


**US Latino Youth Street Gangs: Prevention and Intervention Strategies for Service Providers (Part 1)**

SMH 2019 Winter Symposium  
Pasadena, TX

*J Rocky Romero, PhD, LMSW  
National Trainer and Consultant  
NHL-MHTTC*



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**Introduction**

- Growth of street gangs in the U.S. calls for a comprehensive strategy to deal with the problem.
- Understanding gangs requires knowledge of heterogeneity of Hispanic/Latino population, immigration, and transnational processes.
- Course focuses on Hispanic/Latino youth street gangs in the U.S.
- Course explores the growth of Hispanic/Latino communities and the risk for youth street gangs.



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**Learning objectives**

- Discuss the negative consequences associated with streets gangs.
- Include latest science-based research on U.S. Hispanic/Latino youth street gangs.

Also...

- Recognize the importance of assessing for ACEs:  
A-Adverse  
C-Childhood  
E-Experiences
- Also, *The New Jim Crow* by Alexander (2010) provides a contemporary view of structural impacts of profiling young people of color



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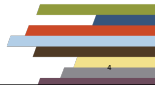
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### Definition of a Gang

A Youth Street Gang has been defined as an identifiable group of youngsters who:

- (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others
- (b) recognize themselves as a street identifiable group (almost invariably with a group name)

*(Reference: Klein 1971; Klein and Maxson 2006)*




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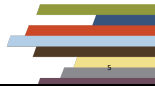
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### Definition of a Gang (cont.)

(c) have been involved in a sufficient number of **behavioral** incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or law enforcement agencies.

*(Reference: Klein 1971; Klein and Maxson 2006)*




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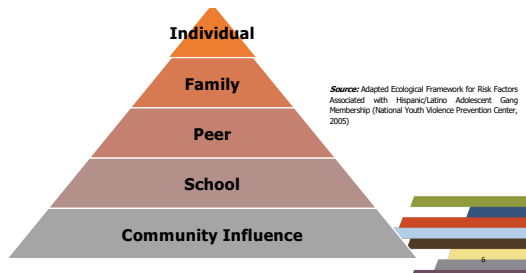
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### Who is Likely to Join a Gang?

Risk factors associated with adolescents joining Hispanic/Latino gangs are organized into five categories adapted from the ecological framework:



Source: Adapted Ecological Framework for Risk Factors Associated with Hispanic/Latino Adolescent Gang Membership (National Youth Violence Prevention Center, 2005)




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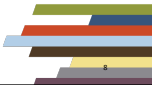
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### Individual Level Risk Factors

<b>Prior Delinquency</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early onset of delinquency including theft, burglary, fighting and destruction of property.</li> </ul>	<b>Alcohol/Drug Use</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early onset of substance use including alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, etc.</li> </ul>	<b>Antisocial Problem Behaviors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History of aggression, violence, depression, rebelliousness, early risky sexual behavior and other risk taking behaviors.</li> </ul>	<b>Childhood Trauma</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History of childhood maltreatment or abuse including sexual, physical and emotional.</li> </ul>
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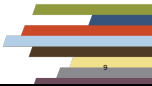
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### Family Level Risk Factors

The role of the family has been an important predictor in understanding adolescents association with street gangs.

- Two types of family risk factors have been identified as contributing to gang membership among Hispanic/Latino adolescents – family structure and family process characteristics.




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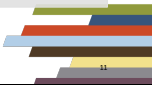
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### Family Level Risk Factors

<b>Family Structure Instability/Disorganization</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family structure (single vs. two parent households) instability or disorganization characterized by divorce and lack of adult pro-social role models</li> </ul>	<b>"Cholo" Family</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multigenerational familial involvement in gangs, substance use, illegal activities, arrests and incarceration</li> </ul>	<b>Problematic Parent/Child Relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor affective relationships, parent/child conflict, inconsistent discipline, and low parental supervision; often aggravated in Hispanic/Latino immigrant families with children being socialized in the U.S.</li> </ul>
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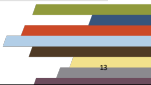
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### Peer Level Risk Factors

<b>Negative Peer Influences</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Association with peers involved in antisocial behavior including school truancy, gang activity, substance use, and delinquent behavior.</li></ul>	<b>Street Socialization</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• History of early association to deviant non-family member subcultures (i.e. adult criminals, drug sellers, thieves, etc.).</li></ul>	<b>Peer Network</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Primary interaction with delinquent peers versus conventional friends..</li></ul>
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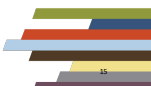
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### School Level Risk Factors

