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Do You know the

Effects of

Violence

on your clients?

## **Gang-Related Violence**

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### **I. Introduction**

The urban poor are doubly at risk from gang violence. The poor are more likely to live in communities where they are the inadvertent or intentional victims of violence by gang members. As Joan Moore has noted, /1/ inevitable victims of gang violence include "innocent bystanders" as well as gang members. In addition, the poor are more likely to live where they are the inadvertent or intentional victims of the law enforcement response to gang-related violence. Responses to gang-related violence that focus on suppression strategies often adversely affect the quality of life of all members of a targeted community, gang members and nonmembers alike. /2/

Legal advocates must develop an understanding of the diversity of phenomena that fall under the rubric of gang violence in order to respond effectively to the challenges of gang violence. To assist in the development of such understanding, this article reviews what is known from research and available statistics on gangs and gang violence. In addition, this article reviews what can be learned and what cannot be learned from existing information about gangs in order to develop the responses that are required to deal effectively with the threats to public safety and quality of life associated with gang violence.

### **II. Images of Gangs**

The public's vision of the gang and its members is often overshadowed by the portrayals most available for mass consumption. In cinema, in the press, and in research, images of gangs have been transformed from sympathetic or even romantic to sinister and threatening. In *West Side Story*, gang members were portrayed as being typical of urban youth of the time. On the one hand were marginalized working class white youth of European descent; on the other young Puerto Ricans struggling with the twin trauma of rejection and assimilation. Decades later, *Warriors* followed a multicultural band of adventurers on a well-choreographed, though violence-plagued, romp across Manhattan. By the 1980s, though, *Colors* chronicled the tactical maneuvers of Crips, Bloods, and "homeboys" with only the Los Angeles Police Department's CRASH (Community

Response Against Street Hoodlums) unit to keep the killing in check. More recently, *American Me and Blood In, Blood Out* have shown an additional dimension of brutality -- the prison gangs that increasingly provide a cultural anchor and are a perpetuating source of institutionalized energy for younger street gang members.

While the transition in gang imagery from romantic to sinister is not as historically recent in social science research on gangs, it did occur. Frederic Thrasher, /3/ whose turn-of-the-century research on gangs in Chicago is still regarded by many as among the best research ever done on gangs, explicitly emphasized the "romantic" dimension of gang life. William F. Whyte's study /4/ of depression-era corner boys in Boston presented the object of his research, the Nortons, as pleasant, adventuresome, and searching for a future in uncertain times. By the 1950s and 1960s, however, gangs had become central to theories of delinquency. /5/ Gangs were considered a social problem, and gang-involved youth were perceived as needing social, and perhaps psychological, services. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was suggested that gang research had come to an end; /6/ what research continued portrayed gangs as violent and focused on the types of gangs considered most seriously criminal by law enforcement agencies. /7/ In the 1990s, there has been a resurgence in research on gangs including a minority of more sympathetic and romantic treatments. Joan Moore and John Hagedorn /8/ have emphasized the degree to which gang members are victims of racial and ethnic discrimination and suppressive responses by criminal justice agencies. At a romantic extreme, Martín Sánchez Jankowski /9/ portrays some of the gangs that he has studied as neighborhood "militia" defending and serving the residents of the communities in which they operate.

These disparate images generated by the leading researchers in the field may be a result of the wide diversity of what is identified as gang phenomena. To avoid becoming dismayed in attempting to sort myth from reality, one should avoid dogmatic pronouncements while continuing to learn as much as possible.

### **III. National Statistics on Gang-Related Crime**

Very little is known about the actual geographic distribution and magnitude of gang-related violence in the United States. While, to some degree, this is the case for all types of violence, particular problems afflict the interpretation of statistics on gang violence. Generally, national and local estimates of the magnitude of serious crime utilize the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR). Maintained by the FBI since 1930, one year after it was initiated by the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the UCR boasts over 16,000 police department contributors encouraged by 30 state laws, 15 with penalties for noncompliance. /10/ No measure of gang-related crime has ever been a part of the UCR. Instead, all existing national estimates of gang-related crime have been produced by academic researchers working under "one-shot" cooperative agreements with Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) or the National Institute of Justice (NIJ).

