

Gangs in North Carolina

The 2010 Report to the General Assembly



Governor's Crime Commission

**North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety
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INTRODUCTION

For the past 12 years the North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center (NCCJAC) of the Governor's Crime Commission (GCC) has been investigating and reporting on the nature and extent of criminal gangs within the state. Early obstacles to this ongoing investigation included denial of the presence of or problems caused by gangs or the lack of a standardized definition of what constitutes these sociological entities. Today, there is little denying that criminal gangs exist within communities, both urban and rural, in the state and that they do represent a criminal justice problem. The North Carolina General Assembly has overcome the definitional issues by codifying a legal definition of criminal gangs. General Statute § 14-50.16 (1) defines a street gang as "any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, which engages in a pattern of criminal activity."



The GCC has supported the North Carolina Gang Investigators Association since its inception in 1999 and their work to educate our state's law enforcement officers during a capital strapped decade, and promote the growth of specialized gang units within their agencies. With the expansion of gang units and gang investigators came the need to share intelligence information between jurisdictions on these groups and associated individuals. The GCC sponsored a statewide web-based database called North Carolina GangNET that

houses intelligence information on gang members from agencies that choose to enter the data. There are a few agencies that choose to have access and be trained on the system that only view the information. These agencies have no entries due to issues such as a lack of personnel resources to enter data or no known gang members.

Because of its strict definitional criteria for entry and validation, researchers with the NCCJAC determined that eventually NC GangNET data would be more useful in describing the nature and extent of criminal gangs within North Carolina than the subjective questionnaires of law enforcement agencies used in earlier studies. This analysis of gangs within the state uses NC GangNET aggregate data from December 2009 as an exclusive source of empirical information.

This update provides an overview of the current data as it is contrasted to data provided in previous reports and information on some of the gang prevention, intervention and suppression programs funded by the GCC in the previous year. This report



is designed to be an update and an extended investigation into this data and additional information is anticipated later in 2010.

GANG ACTIVITY

Reviewing the series of GCC research studies conducted by the NCCJAC on criminal gangs within North Carolina could cause the reader to assume there have been some overwhelming increases in criminal gangs across the state. This may not be the case, initial denial of the presence of gangs by many law enforcement agencies, the rapid increase in law enforcement investigators trained to recognize potential gang activity and then documenting this intelligence, differing definitions of what constitutes a gang or gang member, public perceptions of gang activity fueled by media, and changes in data collection have all led to an unclear picture into the nature and extent of criminal gangs in North Carolina. It is clear there is a presence of criminal gangs in the state and that many are involved in crimes relating to drugs and violent behaviors.

As provided in each of the GCC studies, the information and data are only as good as the responses received. Many agencies have overcome policies of not responding to such surveys with respect to the GCC since the objective of the commission involves supporting the mission of law enforcement. Previous survey data could be an approximation of intelligence data, include data older than five years, as well as include perceptions of gang investigators, school resource officers or others responding to surveys.

While NCGangNet provides more standardized and validated information, relying on GangNet does not offer the jurisdictional perceptions or even biases of previous survey respondents. Comparisons of the 2009 data to the 1999 data may not provide an accurate perception in the difference of the nature and extent of gangs, based on collection methodologies, however, it does indicate the increases in law enforcement documentation and understanding of a problem reaching into both urban and rural communities.

In December 2009 there were 13,699 validated gang members and associates in the NC GangNET database. These breakdown into the following listed demographic elements:



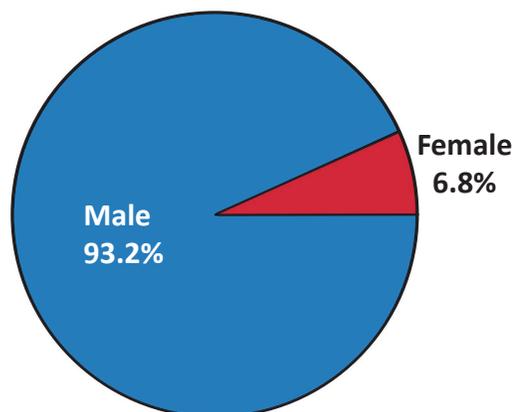
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- Gender - 12,761 male (93.2%) and 938 female (6.8%)
- Race/Ethnicity – 9,540 black (70.2%), 2,554 Hispanic (18.8%), 1,191 white (8.8%), 178 Asian (1.3%) and 33 others (<1%) (there were 103 with no racial or ethnic identifiers)
- 13,589 included identified ages, of which 402 (3%) were age 15 and under, 1,446 (10.6%) ages 16 and 17 and 11,771 (86.4%) were 18 or older.