<b>Lack of School Commitment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evidence of adolescent showing no interest in school and/or lack of educational aspiration.</li></ul>	<b>Problematic Behavior at School</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Patterns of truancy, fighting, teacher conflict and other antisocial behavior during school.</li></ul>	<b>Academic Failure</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evidence of failing academic subject matters as demonstrated by grades.</li></ul>
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### Community Level Risk Factors

<b>Social Disorganization</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presence of high crime and violence rates, established drug market, poverty, and other underclass characteristics</li></ul>	<b>Lack of Social Capital</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Absence of community cohesion in the form of social control and trust by members of the community and respective institutions (i.e. church, community based agencies).</li></ul>	<b>Social Isolation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poor communities that are relatively similar in immigrant status and social class (i.e. income, job status). Often middle class minorities have moved outside the barrio.</li></ul>
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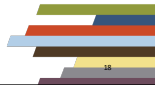
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### Identifying Street Gangs

- Identifying gang members on the street can be challenging.
- Law enforcement, educational institutions, and social service agencies and others use varying characteristics in defining and identifying gangs and gang members.
- Hispanic/Latino youth often are mistaken for gang members.
- For Latino youth this creates atmosphere of fear and intimidation among youth.
- BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT PROFILING....




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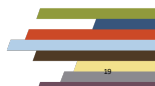
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### Racial and Ethnic Group Gangs

- Most gangs tend to be racially and ethnically homogenous (*Starbuck, Howell, & Lindquist, 2001*).
- Ethnic minority gangs emerge in communities with high unemployment, poverty, welfare dependency, single headed households and other socioeconomic characteristics.
- Hispanic/Latino racial and ethnic group gangs reflect differences in region, economic situation, social status, immigration status, generations and cultural characteristics.




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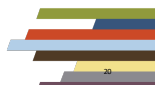
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### Overview of Hispanic/Latino Gangs

One of the most important dimensions in considering the different types of Hispanic/Latino gangs is ethnicity.

Mexican American Gangs	Puerto Rican Gangs	Central American Gangs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Southwest/Border region</li> <li>• Multi-generational "cholo" family based</li> <li>• Neighborhood/Territorial based networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northeastern / Midwest region</li> <li>• Urban areas experienced de-industrialization</li> <li>• Circular Migration (Mainland – Island)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Southwest (LA, Houston)/East Coast</li> <li>• Multiethnic Urban/ Suburban regions</li> <li>• Transnational Activity</li> </ul>




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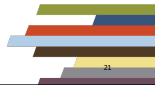
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### Differences in Hispanic Street Gangs

- Stereotypical images and stories are abound in the public media.
- Street gangs engage in fighting for various reasons such as territory, prestige, honor and females. Their violence may largely be related to expressive reasons.
- Drug gangs are characterized by their engagement in drug dealing and trafficking. Their violence is basically related to instrumental functions such as enforcement of market advantages and the collection of debts.



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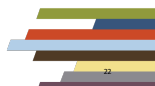
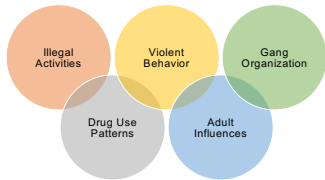
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### Understanding Variations in Hispanic/Latino Gangs

According to Valdez (2006) gangs vary in their composition on five key characteristics:



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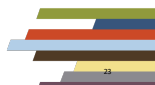
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### Illegal Activities

- Gangs frequently participate in various criminal activities including drug dealing, auto theft, burglary, carjacking, robbery, fencing, and weapon sales.
- Gangs differ on the basis of whether the illegal activities are controlled by the gang as an organization or more on an individual or clique basis.



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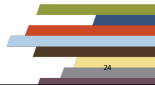
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### **Gang Organization**

The gang organizational structure is based on type of leadership hierarchy, and rules among gangs. The type of leadership may vary from those gangs that have a very diffused to a highly structured leadership (Jankowski, 1991).



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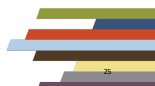
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### **Drug use patterns**

- Gang members reportedly have exceptionally high rates of lifetime use of most controlled substances (Thornberry & Krohn, 1993; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003).
- Gang members differ on current use patterns by frequency and type of drug. There is little variation among gangs on marijuana and alcohol use.



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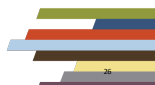
### **Violence**

Violence has been long noted as a distinguishing characteristic of gangs (Yablonsky, 1962).

Violent incidents can be differentiated into purposeful versus random (personal) acts.

Purposeful violence refers to that which is planned or premeditated.

