

Street Gangs and the Effects on the Community

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319 Research Methods

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Abstract

This research paper explores the effect of street gangs in the community. I am going to go in depth in the description and lifestyle of street gangs in the community. I used five articles that give statistics and facts about gangs to gather information. I am going explain the affects of street gangs in different areas and how gangs are created in the first place. The purpose of this research paper is to educate and inform the public of the affects of street gangs in the communities of Los Angeles. By using data and statistics was able to evaluate the affects gangs have on the community and find solutions on how we can help prevent kids from joining gangs.

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Introduction

The Los Angeles County has a large population of almost 20 million. It is made up of five surrounding counties which include Los Angeles, Ventura, Orange, San Bernardino and Riverside. If five Los Angeles county areas were a state, it would be the fourth largest state in the United States. Los Angeles is also known as the nickname, "southland". Inside the beautiful city of Los Angeles there is a dark underworld of gang infested neighborhoods, the dark side of Los Angeles that most people don't know. According to the LAPD, almost half of the homicides in Greater Los Angeles are gang related. Gangs account for approximately 43% of all homicides in Los Angeles County. Of the 1038 homicides in 2004, 454 were gang related (Review of Homicide Crime Statistics, Criminal Justice Center, 2005).

Most of the violent crimes that occur in Los Angeles involving gang members are over revenge, turf and status (The Violence Prevention Coalition of Greater Los Angeles, 2007). Revenge fuels the war between rival gangs and is a never ending cycle, unfortunately innocent victims end up getting killed for being at the wrong place, at the wrong time. Territory is a major reason why gangs violently fight; gangs want to control the drug sales in their turf because that is how they financially support themselves. Gangs remain the primary distributors of drugs through the U.S (National Gang Threat Assessment, U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2005). Status is very important to a gang member because they want to make a name for themselves in order to get more respect from their gang members and the neighborhood.

There are more than 1,300 street gangs with more than 150,000 gang members in the Los Angeles County. In the city of Los Angeles alone, there are over 400 separate gangs and an estimate of 39,000 gang members. The majority of gangs in the city of Los Angeles are Hispanic (“Gang Reduction Strategy” City of Los Angeles, 2007)

Identifying Gangs

Street gangs are a group of associating individuals or close friends who claim control over territory in a community and engage in violent criminal activity or other forms of illegal behavior. Gangs have existed in the United States since the 1800's. According to the Los Angeles Police Department description and identification of gangs on their webpage, "How are gangs identified", street gangs are flashy and most gang members are proud to identify themselves freely in public to let everyone know who they are and what gang they are affiliated with. Gangs members like to show off their tattoos displaying their particular gang names and neighborhood they stand for. Gang members like to wear their gang's colors, for example, bloods wear red baggy cloths and cripp gang members wear blue colors to identify their affiliation with the well know gang in California and the United States.

Most gang members are involved in violent gang related crimes which involve robberies and drive by shootings in rival neighborhoods. Street gangs use similar cloths witch identifies them immediately in the streets. They use gang signs and signals to characterize their affiliation with their 'Vario', a Spanish word for neighborhood that is commonly used within Hispanic gangs. Many gangs in the city of Los Angeles spray paint the walls with their gang name along with the individual gang members' nickname or moniker to let rival gangs know they claim that territory. Graffiti is the gang's way of marking their territory and warn other gangs not to come into their "turf". The tagging on the walls is also a way to let the community know the gangs power. The writing on the

wall is a way of advertising threats to rival gangs or a description of a criminal activity the gang was involved in.

Organized gangs will often get together in dark areas to avoid being noticed by the police. The gang's uniform varies depending on the race of gang. Hispanic gangs in particular usually wear plain white T-shirts, baggy pants, a black beanie or bandana around their head and usually have shaved heads. They dress like this to be easily recognized as gang members. Black gang members tend to identify their gang affiliation by the certain colors they wear. Crips wear black or blue colors to identify themselves. Bloods generally wear red caps or bandanas (called rags) to be easily recognized.

Every neighborhood in gang is different and may wear a different color to be unique. Some gang members or drug dealers declare themselves neutral by wearing green. Although due to the gang intelligence that law enforcement has gathered about each gang, gangs are subject to change their clothing in an effort to deceive the police in profiling them and getting pulled over less. According to LAPD, Gang members usually like to use semi-automatic firearms like "Uzi", "AK-47", and "Mac-10" for criminal activity. Females are also involved in gangs; a few indicators are heavy eye make up and dark lipstick.

