_final_2002.pdf
- Lehman, C. (2000). Striking back [Electronic version]. *Minnesota Medicine*, 83. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Medical Association. Retrieved August 27, 2004, from <http://www.mmaonline.net/publications/MnMed2000/September/Lehman.cfm>
- Lingren, H. G. (1996). Gangs: The new family [Electronic version] (File #G96-1294-A under: Family Life). *Adolescent and Youth*. Retrieved August 27, 2004, from <http://ianrpubs.unl.edu/family/g1294.htm>
- Marsh, D. G. (1994). *Voices of MN youth. A report of the "Listen '94: Kids can't wait" conference* [Electronic version]. Action for Children's Youth Advisory Council, MN Planning. Retrieved August 27, 2004, from www.mnplan.state.mn.us/pdf/voices94.pdf
- McMurry, M. (2005, January). *Minnesota population projections by race and hispanic origin 2000-2030*. Minnesota Department of Administration State Demographic Center. Retrieved January 13, 2005, from <http://www.demography.state.mn.us>
- Moore, J. (1991). *Going down to the barrio: Homeboys and homegirls in change*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Moore, J. & Pinderhughes, R. (Eds.). (1993). *In the barrios: Latinos and the underclass debate*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Moore, J. P. & Cook, I. L. (1999). *Highlights of the 1998 national youth gang survey* (Fact Sheet #99123). Washington, D. C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved August 18, 2004, from <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/fs99123.pdf>
- National Youth Gang Center. (2000). *1998 national youth gang survey. Summary*. [Electronic version]. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved March 22, 2004, from <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/ojjdp/183109.pdf>
- Newman, R. P., Smith, S. M., Murphy, R. (2001). *A matter of money: The cost and financing of youth development*. Washington, D. C.: Center for Youth & Policy Research, Academy for Educational Development.
- Pappas, C. (2001, August). *U. S. gangs: Their changing history and contemporary solutions*. Retrieved August, 18, 2004, from <http://www.yapi.org/old/publications/resourcepapers/Gangskon.pdf>
- Resnick, M. D., Bearman, P. S., Blum, R. W., et al. (1997). Protecting adolescents from harm: Findings from the national longitudinal study on adolescent health. *Journal of American Medical Association*, 278, 823-832.
- Rodriguez, L. (1993). *Always running*. East Haven, CT: Curbstone Press.
- Schneider, E. C. (1999). *Vampires, dragons, and Egyptian kings*. Princeton University Press.
- Snyder, H. N., & Sickmund, M. (1999). *Juvenile offenders and victims: 1999 national report*. Washington, D. C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U. S. Department of Justice. Available on-line at <http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/nationalreport99/toc.html>
- Spergel, I. A., Chance, R., Ehrensaft, K., Regulus, T., Kane, C., Laseter, R., et al. (1994). *Gang suppression and intervention community models*. NCJ 148202. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U. S. Department of Justice. Retrieved August 18, 2004, from <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles/gangcorr.pdf>
- Spergel, I. A., Kane, C., Hyatt, M., Ross, R., & Rodriguez, P. (Eds.). (1988). *Report of the law enforcement youth gang symposium*. Retrieved October 6, 2004, from <http://www.ncjrs.org/txtfiles/d0033.txt>

- Starbuck, D., Howell, J. C., & Lindquist, D. J. (2001). *Hybrid and other modern gangs* [Electronic version]. (NCJ# 189916). Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Washington, D. C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved August 23, 2004, from http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2001_12_1/contents.html
- Straka, R. (2003). *The violence of Hmong gangs and the crime of rape*. The Federal Bureau of Investigation Law Enforcement Bulletin. Retrieved August 27, 2004, from http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2194/is_2_72/ai_98253655/print
- Teeter, R. (1995). 19th century a.d. *Adolescence*. Retrieved August 23, 2004, from http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2248/is_n118_v30/ai_17150109/print
- Thornberry, T. P., Krohn, M. D., & Lizotte, A. J. (1993). The role of juvenile gangs in facilitating delinquent behavior [Electronic version]. *Journal of Research and Crime and Delinquency*, 30, 55-87.
- Thrasher, F. (1927). *The Gang: A study of 1, 313 gangs in Chicago*. University of Chicago Press.
- U.S. General Accounting Office. (1998). *Welfare reform: Implications of increased work participation for childcare*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Accounting Office.
- Valdez, A. (1998). *Hispanic gangs*. National Alliance of Gangs Investigators Associations. Retrieved August 27, 2004, from http://www.nagia.org/Hispanic_Gangs.htm
- Vigil, J. D. (1997). *Learning from gangs: The Mexican American experience* (#ED405157). Retrieved August 27, 2004, from ERIC Digest database.
- Vigil, J. D. (2002). *A rainbow of gangs*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Weisheit, R. A. & Wells, L. E. (2001). *Youth gangs in rural America, final report* [Electronic version] (Document #190228). National Institute of Justice, National Criminal Justice Reference Service. Retrieved August 24, 2004, from <http://www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/nij/grants/190228.pdf>
- Wiener, V. (1999). *Winning the war against youth gangs: A guide for teens, families, and communities*. Westport, CT: Green Wood Press.
- Witt, P.A. & Baker, D. (1997). Developing after-school programs for youth in high risk environments. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, 68, 18-20.