Other acts of violence tend to be more spontaneous and gratuitous, often centered on perceived acts of disrespect.



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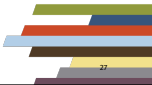
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**Adult Influences**

The level of dependence on adults influences the nature of a gang's illegal activities and organization.

Gangs that are closely associated with adults usually display higher levels of organization and sophistication with regards to criminality.

These gangs tend to be organized more as criminal enterprises than as groups **with behavioral issues**.



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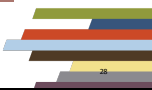
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**Typology of Hispanic/Latino Gangs**

On the basis of these dimensions a four-fold typology of Hispanic/Latino gangs is proposed:

Criminal Adult Dependent	Criminal Non-Adult Dependent
Transitional	Barrio Territorial



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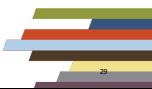
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**Typology of Hispanic/Latino Gangs**

**Criminal-Adult Dependent Gangs**

Adults provide access to illegal drugs, weapons, drug dealing networks, and national and international markets for stolen merchandise and protection against rival gang members and adult criminals.



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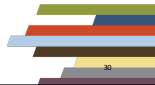
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### **Typology of Hispanic/Latino Gangs**

#### **Criminal Non-Adult Gangs**

Similar in organizational structure to the criminal-adult dependent gangs. They differ from the previous type in that they are more loosely knit with a flexible leadership structure and not as influenced by adults. Involved in more independent and personal (non-adult dependent) illegal activities such as drug dealing, stolen cars, robberies and car-jacking).



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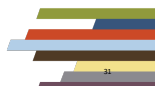
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### **Typology of Hispanic/Latino Gangs**

#### **Barrio-Territorial Gangs**

Traditional and territory-based, obtaining its identity from association with a specific neighborhood or small urban area (public housing). This association has often gone on for generations and involves intergenerational linkages within families. It is not as hierarchical as other types of gangs. Beginning to appear in suburban areas.



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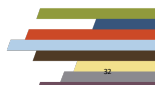
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### **Typology of Hispanic/Latino Gangs**

#### **Transitional Gangs**

Characterized by its trajectory and movement, sometimes growing in membership and reputation, and at times disintegrating. Sometimes they are a temporary phenomenon. Normally smaller than other types of gangs and not as organized, with a fluid hierarchy and leadership structure. Often, the gang centers on a charismatic leader.



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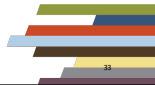
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**Prison Gangs and Hispanic/Latino Street Gangs**

- Traditionally, youth street gang and the prison gang have been quite separate entities.
- Street gang members are perceived as too emotional and undisciplined to warrant recruitment by a prison gang until they were incarcerated.
- Even when incarcerated, street gang members tended to sustain their identification with their gangs and even resist prison gangs by keeping true to their geographical loyalties and animosities.



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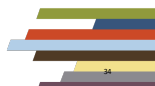
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**Prison Gangs and Hispanic/Latino Street Gangs**

- As more and more gang members are incarcerated the traditional relationships between prison and youth street gangs is changing.
- The alliance of youth street gangs and prison gangs is exacerbated by formerly incarcerated Hispanic/Latinos returning to their communities.



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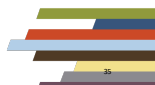
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**Summary – Gang Types**

- Majority of the gangs are involved in illegal activities such as theft, drug dealing and violence; and are more likely to use violence than in the past. The gang's organizational hierarchy varies depending on the need for such a structure.
- Social change engendered by globalization and the process of acculturation of Hispanic/Latinos, seems to erode traditional intergenerational ties that provided some modicum of social support as well as stimulating ever more severe variants of urban street gang violence (Vigil, 2003).



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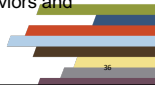
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### **Gang Member Demographics & Psychosocial Profiles**

- The development of a portrait of existing Hispanic/Latino gang member demographics and psychosocial characteristics is a challenging task.
- While Hispanic/Latino gang member demographic characteristics tend to be rather uniform, the psychosocial characteristics of Hispanic/Latino gang members show a greater variation.
- The psychosocial profiles of Hispanic/Latino gang members range from normal to extreme behaviors and personalities.



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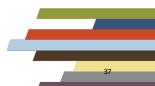
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### **Hispanic Gang Members Demographics**

- Up-to-date gang member demographic data broken by ethnicity are difficult to obtain outside of selected samples drawn from limited studies.



