

Pennsylvania Youth Gang Data Project



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Goals

■ Intended Outcomes

- Create statewide standard for definitions and criteria concerning gang activity/gang involvement;
- Foster open lines of communication among schools, law enforcement and local, state and federal agencies;
- Develop a statewide clearinghouse for gang information and resources;
- Educate schools and communities on Pennsylvania youth gangs;

Overview of Project

- Literature review on best practices
- Comparative analysis of existing Pennsylvania youth gang assessment processes and tools through surveying:
 - Police Departments
 - School Districts
 - County Juvenile Probation/Parole
 - Juvenile Detention Facilities
- Identify gaps and make recommendations

Task I: Review of the Literature

- Over 30 publications were identified and collected by the research staff;
- Types of information collected:
 - Extent and nature of gang-related activities in local schools;
 - Information about how other geographical locations have monitored and/or tracked these activities; and
 - Identification of any tracking/monitoring tools currently being used in these other locations.

Nexus Between the Literature and the Present Study

- To better illuminate for the Center the extent and nature of gang-related activities in public schools in order to “know what to ask” of the four study populations; and
- To assist the Center in developing a set of monitoring and/or tracking tools to be used across the Commonwealth.

OJJDP Data on Youth Gangs in Schools 2000

- Gang problem exists in elementary and secondary schools;
- Of students who reported a gang presence: 12% witnessed the carrying of guns by perceived gang members;
- Of students who reported a gang presence: 35% witnessed drug use and dealing associated with gangs;
- Gang characteristics as perceived by students: violence 50%, tagging/marking 56%, gang clothing 71%, gang name 80%;
- Perceived gang presence increases with student age; and
- Low income (less than \$7,500) students reported more of a gang presence than did their higher income counterparts;

The Youth Gangs Problem (Spergel 1995)

- Gang members are likely to be dropouts, behind in schoolwork, and to have been suspended;
- Gangs see schools as a place to “hang out”;
- School variables such as attendance, achievement, student satisfaction and educational climate can predict gang membership; and
- Teachers, school resources for students, the way the school is “run,” and the school’s basic “physiological climate” can inhibit gang presence.

Confronting Gangs: Crime & Community (Curry & Decker 1998)

- Most gang members share their time with normal institutions (example: schools);
- Gangs in school are due to a lack of control of students by school officials;
- About 2/3 of gang members dropout of school;
- Schools do not interest gang members;
- Schools suspend students and this forces them out to the streets;
- Gang members oppose school norms and ideals; and
- Harsh treatment toward all students to deter gangs caused an overall problem for one Chicago area school.

Task II: Surveys of Four Key Populations

- **Step one: Human Subjects Review through Penn State's Office of Research Protections;**
- **Step two: Development of study protocols;**
- **Step three: Administer the surveys using Dillman's total design method;**
- **Step four: Track response rate, data coding and entry;**
- **Step five: Data analysis;**
- **Step six: Report writing with conclusions; and**
- **Step seven: Oral presentation of major findings to the Center staff.**

Major Research Questions

- What areas of data collection on youth gang characteristics and activities are currently in place in Pennsylvania?
- What is the quality of these data collection efforts?
- What do we know about the extent and the nature of school-based gang activities across the Commonwealth?

Target Populations

- Approximately 1,400 police departments located throughout Pennsylvania;
- 501 local school districts in PA;
- Chief Juvenile Probation Officers in PA counties; and
- Directors of juvenile corrections and/detention facilities in PA (approximately 25 units).

Study Protocols

- Letter of introduction by key stakeholder stating the importance of the study with instructions for participation;
- Implied consent form (required by PSU's Office of Research Protections);
- The questionnaires; and
- Reminder notices.

Questionnaire Development

- Shared with all members of the Advisory Board and staff of the Center.
- Many of the questions drawn from the literature.
- All questionnaires revised with final copies forwarded to PSU's Office of Research Protections.

Implied Informed Consent Forms

- Constructed using templates from PSU's Office of Research Protections.
- Forwarded to all sponsoring parties for inclusion in study packets.

Administering the Surveys

- Chiefs of Police – June, 2006 (Population = 1412)
- Chief Juvenile Probation Officers – June, 2006 (Population = 67)
- School Districts – June, 2006 (Population = 501)

Sponsoring Entities...

- PA Chiefs of Police (Internet survey and mail survey).
- Juvenile Court Judges' Commission (mail survey).
- Center for Schools and Communities (web-based survey and mail survey).

Responses to date....

- Police Chiefs – N = 210; Response rate = 23%
- JPO's – N = 65; Response rate = 97%
- School Districts – N = 221; Response rate = 44%

Preliminary Findings from the Police Department Survey

- Only three departments report having a separate and dedicated gang unit.
- Fifty-five (26%) departments say that they have someone who is specifically tasked with documenting gang-related activities.
- Forty (20%) departments report having a data collection, monitoring or tracking tool used to compile gang-related activities.
 - Field incident or reporting form most likely response followed by a computer software program (fifteen departments).

