



Generalizing About Gangs and Gang Crime:

An Examination of Discontinuities in
Data Needs and Data Availability

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Official Data on Gang Crime

- Official data
 - Uniform Crime Reports
 - Supplemental Homicide Report
 - National Incident Based Reporting System
 - Municipal and County Level data collection
 - Ex. Chicago PD and LAPD

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Perceptions of Law Enforcement Personnel

- Survey Data
 - National Youth Gang Survey
 - Nationally representative sample of agencies
 - 24,000 youth gangs
 - 760,000 gang members
 - National Gang Threat Assessment
 - Non-representative sample of agencies
 - 1600 prison gangs
 - 113,000 gang-involved inmates
 - 250 outlaw motorcycle gangs
 - Self-report offender surveys
 - Gang membership increases the seriousness and longevity of criminal careers
 - Gang members are more involved in crime than their non-gang counterparts

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Guiding Questions

- To what extent is survey data useful for describing the nature and extent of local gang problems?
 - What do local criminal justice system actors know about gangs, gang members, and the crimes attributable to this population?
 - Are there differences in personnel knowledge for agencies with gang units versus those that do not have a special group assigned to monitor gang activity?

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Current Study Design

- **Research Objectives**

To identify how NM law enforcement personnel:

- Perceive the nature and extent of the gang problem in the state
- Collect information on gangs, gang members, and gang crime within their agencies
- Identify resources available for combating the gang crime problem in their jurisdictions
- Identify how they think the state should prioritize future anti-gang activities

- **Survey Instrument**

- Adapted from prior national and local level surveys and converted to a web-based format

- **Sampling Strategy**

- All known municipal, county, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies
- District and federal prosecutors
- Individual law enforcement agents

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Respondents by agency type and jurisdiction level

	N	%
<i>Agency Type</i>		
Law Enforcement	117	70.1
Prosecution	15	9
Corrections	35	20.9
Total	167	100
<i>Jurisdiction Level</i>		
County	25	15
Municipal	48	28.7
State	47	28.1
Tribal	5	3
District	13	7.8
Federal	29	17.4
Total	167	100

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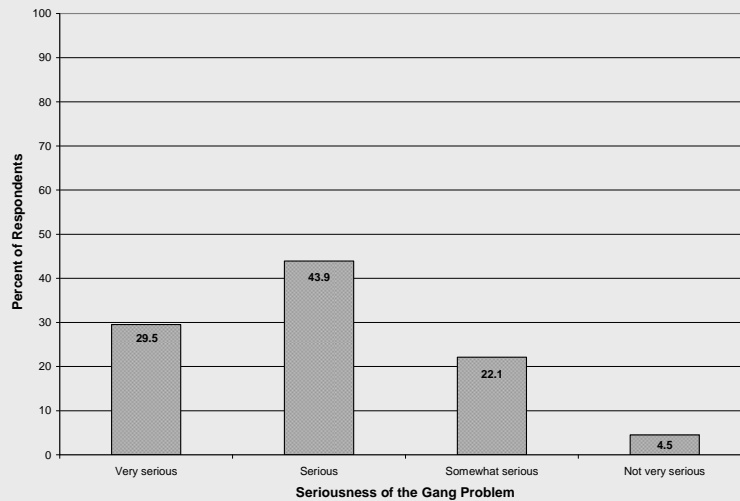
Perceptions of Problems and Solutions

- Respondents easily answered questions that asked directly for their “perception” of gang activity in their jurisdiction.



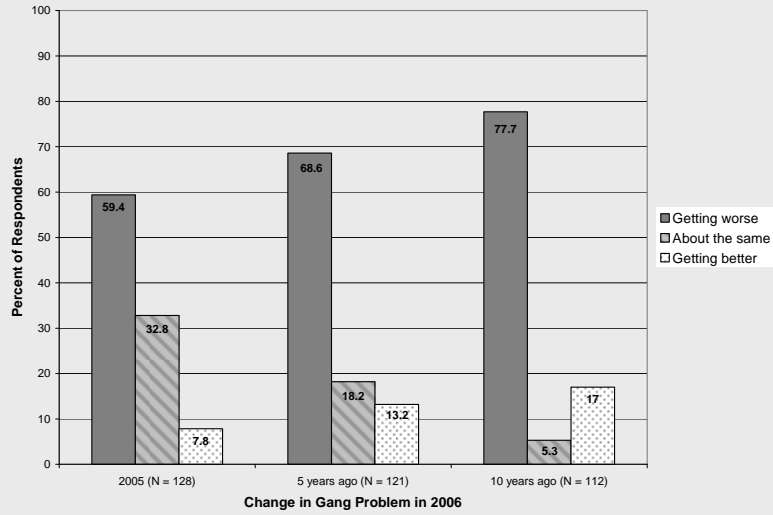
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Perceived seriousness of the gang problem (N = 132)