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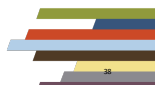
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### **Hispanic Gang Members Demographics**

- On the national level, data from the annual National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS) is perhaps the most useful data source, but their data is limited to law enforcement estimates and does not actually interview a representative sample of gang youth.
- Law enforcement databases tends to overestimate the number of gangs and gang members compared to the perspectives of the gang members themselves.



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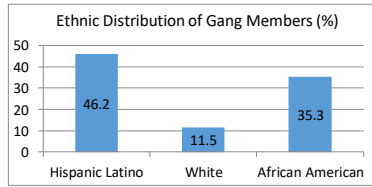
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### Hispanic Gang Members Demographics

The 2011 NYGS concluded that that Hispanic/Latinos and African Americans constituted the majority of gang members. (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2011)




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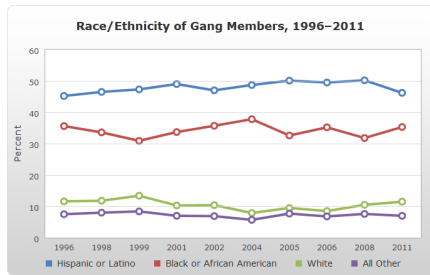
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### Hispanic Gang Members Demographics



Source: National Youth Gang Center (2011). *National Youth Gang Survey Analysis*. Retrieved [date] from <https://www.nationalyouthgangcenter.org/Survey-Analysis/Demographics>

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### Hispanic Gang Members Demographics

**Gender:** Hispanic gang members, as with other ethnic groups, are predominantly males (93%). The percentage of youth self-identifying as gang members who are female has been reported to range from 8 to 38 percent.

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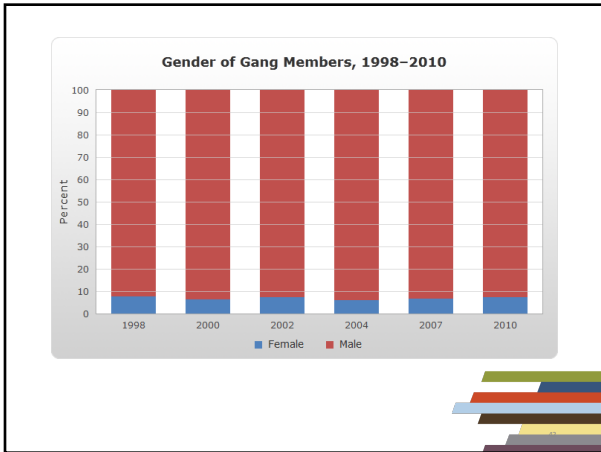
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**Hispanic Gang Members Demographics**

**Age:** The trend on age distribution among gangs has been changing from 1996 through 2011. In 1996 there was an even split in gangs between juveniles (i.e. under 18) and young adults (over 18). By 2011, the percentage of young adults was 35 percent. For Hispanic gangs, these distributions seem to be similar.

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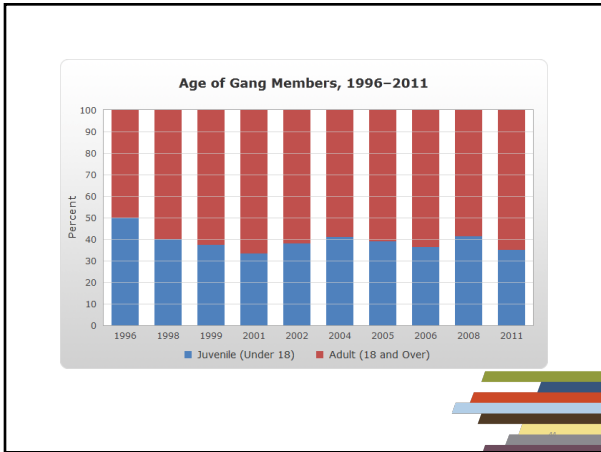
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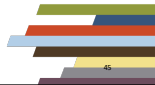
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### Hispanic Gang Members Demographics

**Urban versus Suburb:** Hispanic/Latino gangs have been largely an urban phenomenon until recently; are now spreading from larger cities (45.%) to suburban areas (51.0%) and smaller cities (53.8%) at seemingly the same proportion as the national averages.

**Migration:** The increasing migration of Hispanic gang members that follow the pathways. The general Hispanic/Latino population in the U.S. is also changing the traditional concentration of Hispanic gangs in specific regions of the country (Vigil, 2001).



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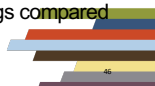
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### Social Profile of Hispanic Gang Members

**Criminal Behavior:** Gang members, in contrast to other youth dealing with behavioral issues, engage in exceptionally high levels of criminally-related behavior. Gang members report participation in various other criminal activities including drug selling and dealing, burglary, auto theft, car-jacking, robbery, fencing and weapon sales (Valdez, 2003).