The data chart shown below shows the number of gang members from different races including Hispanics gangs, the Crips, Bloods, Asian gangs and white gangs.

City of Los Angeles

Count for December by Year

(LAPD has not release updated statistics since 2005)

Year		Hispanic	Crip	Blood	Asian	Stoner*	White	Total
2005	Gangs	246	113	45	32	16	11	463
	Members	21,790	10,792	4,416	839	537	600	38,974
2004	Gangs	246	113	45	32	16	11	463
	Members	22,514	10,187	4,205	1,117	752	791	39,566
2003	Gangs	204	107	43	32	16	5	407
	Members	28,827	11,661	4,620	1,599	656	926	48,289
2002	Gangs	204	107	43	32	16	5	407
	Members	30,517	12,016	4,700	1,701	704	859	50,497
2001	Gangs	204	107	43	32	16	5	407
	Members	33,762	13,109	5,317	1,749	787	661	55,385
2000	Gangs	204	107	43	32	16	5	407
	Members	36,071	13,186	5,377	1,728	808	190	57,360
Year		Hispanic	Crip	Blood	Asian	Stoner*	White	Total
1999	Gangs	204	107	43	32	16	5	407
	Members	38,554	15,137	6,032	2,028	867	164	62,782
1998	Gangs	205	107	43	32	16	5	408
	Members	35,025	13,848	5,661	1,847	792	101	57,274
1997	Gangs	204	107	43	32	16	5	407
	Members	39,991	15,415	5,532	2,048	752	691	64,429
1996	Gangs	204	106	43	32	16	5	406
	Members	38,895	14,771	5,292	1,973	729	640	62,300
1995	Gangs	203	105	43	31	16	5	403
	Members	36,508	13,906	4,941	1,767	705	532	58,359
1994	Gangs	202	104	42	29	16	5	398
	Members	32,886	12,905	4,580	1,628	685	439	53,123
1993	Gangs	208	109	45	35	17	4	418
	Members	35,865	16,450	5,494	2,428	739	387	61,362

Why Kids Join Gangs

Street gangs have big negative impact on the community. Criminal street gangs have become a serious problem in California and have been accountable for the largest threat to public safety. Gang related criminal activity terrorize the residents living in gang infested neighborhoods. Law enforcement agencies have been trying to help solve the gang problems in our communities for years. To help solve the gang problem in our communities, the community as a whole has to work closely with the local police to gather and share information to get better understanding of how gangs operate and the reasons that cause kids to join gangs.

Street gangs thrive in low income neighborhoods. Statistics show that minority communities were the reason why police organized a gang unit in response to gang related activity. The police department created a gang unit to show the public and media that they are doing an effort to solve the problems of local street gangs and gang related violence. The Gang Risk Intervention Program (GRIP), is a gang prevention and intervention project in the Los Angeles County school system that helps young kids stay away from the gang lifestyle. A survey showed that there are approximately 50,000 gang members in the Los Angeles County alone. Over 23,000 were reported violent gang crimes in the City of Los Angeles. Gangs have cost the state of California \$1 billion a year due to the financing of gang prevention, law enforcement, prosecution, jails, ect.

To help address the gang problem we must first understand the reasons why juveniles join gangs at a young age. You can start noticing the signs of a juvenile at risk

of joining a gang when they start getting themselves involved in delinquent behavior. Kids don't receive enough love at home so they seek for friendships and acceptance with gangs. They may feel safe and protected by joining their neighborhood gang. Kids feel that gangs give you respect and money. Some kids grow up with family members that are active gangsters and see it as part of the family tradition.

To help prevent juveniles from joining gangs, parents need to interact with their kids and educate them about the negative affects of gangs to keep them away from gangs. Law enforcement, schools and the community need to work closely to educate parents about the gang problem to prevent their kids from joining gangs. The community has to strengthen the communication with schools and families, supervise the community, offer training for teachers and parents to work with rebellious kids and most importantly teach kids build self- esteem and interpersonal skills in order for them to resist to peer-pressure of joining a gang.