In the first, national-level study of the gang problem published in 1975, /11/ Walter Miller of Harvard University, with the support of OJJDP, studied 12 large cities, 6 of which he identified as having gang crime problems. For the six cities with gang crime problems, Miller estimated from 760 to 2,700 gangs with from 28,500 to 81,500 members. Seven years later, in an expanded survey,

/12/ Miller estimated 97,940 gang members in 2,285 gangs in 286 cities. In 1988, a research team led by Irving Spergel of the University of Chicago, again with OJJDP support, compiled estimates of 1,439 gangs and 120,636 gang members from only 35 jurisdictions. /13/ The most recent, national-level study of gang-related crime problems, /14/ conducted by the author's research team under a cooperative agreement with NIJ, used a more conservative method for producing its national statistics. Where the earlier national studies solicited estimates of the magnitude of local gang crime problems when official statistics were not available, the NIJ national survey tabulated only numbers generated from official law enforcement records. For 101 jurisdictions generating official annual statistics, the survey tabulated 249,324 gang members and 4,881 gangs for the year 1991.

Increases observed in the number of gangs and gang members over the 17 years of national-level studies have been paralleled by increased numbers of geographical areas encountering gang crime problems. As noted above, half of Miller's twelve 1975 cities reported the presence of gang crime problems. In 1983, a survey of a random sample of police departments in 60 cities with populations over 100,000 recorded that 45 percent reported gang crime problems. /15/ In 1988, in their screening of 94 cities, Spergel and his research team classified 72 percent as having gang crime problems. /16/ The 1992 NIJ survey recontacted police departments in the 94 cities included in the 1988 study and found that the percentage reporting gang crime problems had risen to 89 percent, a statistically significant increase. /17/ Of the 79 largest U.S. city police departments, all but 7 (over 90 percent) reported officially recognized gang-related crime problems within their jurisdictions in spring 1992.

#### **IV. The Violent Nature of Gang-Related Crime**

Gangs are above all a form of organized violence. Early in the 20th century, Thrasher spoke of gang "warfare," noting, "The gang is a conflict group. It develops through strife and thrives on warfare. . . . In its struggle for existence a gang has to fight hostile groups to maintain its . . . privileges, its property rights, and the physical safety of its members." /18/ The place of the criminally involved gang in its social context and the internal structure of the gang are a product of continuing conflict that often results in intergang and intragang violence. In his overview of gang research, Spergel asserts, "The relationship between gangs and violence is most evident when patterns of behavior by gang members and nonmembers are compared. Gang youths engage in more crime of a violent nature than do nongang but delinquent youths." /19/

Research has shown that official definitions of gangs and gang-related crime reflect the violent nature of gang activity. In constructing a definition of "gang" for his 1975, national-level study, Walter Miller began his list in "rank order" with "violent or criminal behavior as a major activity of group members." /20/ Of Miller's respondents, 73.2 percent identified this criteria as "necessary" to their definition of a gang. In their 1984 national-level study of police response to gangs, Jerome Needle and William V. Stapleton reported that, among the 27 metropolitan police departments reporting gang crime problems, the most frequently reported defining criterion was "violent behavior," with 77.8 percent of their respondents describing gangs in this way. /21/ In the 1992 NIJ survey, 82.9 percent of the 70 largest U.S. city police departments with an official gang definition reported violent crime as part of their definition. /22/

The tendency of local officials to define gang crime problems in terms of violence conforms with an analysis of gang crime statistics reported by law enforcement agencies for 1991. Of the total gang-related criminal incidents reported to the NIJ survey, just over half (51.5 percent), are homicides and other violent crimes. While gangs may collectively engage in profit-making criminal enterprises, the predominant activity with which they are associated, according to research, official policy, and crime reports, is violence.

## **V. Drugs and Gangs**

It is widely believed, especially among the public and public officials, that there is a link between increased gang violence and increased drug use in the U.S. Indeed, the Youth Gang Drug Prevention Program administered by HHS's Family Youth Services Bureau, perhaps the greatest current governmental gang prevention and intervention program, makes the link between gangs and drugs in its title and legislative mandate. /23/ Felix Padilla describes the transition of a Chicago Puerto Rican gang into a drug-selling "enterprise" complete with exploitation and alienation among the gang member-workers. /24/ For Martín Sánchez Jankowski, gangs are "rational organizations" for whom drug dealing can serve as one of a number of potential entrepreneurial activities so long as it is profitable. /25/ Other researchers, however, argue that the relationship between drug selling and gangs is not at all clear and requires further research. /26/