**Drug Use:** Gang members engage in exceptionally high levels of lifetime and current use of illicit drugs compared to other youth.



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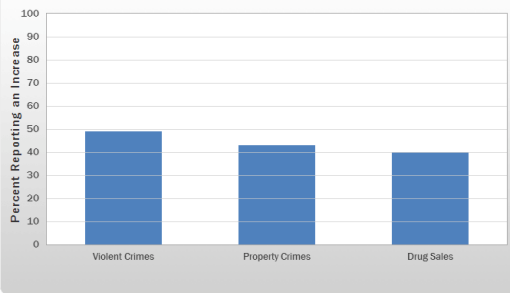
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Gang-Related Crime, 2011 to 2012



Violent Crimes	48.9%
Property Crimes	42.9%
Drug Sales	39.9%



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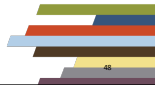
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### Social Profile of Hispanic Gang Members

**School Dropout:** School dropout rates among gang members are disproportionately high when compared to other youth. These rates are a direct consequence of the "precocious transitions"- untimely and disorderly life course transitions.



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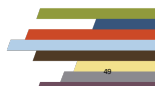
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48

### Social Profile of Hispanic Gang Members

**Street-Oriented Family:** Certain family characteristics such as involvement in illegal activities, drug use in household, incarceration histories, and neglected parental supervision among Hispanic/Latinos are an integral part of the social profile of gang members. This is understandable in light of the strong cultural influence of familismo on Hispanic/Latino identity and orientation.



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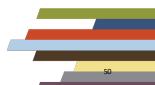
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### Psychological Profile of Hispanic Gang Members

- The psychological differences between **gang involved youth, youth dealing with mental health issues, and conventional youth** must be explored and considered.
- Researchers have concluded that gang members are: socially inept, have lower self-esteem, less committed to school, engaged in more risk-seeking behavior, have sociopathic characteristics, have lower communication levels with their parents, and impulsive.



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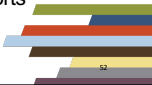
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50

**Young Females and Male Gang Members**

- Gang affiliated females connected to male street based youth gangs are highly vulnerable to specific risk factors including violence, drug use, and sexual risk behavior.
- Young females embedded in gangs are especially susceptible to distinct forms of dating violence
- Other female-specific risk factors include risk-seeking behaviors, lower school commitment, fewer pro-social peers, lower involvement in community sports activities, and less attachment to teachers.




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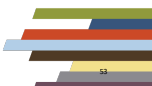
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**Young Females and Male Gang Members**

- In regards to working with females, strategies are slightly different than for males reflecting their different social position and organization.
- Entry to female participants is through boyfriends, family members and male gang members. This is important because different strategies from males may need to be used for these females.




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**OJJDP (2010)  
Juvenile Justice Bulletin:  
Promising and Effective Programs for  
Gang Prevention**

Programs are scored on the following:

- Soundness/clarity of the program's framework,
- Program fidelity ( i.e., adherence to original program operational guidelines.
- The strength of the evaluation's design.
- The empirical evidence demonstrating that the program prevents or reduces problem behaviors.




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**OJJDP (2010)  
Juvenile Justice Bulletin:  
Promising and Effective Programs  
for Gang Prevention**

Scores promising programs on three levels:

Level 1: program has been scientifically proven to prevent delinquency, reduce risk...high quality research design.

Level 2: program has all the same aspects as level 1 but provides a more experimental or quasi-experimental component.

Level 3: program displays a strong theoretical base, and have proven to reduce delinquency, etc.




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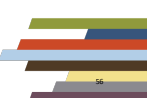
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**Summary – Demographics, Social and Psychological Profiles**

Gang members :

- Tend to be young (average age 18 years) and uneducated males.
- Commit crimes at a significantly higher rate than non-gang **members**.
- Engage in violence and excessive drug use.
- Tend to have more deleterious social and psychological profiles.




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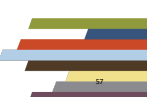
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**Summary – Demographics, Social and Psychological Profiles**

- Key characteristic associated with street oriented family backgrounds.
- Trend to be dispersed from larger inner city areas to suburbs, smaller cities and rural areas.
- Transnational migration patterns are observed especially in the proliferation of Central American gangs.




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**Typology Identification: Group Exercise**

- Break into 4 groups
- Each group is assigned one typology
- Each group identify the different gangs (groups) that could be identified by these typologies in your community.
- Discuss as larger group and identify: similarities, trends, and needed resources.



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