This way the community can build gang prevention programs and intervention services to prevent our youth of today and the future go down the wrong path. By using these effective gang prevention programs we can help kids at risk stay away from gangs. We can no longer ignore the gang problem that is happening in our communities because we are all affected one way or another; therefore we must all work together and cooperate to help address this issue.

L.A. Gangs

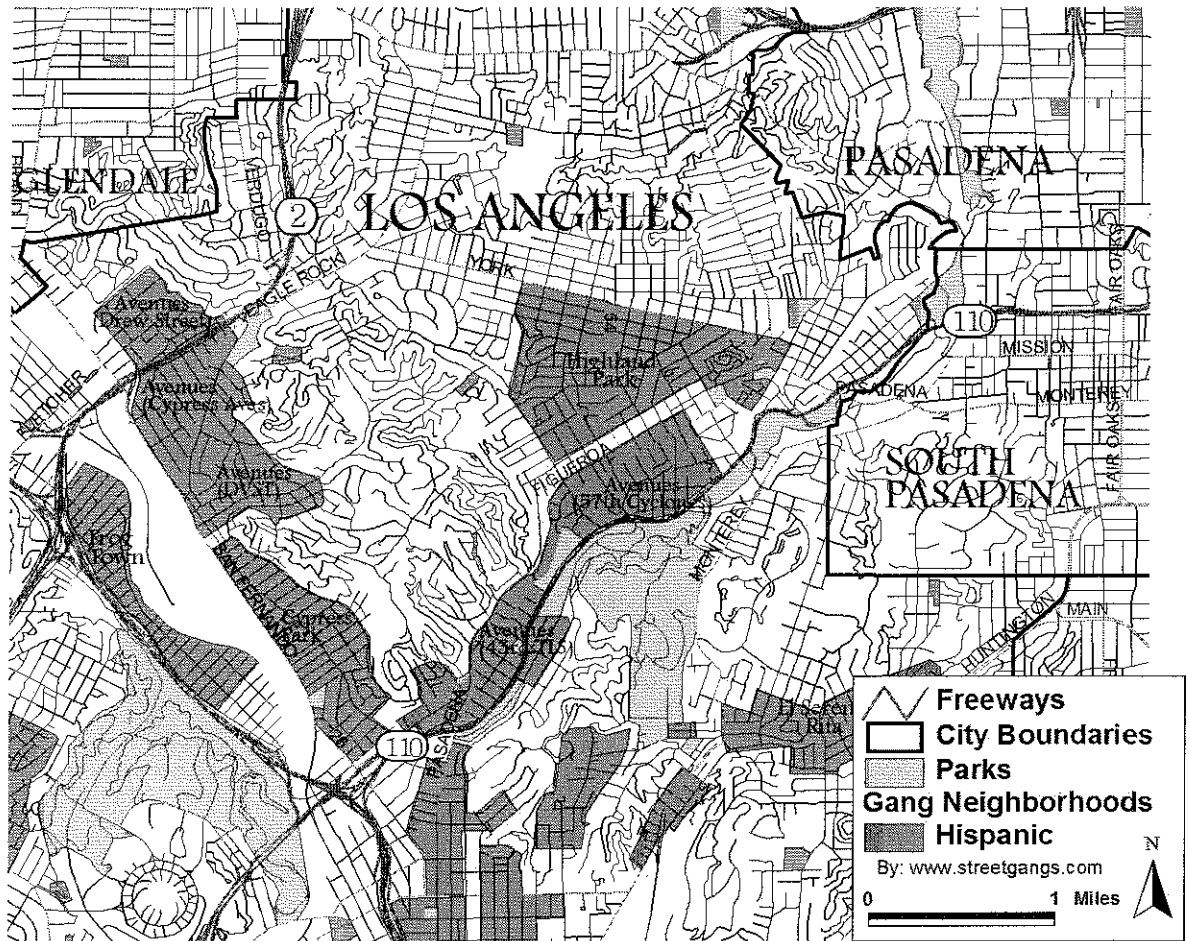
Los Angeles County is considered the gang capitol of the world. Los Angeles was the birth place of four of the largest and most dangerous gangs in the world, which are, Mara Salvatrucha (MS13), 18TH Street and the Crips.