Certainly, higher rates of drug use by gang members in comparison to nongang members have been reported by a number of researchers. /27/ Joan Moore has described how, among Los Angeles Latino gang members, heroin use had an impact on the structure of gang organization in the 1950s /28/ and increased use of PCP on gang violence in the 1970s. Still, she suggests that the perceived association between gangs and violence and the growing problem of cocaine and crack dealing in the same inner-city areas is incorrect. /29/ In support of Moore's perspective, John Hagedorn, on the basis of his findings for Milwaukee, concluded, "Drug sales for most gang members are just another low-paying job." /30/

Analyses of law enforcement records support those who argue that drug trafficking constitutes a relatively small part of gang-related criminal activity. Separate studies of arrest reports on cocaine sales in South Central Los Angeles and two Los Angeles suburbs have shown that gang members appeared to be involved in about 25 percent of drug sale arrests. While this is a comparatively large involvement, the authors conclude that gangs do not by any means "dominate" the cocaine market in Los Angeles, the U.S. city with the largest reported gang membership. The study also found that drug sale arrests involving gang members did not involve significantly larger amounts of drugs and were no more likely than drug-related crimes by nongang members to involve the presence of firearms. /31/ According to the 1992 NIJ survey, drug-related arrests constituted only 10 percent of all gang-related crimes. /32/

## **VI. Ethnicity and Gang-Related Crime**

Early in the 20th century, gang violence was viewed as involving "ethnic" Americans, most commonly second-generation white immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe and African Americans moving to northern cities from the South. Most recent research has, however, focused on gang violence among African Americans, Latinos, and Asians. /33/ Research has shown that levels of gang homicide vary with respect to the ethnic composition of communities /34/ and that the processes of gang involvement and delinquency are different for African Americans and Latinos. /35/

John Hagedorn /36/ and George Knox /37/ argue that racism plays a role in the process of gang-member identification by law enforcement. Data from the official records on gang ethnicity from 37 metropolitan jurisdictions collected in the 1992 NIJ survey reveal that 1991 police records identify gang members as overwhelmingly African American and Latino at 47.8 percent and 42.7 percent, respectively. Asians make up 5.2 percent, and whites only 4.4 percent. /38/ A recent study of data from 16 cities for which data on gang member ethnicity was collected during 1990 and 1991 suggests an interesting trend. /39/ The number of African American gang members increased by 13 percent over the two years, and the number of Latino gang members by 18 percent. Though significantly smaller in terms of absolute numbers, the rates of increase in the number of gang members identified as Asian and white were much higher at 66 percent and 55 percent, respectively.

## **VII. Gender and Gang-Related Crime**

In his first national-level study of gang-related crime, Walter Miller estimated that females accounted for about 10 percent of the country's gang crime problem. He reported obtaining only one report of an "independent" female gang. /40/ This finding, though used by some researchers as a justification for ignoring female gang involvement, placed a higher estimate on female gang participation than had ethnographic research conducted prior to Miller's survey. From Thrasher on, researchers had described females as peripheral to gang activity or, in their individual roles as a potential spouse for the gang member, as antithetical and destructive of gang cohesion. /41/ Research that studied females as active participants in gangs remained relatively limited until the 1980s, and there remains much speculation and little systematically gathered information on female gangs.

Two of the best known research projects on female gang involvement draw very different conclusions about the role of females in gangs. From her research on females involved in three New York gangs, Anne Campbell /42/ stated two major conclusions: First, Campbell concluded that "[i]t is still the male gang that paves the way for the female affiliate and opens the door into many illegitimate opportunities and into areas that serve as proving grounds." With some exceptions, Campbell found that females become involved in gang activity through male relatives or boyfriends. Second, Campbell concluded that, once females become involved in gangs, "a more visible solidarity or 'sisterhood' within the gang appears. A girl's status depends to a larger extent on her female peers." "Worth" within the gang is not a matter of relationships with males or "simple sexual attractiveness."