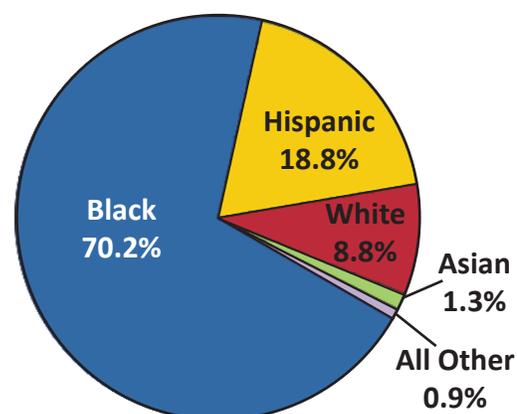
It is apparent that gang members identified via the NC GangNET system tend to be disproportionately adults, male and from black and Hispanic racial/ethnic makeup. Follow-up on the low youthful offender representation indicates there may be some undetermined level of under reporting of juveniles (ages 15 and younger). This might indicate a paradigm shift in the perception of gang members from involving large numbers of youths to indicating that criminal gangs being tracked in NC GangNET are adult entities with the involvement of juveniles at some level. This may also indicate that identifying neighborhoods and communities where criminal gangs flourish is paramount in targeting gang prevention, intervention and suppression programs.

The current number of validated gangs in North Carolina is 898 which is higher than the 855 noted in the GCC report to the General Assembly dated March 2009. The number of gang members and associates has also risen from 10,050 to the current 13,699. Of important note is the phasing into the NC GangNET system the N.C. Department of Correction (DOC) prison security threat group validated members which accounts for a number of these increased gang members. This year the DOC Division of Community Corrections will begin merging the community threat group validated members which are being monitored by probation. Security threat group and community threat group are the DOC designations for groups that generally fit the criteria for criminal gangs. (See Table 1 on the following page.)

Gang Membership by Gender



Gang Membership by Race/Ethnicity



Gang Membership by Age

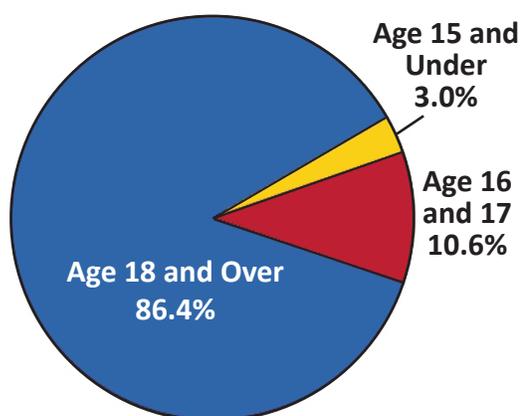


Table 1: Gangs by County

| Data from the Eastern Node of GangNET (Durham) | | Data from the Western Node of GangNET (Charlotte) | |
|---|------------|--|------------|
| County Name | # of Gangs | County Name | # of Gangs |
| Alamance County | 22 | Alleghany | 1 |
| Bertie County | 1 | Burke | 1 |
| Bladen County | 1 | Cabarrus | 34 |
| Brunswick County | 1 | Caldwell | 2 |
| Chatham County | 4 | Catawba | 13 |
| Chowan County | 3 | Cherokee | 4 |
| Cumberland County | 42 | Davidson | 9 |
| Duplin County | 8 | Forsyth | 60 |
| Durham County | 41 | Gaston | 21 |
| Edgecombe County | 41 | Guilford | 29 |
| Franklin County | 5 | Henderson | 8 |
| Granville County | 5 | Iredell | 15 |
| Halifax County | 1 | Lincoln | 10 |
| Harnett County | 37 | Mecklenburg | 160 |
| Johnston County | 14 | Randolph | 6 |
| Lee County | 20 | Rockingham | 12 |
| Lenoir County | 8 | Union | 1 |
| Moore County | 20 | Yadkin | 5 |
| Nash County | 3 | <p><i>Note: There were seven gangs with overlapping counties that were not included in this table as it could not be determined if the gang was already listed in that county. There were also 92 gangs listed in the western node whose county could not be determined and could be gangs from areas in South Carolina bordering on the Charlotte area who cross state lines.</i></p> | |
| New Hanover County | 27 | | |
| Northampton County | 3 | | |
| Orange County | 6 | | |
| Pasquotank County | 5 | | |
| Pender County | 39 | | |
| Person County | 3 | | |
| Pitt County | 6 | | |
| Robeson County | 5 | | |
| Sampson County | 24 | | |
| Vance County | 1 | | |
| Wake County | 97 | | |
| Warren County | 2 | | |
| Washington County | 1 | | |
| Wayne County | 6 | | |
| Wilson County | 1 | | |
| Total Number of Gangs Reported: 891 | | | |