The statistic chart shown below shows gang marked territory between 2 main black gangs in south Los Angeles, the Bloods and Crips. The chart is marked red for Blood territory and blue for Crip territory. It is clear that the Crips out number the Bloods.

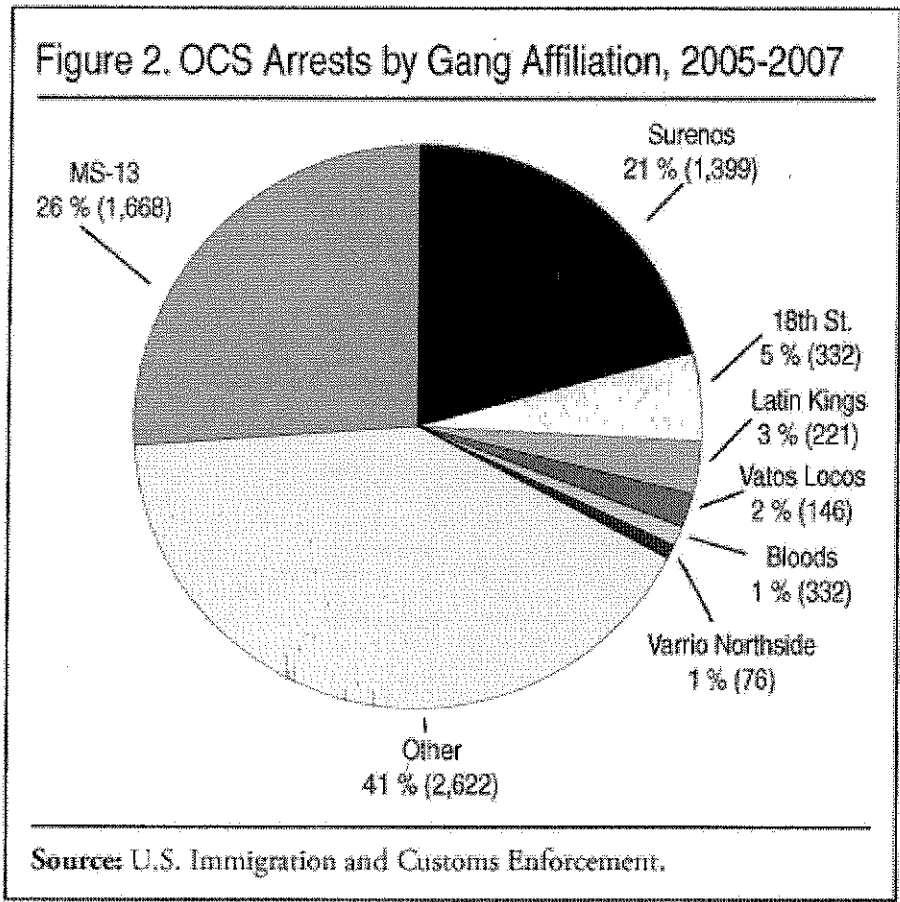
(Frank Jacobs, Gangs of L.A., Think Big, 2011)



This chart shown below shows the Hispanic gang territories in a Los Angeles.



This chart shows the gang affiliated members that were arrested in 2005-2007, including the gang they claimed. You can clearly see in the chart that MS-13 has the most gang members compared to other gangs around the United States.



How Gangs Impact the Community and businesses

Gang violence in the United States has been a big issue that the police and government have been trying to solve for years. There are approximately 1.4 million active street gangs, prison, and OMG gang members comprising more than 33,000 gangs in the United States (National Gang Threat Assessment, 2011). Gangs are a heavy financial burden on the community and businesses in the neighborhood. Businesses located in gang turf are impacted by the gang violence in the area. The total volume of crime is estimated to cost Americans \$655 billion each year (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2004). Because of gangs, small businesses lose customers due to the gang intimidation and are afraid to shop at the certain stores where gangs reside. There a huge loss of revenue for the businesses due to the violence, graffiti clean-up and theft. Gangs in the United States have long had a significant economic crime impact (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1997; Valdez, 2000).