From two barrio gang populations located in two Mexican American communities in Los Angeles, Joan Moore /43/ conducted interviews with a random sample of 156 male and female gang members. Of her respondents, "a full third of the sample were females." In contrast to Campbell, Moore argued that the sexist image and treatment of females within gangs is by no means a thing of the past. Moore concluded, "Campbell argues that gang girls have outgrown their sexist image, but we found no indication of change in the quality of sexism between older and younger cliques." Campbell and Moore used different methodological approaches and studied female gang members in geographically disparate urban settings, but their different conclusions underscore the need for more knowledge of female gang involvement, especially about the link between the gang, the gender-stratified opportunity structure of the girls involved, and the meaning of such involvement for their futures. /44/ As Moore has continually insisted, gang involvement by females may have more long-term effects on their own lives and more serious impact on the lives of their children (and perhaps consequently for community and society) than that of males. /45/

Since 1989, when Congress allocated funds for new social programs through the Youth Gang Drug Prevention Program, prevention and intervention of female gang involvement have received specially designated attention in federally supported responses. Of the programs funded by HHS, 12 have been devoted totally to serving the special needs of females at risk for gang involvement. These programs were located in Boston, Denver, Hartford, Minneapolis, Pueblo (Colorado), St. Louis, Seattle, Stockton (California), and the District of Columbia. In addition to serving populations of Latinas and African Americans, the program in Minneapolis was dedicated to the service of Native American females, and Boston's program served small percentages of white and Asian females. /46/

In contrast to the "one" independent female gang known to police reported by Walter Miller in 1975, the 1992 NIJ national survey reported 99 independent gangs recorded by law enforcement agencies in 35 different jurisdictions. /47/ Though a number of large cities still do not "count" female gang members in their official tabulations of gang members, 61 jurisdictions reported a total of 9,092 female gang members on whom official records are maintained by law enforcement. Female gang members, as well as females in the general population, are not as violent as male offenders. According to available national-level statistics on gang-related criminal incidents, a significantly lower proportion of gang-related crimes attributed to females consists of violent crimes and a significantly greater proportion consists of property crimes. /48/

## **VIII. "Youth" Gangs**

For Thrasher, gangs existed in adolescence, an interstitial period in the life cycle. /49/ Adolescence, a particularly 20th century phenomenon, is associated with the constriction of the employment market into the preserve of those adults still fortunate enough to participate effectively in that market. Gangs and other forms of peer association fill the gaps that emerge when youths have nothing else to do. As young adults in the U.S. have found themselves with fewer and fewer opportunities to become members of the working class, the place of gangs in the life cycle has extended. Researchers and the media have noted the increased presence of adults in gangs. /50/ Police statistics also reflect it. Of 24 of the largest U.S. cities reporting a breakdown of gang-related crimes by adults and juveniles, 10 report half or more of their gang-related crimes are attributed to

adults. /51/ In some cities with the oldest gang problems, the distribution is most heavily skewed toward adult gang members, with Chicago attributing 74 percent of its gang-related crimes to adults and Santa Ana (California) 80 percent. In cities, where gang problems have a more recent history such as Mobile (Alabama), Arlington (Texas), and Lexington (Kentucky), crime statistics are skewed in the opposite direction, with 90 percent, 90 percent, and 80 percent of gang-related crimes, respectively, attributed to juveniles. This finding suggests that the term "youth gang" is still appropriate in the sense that youth is when members are recruited to gangs. However, members do not seem to be leaving or "aging out" of gangs as much as they once did. Perhaps this is because they have nowhere else to go.

## **IX. Responses to Gang-Related Crime**

Responses to gang-related crime have been classified as social services, opportunity provision, community organization, and suppression. /52/ When Spergel first produced this breakdown of responses in the 1960s, he did not even list suppression as a viable response category. /53/ As the national philosophy changed, especially during the Reagan Administration, suppression became increasingly not just the dominant, but in many cases the only, response to any kind of crime problem. The 1988 national survey of "promising" gang programs showed that strategic responses to gang-related violence were most likely to fall under the category of suppression. /54/ This is particularly striking because only 20 percent of the agencies surveyed were law enforcement agencies. A community-level analysis of which strategies were associated with perceived effectiveness in dealing with gang crime problems revealed that community organization and opportunities as primary response strategies were more likely to be perceived as effective than social service or suppression strategies.