Preliminary Findings from the Police Survey (Continued)

- Twenty seven departments said they would be willing to share these tracking tools with the Advisory Board.
- Only two department said they have a written policy in place and are willing to share that with the Advisory Board.

Preliminary Findings from the Police Survey (Continued)

- 78% of departments report that they either “sometimes” or “routinely” work with officials to deal with gang-related activities on school property.
- A majority of departments say that neither male nor female gang-related activities on school property or at school events are a problem.
- Two departments responded “a major problem” when asked that question and about male and female activity.

Steps taken by police departments...

- Thirty six departments (17%) report increasing patrol around schools because of gang-related activities.
- Thirty departments (14%) report having increased interactions and/or collaboration with school truancy officers because of gang-related activities.

Preliminary Findings from the Chief JPO Survey

- 81% of JPOs say that they place officers in the local schools.
- Only one agency reported having a separate and dedicated gang unit.
- Ten said they have a person who is specifically tasked with documenting gang-related activities.

Continued...JPO Survey

- Only nine units report having a data collection, monitoring, or tracking tool.
- More likely to be a reporting form, but two agencies report having a software program.
- Eight agencies said they would be willing to share what they have with the Advisory Board.

Continued...JPO Survey

- No agency reported having a written policy that addresses how to handle school-related gang activities.
- 27 (42%) agencies report not having any real collaboration with local school officials; 27 (42%) report occasional collaboration and ten (15%) say they routinely collaborate with school officials to deal with gang-related activities on school property.

Continued...JPO Survey

- 25 (38%) agencies report having no real interaction with local police about this issue.
- 28 (43%) agencies “occasionally” collaborate with the local police.
- 11 (17%) agencies “routinely” collaborate with local police about gang-related activities within the local schools.

Continued...JPO Survey

- Only three agencies report male gang-related activities in local schools as a “major problem.”
- One agency reports female gang-related activities as a “major problem.”
- 24 (37%) agencies report male and 14 agencies report female gang-related problems in local schools as “somewhat of a problem.”

JPOs Response to School-Based Gang Behaviors

- Only seven (11%) agencies say they have increased collaboration with local truancy officers.
- 18 (28%) say they have increased collaboration with SROs.
- Three agencies have implemented conflict resolution programming because of gang behaviors.
- Only two agencies have developed and implemented a gang intervention program in their county.

Preliminary Findings from School District Surveys

- Two districts report having a separate and dedicated gang unit.
- 47 (21%) districts report having someone who is specifically tasked with documenting gang-related activities.

Continued...School Districts

- Forty seven (21%) districts say they have some type of data collection tool.
- Forty (18%) report having a reporting form; eleven a computer software program.
- 10% of school districts report having a written policy in place and half are willing to share a copy of that with the Advisory Board.

Continued...School Districts

- 36% of school districts say there is no real interaction between school officials and local police.
- 30% say they “occasionally” collaborate.
- 33% report “routinely” collaborating with local police.

Continued...School Districts

- Only 5% report that male gang-related activities are a serious problem and 16% report this as a moderate problem.
- No districts say that female gang-related activities are a serious problem but 9% do report this as a moderate problem.

Continued...School Districts

- 30% (61 districts) have developed special security measures.
- 14% have increased their efforts to combat truancy.
- 137 (62%) have developed conflict resolution programming and 14 of these have a component specifically related to gang-related activities.
- Eleven districts have implemented a gang intervention program.
- 95 (43%) districts have developed a dress code.

Continued...School Districts

- 40% of school districts say that as a general policy they would expel those students who have been found to have engaged in gang-related behaviors.
- About 65% of school districts said that they use both a “zero tolerance” approach to combating gang activities along with placing children in special programs.

Conclusions

- Across all three populations (police, juvenile probation agencies, and school districts), there is some effort being made to track school-based gang activities.
- These tracking tools are primarily in hard copy format (reporting form or field incident report);
- Some software programs are in existence;

Conclusions...continued

- The tracking tools that are in existence will need to be collected from those respondents who said they would make them available to the research team;
- The tools will then be evaluated regarding their usefulness to the Center;
- The Center will develop a tracking tool that can be used by key stakeholders and perhaps standardize data collection;

Conclusions...continued

- Lack of congruence between what the police say about interactions with school officials and what school officials say about that interaction;
- Clearly, the police do not see a problem, yet 36 departments report increasing patrols;
- About a third of probation departments report gang activities associated with local schools, but the majority report very little collaboration with school officials about this problem;
- Very few school districts report a problem with gang-related activities, yet 95 districts report instituting a dress code to curtail gang behaviors and 61 have implemented special security measures because of same;

Next Steps...

- Findings presented to the Advisory Board;
- Forensic discussion by the Advisory Board about how best to use the findings;
- Tracking tools identified by the research staff examined by the Center as to their usefulness;
- The Center will develop a tracking tool that can be used in the field and that could aid in more efficient measures of the extent and nature of gang-related activities in PA's public schools;
- Final report to Hamilton Fish;

If you have questions or would like additional information:



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