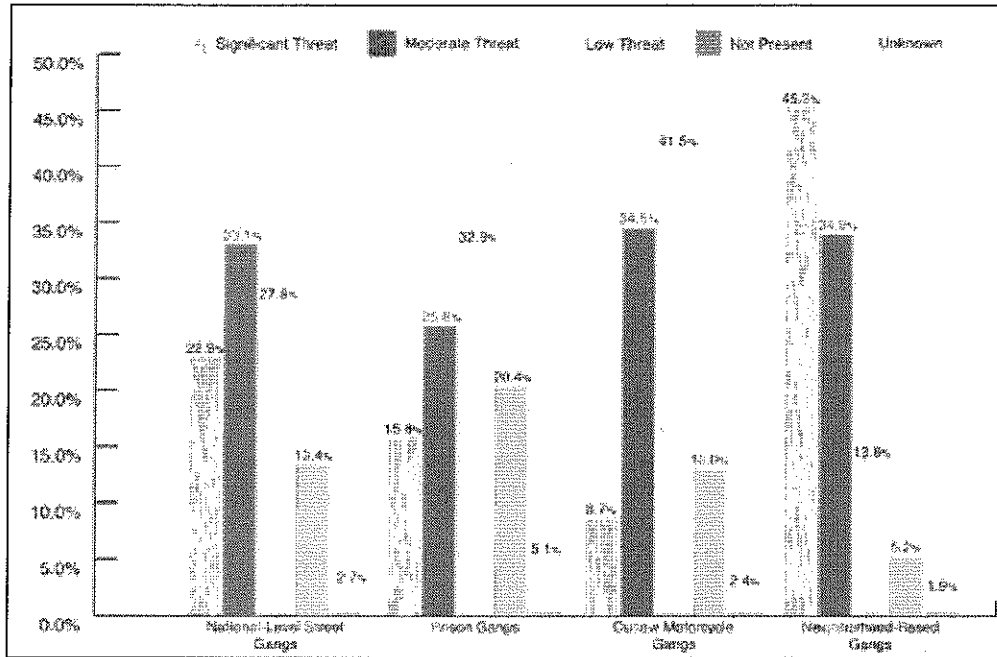
More prisoners are being released now than ever before due to over crowding. The problem with this is that most of the inmates released have a hard time adapting back to society and becoming a law abiding citizen. A modern estimate is that nearly 600,000 adult inmates arrive on the doorsteps of communities throughout the country each year (impact of Gang Violence on Businesses and Communities, 2011) (Petersilia, 2003, p. 3). Released felons are not prepared to face life back into society. The general public is affected and must find ways of training institutionalized felons before they are released in to society in order for them not to return to a life of crime.

Homeboy Industries is one of the programs in the city of Los Angeles that helps institutionalized criminals and gang ex-gang members get their lives together through job training, education and counseling. Homeboy Industries assists at-risk and former gang-

involved youth to become positive and contributing members of society through job placement, training, and education (<http://homeboy-industries.org>). The programs also offer tattoo removals to ex-gang members in order for them to have chance of starting a new life for themselves and their families.

Gangs are an economic and social problem that neighborhoods in Los Angeles face. To help resolve this issue we have to seek help from people in our community. Law enforcement, county, city and members of the community have to come together and create a plan on how we can help prevent the youth from joining gangs in the first place. We have to work as a crime prevention team in order for the community and the city of Los Angeles to become a safer place to live and youth to grow up in.

(National Gang Threat Assessment, 2011) Here you can see the threat level in each different section in gang street level, prison gangs, Outlaw motorcycle gangs, Neighborhood based gangs.



Recruiting

Gangs are starting to become more sophisticated and are starting to use social media to negatively influence the youth to join gangs, according to NGIC reports. Facebook, Youtube and Myspace are the main social networks used to communicate with other gang members, intimidate and promote their gang. According to NGIC reporting, gang recruitment and intimidation is heavily facilitated through the Internet. Gangs use social networking sites such as Facebook to promote their gang, post photos of their gang lifestyle, and display their bravado, which ultimately influences other youth to join gangs. Schools are also a primary place for gangs to recruit members into their gang.

Summary

Gangs have affected every community negatively in neighborhoods all over the United States for years and gangs will keep getting worse if we don't do anything to stop them from vandalizing our community. James Howell says "to prevent youth from joining a gang, communities must strengthen families and school, improve community supervision, train teachers and parents to manage disrupt youth and teach students interpersonal skills" (OJJDP, 2010). This concludes my research on the affects that gangs have on the community.

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