Spergel's University of Chicago group that conducted the OJJDP 1988 National Gang Survey produced a set of prototype models and manuals for distribution to key agencies, ranging from police to judges to grassroots organizations, in communities developing responses to gang-related crime. For two years, these materials along with other research results were distributed by the National Youth Gang Information Center /55/ and are still distributed by the Department of Justice's Juvenile Justice Information Center. These information efforts and other federal initiatives against gang-related crime have emphasized or mandated community mobilization and interorganizational cooperation. By 1992, the NIJ national survey of law enforcement agencies found that all responding agencies reported trying at least some kind of community organization strategy in conjunction with gang-suppression efforts. /56/

## **X. Denial and Repression: the Double-Edged Sword**

Examining national-level gang crime statistics requires keeping the political nature of such statistics in mind. This is especially true when assessing the changing geographic distribution of the official recognition of gang crime problems by local municipalities. Of the seven largest U.S. cities reporting no gang-related crime problems in 1992, three reported "ganglike" problems. Washington, D.C., reported a criminal "crew" problem; Raleigh, North Carolina, a "posse" problem; and Baltimore, a drug organization problem. Only four of the nation's largest cities,

Pittsburgh, Richmond (Virginia), Memphis, and Newark, did not report a gang-related crime problem in the spring of 1992. Of these, there was some disagreement among departmental personnel in Richmond before the correct official position of "no problem" was ascertained. Pittsburgh officially recognized its gang crime problem in June 1992 and formed a gang response task force within its city police department later that month. /57/

Ron Huff points out that only separate gang-related attacks on the governor's daughter and the mayor's son forced officials in Columbus, Ohio, out of their "denial" of a gang crime problem. /58/ John Hagedorn reports that community response to gangs in Milwaukee has gone through three stages -- denial, recognition, and repression. /59/ For Hagedorn's developmental model of response, the denial stage is crucial. The recognition process is compromised and defined by the denial phase, and the repression phase is made inevitable by the denial phase.

According to Hagedorn, the motivations for a policy of denial grow out of two kinds of fear. On the one hand, political and business leaders of a community often fear that recognition of a gang problem will undermine tourism and the potential for attracting prospective employers and economic ventures. On the other hand, selected representatives of a community fear that law enforcement will use "gang problems" to "crack down" on poor and minority communities and that any recognition of gang problems constitutes a form of racism. Hagedorn argued that both reasons for denial were operative in the history of Milwaukee's response to its gang crime problem.

A study of institutional responses in the District of Columbia has suggested that fear of repression focused on youth and their communities motivates District of Columbia officials in their hesitation to attribute that city's juvenile violence problem to "gangs." Officials prefer to describe the District's crews as something other than a gang problem. /60/

Once denial becomes a political position with its own advocates and opponents, recognition becomes a political choice rather than a realistic assessment of prevailing community conditions. In recent decades, available resources for social service and public agencies within U.S. cities have become increasingly scarce. Agreement or disagreement over any official position can become an important consideration in the distribution of resources. When denial is the official policy, agencies competing for resources are encouraged by fiscal conditions to participate in the denial. As the official policy changes to recognition, sometimes associated with changes in municipal leadership, agencies previously excluded from resources are similarly encouraged to exaggerate gang crime problems. The result is community conflict at a time when unity is needed.

Hagedorn suggests that, inevitably, the response to a gang problem after a period of denial is repression. Hagedorn notes that, by the time recognition occurs, community division is so great that the problem will have reached extreme levels. A primary emphasis on suppression as a response to gang problems results, in Hagedorn's view, in minority communities not getting access to resources needed to deal with the social problems that are the root causes of the gang problem in the first place. In the meantime, suspected gang leaders are harassed, arrested, and incarcerated. Increasingly, jails and prisons have become settings for the seasoning and strengthening of gang structures. For over 20 years, gangs have controlled some state prisons, and there is evidence that this is a trend that has spread to local jails and juvenile correctional facilities. /61/

## **XI. Statistical Policy and Response Policy**

As noted above, law enforcement agencies in 101 jurisdictions maintained records for 1991 on 249,324 gang members and 4,881 gangs. /62/ Just over 40 percent of these jurisdictions did not keep records on or did not tabulate annual totals for gang-related crimes. For these municipalities, the official measure of the magnitude or seriousness of their local gang problem is expressed in terms of gang involvement and gang participation rather than more directly by gang-related crime.

In addition, the ratio between number of gang members and number of incidents in most jurisdictions where both statistics are reported is skewed. The number of gang-related incidents exceeds the number of gang members officially reported for 1991 in only three of the largest 79 U.S. cities. /63/ Only 72 of these cities report gang crime problems. For example, Tucson reported the greatest incident to member ratio, 1,377 members and 2,607 gang-related crimes for the year, not quite an average of two crimes per gang member. For the remainder of the largest and five of the six smaller cities reporting both statistics, the local gang crime problem is represented by a greater number of gang members than gang-related crimes. For example, Los Angeles reported 8,528 gang-related crimes and 55,258 gang members in 1991; Louisville, Kentucky, reported 1 gang-related crime (an assault) and 250 gang members.