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Changes in the extent of the gang problem



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% reporting state policy priority in top three

State Priority	% reporting priority in top 3
Legislation that enhances penalties for gang-motivated/gang-related crimes	69.6
Funding for more specialized gang units within law enforcement agencies	48.8
Legislation that provide penalties for those who try to recruit individuals to join a gang	33.6
Funding for more youth gang intervention/prevention programs	32.8
Better intelligence sharing across agencies	32
Training on gang identification, gang trends, and/or gang investigations	28
Funding for more gang prosecution	20
Better data on gang activity, locally and statewide	16
Training on officer safety	10.4
Other	4.8
N	125

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Enumerating the Problem

- While respondents report that the gang problem is serious and getting worse, they are for the most part unable to reliably estimate the extent of the gang problem.
 - Number of gangs
 - Number of gang members
 - Proportion of crime attributable to gangs



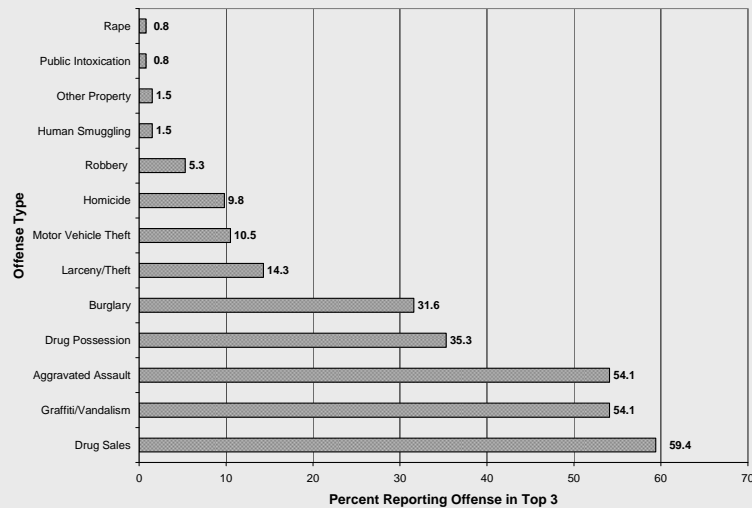
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Estimated number of gangs in jurisdiction by county population size

	N	Minimum	Average # of Gangs	Maximum
Less than 50,000	13	2	7	30
50,001 to 100,000	12	2	16	84
100,001 to 200,000	13	2	15	40
Greater than 200,000	8	8	182	500

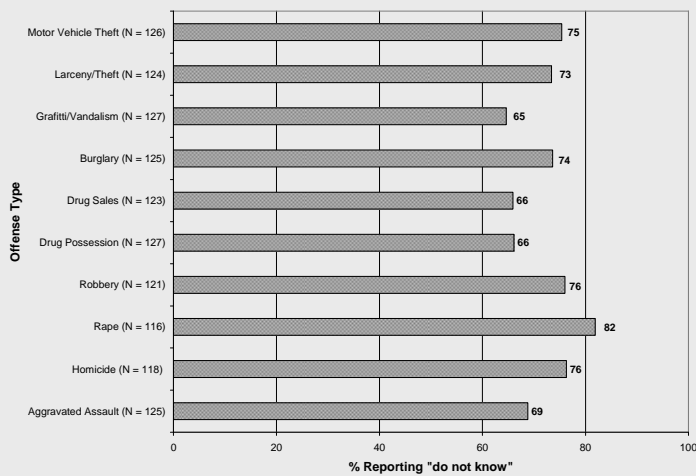
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Offenses ranked in the top 3 most frequently committed by gang members (N = 133)



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% reporting that they "do not know" how much crime is attributable to gang activity



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Gang Unit and Respondent Knowledge

% reporting agency collects intelligence and/or tracks gang crime by presence of gang unit

	% Collecting intelligence	% Tracking gang crime
Gang Unit	93 (N=45)	72 (N=43)
No Gang Unit	60 (N=84)	50 (N=80)
χ^2	16.375 (df = 1, p = .000)	5.594 (df = 1, p = .018)

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Data Needs

Prior research has shown that more data is needed:

- Evaluating prevention and intervention strategies
 - Official incident level data is needed to track changes in the occurrence of gang crime
 - Consistent definition and collection procedures will be necessary for measuring gang crime
- Local gang data collection strategies need to move beyond intelligence gathering

The current research evidences the need for official data collection strategies:

- Personnel perceptions are unreliable for estimating the presence and composition of gangs as well as the extent and nature of gang crime

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