



# OJJDP FACT SHEET

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## National Youth Gang Survey Trends From 1996 to 2000

by Arlen Egley, Jr.

This Fact Sheet highlights findings from the five National Youth Gang Surveys conducted annually since 1996 by the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC). NYGC is funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The nationally representative sample of 3,018 law enforcement agencies includes (1) all police and sheriff's departments serving suburban counties and cities with populations of more than 25,000 and (2) a randomly selected sample of police and sheriff's departments serving rural counties and cities with populations between 2,500 and 25,000. Survey respondents were asked to report information only for youth gangs, defined as "a group of youths or young adults in your jurisdiction that you or other responsible persons in your agency or community are willing to identify or classify as a 'gang.'" Motorcycle gangs, hate or ideology groups, prison gangs, and adult gangs were excluded from the survey. Annual response rates ranged from 84 to 92 percent during the survey years of 1996 to 2000.

### Patterns of Gang Activity

The proportion of respondents that reported youth gangs in their jurisdiction decreased over the survey years, from 53 percent in 1996 to 40 percent in 2000.

Between 1996 and 2000, NYGC researchers observed three patterns: persistent, transitory, and a total absence of gang activity. In cities with a population of more than 250,000, all respondents reported persistent gang activity from 1996 to 2000. Eighty-six percent of cities with a population between 100,000 and 250,000 and 61 percent of cities with a population between 50,000 and 100,000 reported persistent gang activity over the survey years, whereas only 6 percent and 9 percent, respectively, reported a total absence of gang activity. In cities with a population between 25,000 and 50,000, 38 percent of respondents reported persistent gang activity, 41 percent reported transitory gang activity, and 21 percent reported a total absence of gang activity.

In suburban counties with a population of more than 100,000, 61 percent of respondents reported persistent gang activity and 9 percent reported a total absence of gang activity from 1996 to 2000. Law enforcement agencies serving smaller cities (i.e., with a population of less than 25,000) and rural counties were less likely to report persistent gang activity during the survey years. In smaller cities, 13 percent of respondents reported persistent gang activity and 48 percent reported a total absence of gang activity. Rural counties reported 7 percent and 60 percent, respectively.

### Numbers of Gangs and Gang Members

NYGC researchers estimate that more than 24,500 gangs were active in the United States in 2000, a decline of 5 percent from 1999. However, cities with a population of more than 25,000 experienced a slight increase (up 1 percent from 1999) in the number of gangs. The estimated 12,850 gangs in these cities equals the 1996 estimate, the largest number reported during the survey years.

The overall estimate of gang members across the United States has exceeded 750,000 in all survey years. NYGC researchers estimate that more than 772,500 gang members were active in the United States in 2000, a decline of 8 percent from 1999. Nevertheless, cities with a population of more than 25,000, which accounted for 66 percent of all gang members in 2000, experienced an increase (up 2 percent from 1999) in the number of gang members. The estimated 509,500 gang members in these cities were the most reported since 1996.

### Gang-Related Homicides

A total of 284 cities with both a population of more than 25,000 and persistent gang activity reported gang homicide statistics for 1999 and 2000. Ninety-one percent of cities with a population of more than 250,000 reported at least one gang-related homicide from 1999 to 2000, as did 64 percent of cities with a population

between 100,000 and 250,000, 55 percent of cities with a population between 50,000 and 100,000, and 32 percent of cities with a population between 25,000 and 50,000. Among those cities with one or more gang homicides, 47 percent reported an increase and 42 percent reported a decrease in the number of gang homicides from 1999 to 2000.

## Demographics of Gangs and Gang Members

In 2000, respondents reported that 94 percent of gang members were male and 6 percent were female. Respondents also indicated that 39 percent of all youth gangs had female members. Eighty-two percent of respondents reported that none of the gangs in their jurisdictions were predominantly composed of females and, overall, only 2 percent of gangs were identified as predominantly female. These numbers are comparable to those reported in 1998.

Age and race/ethnicity of gang members were measured in the 1996, 1998, and 1999 surveys. In 1996, respondents reported that 50 percent of gang members were juveniles (i.e., younger than 18) and 50 percent were adults (i.e., 18 and older). In 1999, these numbers were 37 percent and 63 percent, respectively. In 1999, respondents reported that 47 percent of gang members were Hispanic, 31 percent African American, 13 percent white, 7 percent Asian, and 2 percent "other." The distribution of race/ethnicity of gang members varied little across measurement years.

## Summary

Analysis of the National Youth Gang Surveys from 1996 to 2000 indicates that the Nation's youth gang problem continues to affect a large number of jurisdictions and has been most persistent in the largest cities. All cities with a population of more than 250,000 and 86 percent of cities with a population between 100,000 and 250,000 reported persistent gang activity from 1996 to 2000, and the prevalence of gang-related homicides was highest in cities of these sizes. Additionally, the estimated number of gangs and gang members in larger cities (i.e., with a population of more than 25,000) has remained virtually unchanged, counter to the overall decline of gangs and gang members over the survey years. Forty-seven percent of these larger cities with persistent gang problems reported an increase in gang-related homicides from 1999 to

2000. The persistence of both gang activity nationwide and the violence associated with it calls for continued efforts to reduce and prevent gang involvement.

## For Further Information

Extensive analysis of the 2000 survey and the 1999 and forthcoming 2001 surveys will be combined in a comprehensive report examining trends related to youth gangs. For additional information about youth gangs, call the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse at 800-638-8736 or contact NYGC at 800-446-0912 or [www.iir.com/nygc/](http://www.iir.com/nygc/).

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