There are two problems with using statistics about gang membership instead of number of gang-related crimes to evaluate gang crime problems. First, concentrating on the number of gang members results in an inadequate measure of the scope of the problem. Second, emphasis on membership in determining the scope of gang crime problems is associated with a philosophy of response so dominated by suppression that it may undermine more constructive and effective responses to gang crime problems. Gang membership is not a crime. The number of young people who can be identified by law enforcement as affiliated with whatever faction, grouping, or gang tells us more about the operation of law enforcement intelligence than it tells us about any threat to public safety. Using gang-related criminal incidents as a measure of gang-related crime problems is a criminological approach to the social problem of gang-related crime.

Determining numbers of gangs and gang members in considering gang problems is analogous to the military determining the strength of the enemy, including the number of enemy soldiers. However, gang-related crimes are criminal acts, most of which are violent in nature. Most of the victims of these crimes are residents of the communities in which gang-related crime problems are concentrated. Counting gangs and gang members tends to characterize these communities as "occupied territories" rather than as viable social orders that must be protected and strengthened. From a military perspective, little or no distinction is made between victim and offender.

Only statistics on gang-related crime constitute a realistic measure of the seriousness of gang crime problems in terms of human suffering and loss. The number of gang-related crimes for the 60 jurisdictions reporting for 1991 totaled 46,359, of which 1,072 were homicides. Given the proportion of jurisdictions not reporting gang-related crimes, these numbers by definition substantially underestimate the national-level gang crime problem. Tabulations of gang-related crimes are the only acceptable measure upon which to base public policy for responding to gang crime problems at the national and at local levels.

## **XII. Effectively Responding to Gang-Related Violence**

Gang crime problems are community-level problems and above all else require community-level solutions. Thrasher characterized gangs as "interstitial" social entities. /64/ Gangs grow and flourish between the social spaces of other institutions such as the family or household, the school, the church, and other overarching forms of community. Gangs become strong where other institutions are weak. Where families, schools, and the other components of communities are powerless, fragile, and mutually isolated, gang violence can become chronic and reach higher levels of intensity. Where a community is strong and united, gang violence, like other forms of violence, is more likely to be controlled. Two recent books on serious crime in the U.S., approaching their subject from different theoretical traditions, have both argued that community empowerment is the key to crime control. /65/

Selecting the most effective legal advocacy strategy to empower communities is not necessarily an easy matter. In some communities, civil actions have been filed against gangs for damages to property and health caused by their presence. /66/ Specific laws provide legal means to seek restitution from gangs and gang members for the cost of damages resulting from their criminal activity or for costs incurred by local governments in controlling gang-related violence. Robert Destro emphasizes that these legal responses to gangs require a "balancing" of civil rights. /67/ On the one hand are the rights of citizens and families to be free from intimidation and violence; on the other hand are the rights of gang members to free association and speech. Dress codes that forbid the wearing of gang colors or gang-identified attire or prohibitions on the public display of gang symbols are typical responses that require a balancing of these rights.

Robert Bursik and Harold Grasmick have suggested that gang members may constitute part of viable solutions for inner-city communities where gangs have long since become entrenched and integrated into what remains of community structure. /68/ Admittedly, this notion is controversial. A project that does involve former gang members was recently described in testimony submitted to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice. /69/ In the Chicago community of Little Village, Spergel is working with a network of police, outreach youth workers, probation officers, court service workers, and former gang members to reduce violence between two warring coalitions of Latino street gangs. Preliminary evaluation results of this project include a reduction in gang-related homicides, increased community organization and mobilization, and the channeling of gang-involved youths into educational programs and jobs.

Thirty years ago, Spergel counseled social workers to develop their community organization skills if they hoped to deal effectively with gang problems. That advice may be just as sound today for legal advocates and anyone else hoping to cope with gang-related violence. In order to achieve community empowerment, response strategies by legal services professionals and paraprofessionals will have to be flexible and attuned to the needs of particular communities and their residents. Legal advocates may find themselves in some cases representing community residents against gang members, in others representing gang members against suppressive response strategies, and in still others representing community residents including gang members against suppressive response strategies that are excessively encompassing. A key to choosing the alternative strategy most likely to serve community needs is overcoming restrictively simplistic and often mythical perceptions of the changing and diverse nature of gang involvement and gang-related violence.

## Footnotes

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