With the data from NC GangNET, gaining an idea of the nature and extent in North Carolina has become more readily available with the knowledge that there is standardization in what represents a gang from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Many new questions have arisen from this latest data that will be further investigated over the next several months. While it may not be a perfect system it affords participating local jurisdictions and the Governor's Crime Commission the ability to better understand the nature and extent of gangs in North Carolina's communities and to target gang prevention, intervention and suppression funding and efforts to areas that have identified and validated a gang presence.



Program Performance and Impact

Beginning with the 2009/2010 fiscal year, agencies receiving federal or state gang grant funds from the Governor's Crime Commission were required to submit quarterly performance reports documenting the progress of their respective programs as well as its impact on addressing the local gang problem or presence in their areas. Applicable grant project directors were asked to submit data for the last quarter, before grant implementation, to provide for pre and post programmatic comparisons. In the event that these directors were unable to provide this data the first three months after grant implementation, initial data were treated as baseline measures for tracking program progress throughout the life of the grant project.

An on-line Internet based application was developed to capture this program data with questions varying by program type. Directors from grant projects which are primarily law enforcement or suppression oriented are required to provide data on the number of suspected and confirmed gang members, the number and nature of gang investigations and indictments, as well as specific information on each unique gang such as its name, size, demographical composition and organizational structure. Criminal activity data is also collected in order to document the extent of the gang's violence and their drug and weapons involvement during the preceding quarter.



In addition to reporting on the number of gang members and gang activity intervention and prevention programs which work with current or potential gang members, agencies are also required to submit the number of persons entering and exiting these projects during each quarter. Programs that have any combination of intervention, prevention and suppression components are required to submit all of the data outlined above.

The following section presents a preliminary analysis of this performance and impact information by comparing pre-program implementation data during the period of March 1 – May 31, 2009 for the first cohort of grantees with the following first quarter (June 1 – August 31, 2009). As the number of gang grantees grows and as the amount of data being input into the on-line application expands over time a more complete and accurate portrait of gang activity in North Carolina can be developed and the commission can better document program performance and assess the effect of these programs on alleviating, or at least minimizing, gangs and gang crime across the state.



Thirty-two grant programs provided data for both reporting periods; i.e. three months prior to, and three months after, grant implementation.

A total of 1,658 individuals were admitted in the pre-grant implementation period by those programs that offer intervention and/or prevention services with the typical program admitting 52 people during this three-month period. The number of new admissions ranged from zero to 543. During the first three months, after grant implementation, a total of 1,788 individuals were admitted which equates to a 7.8 percent increase in new admissions over the three months prior to beginning the grant. The average number of program admissions, during the two reporting periods, grew from 52 before grant receipt to 56 after the programs received grant funding. Thus, on the average, program admissions increased after the GCC provided grant funding.

Table 2 presents comparative information for the two reporting periods on the average number of suspected and self identified gang members as well as data on active investigations and indictments.

Table 2: Average Number of Suspected and Identified Gang Members and Investigations and Indictments by Reporting Period

| Variable | Three Months Prior to Grant Implementation | Three Months After Grant Implementation | Percent Change |
|---|--|---|----------------|
| Suspected Gang Members | 375 | 234 | -37.6 |
| Self-Identified Gang Members | 100 | 99 | -.01 |
| On-going Investigations | 13.2 | 7.0 | -47.0 |
| Joint Federal and Interstate Investigations | 2.5 | 1.4 | -44.0 |
| Federal and State Indictments | 1.7 | 0.2 | -88.0 |

Note: The average number of on-going investigations differ significantly over the two reporting periods, as do the average number of indictments ($p < .05$).

During the three month pre-implementation period, a total of 11,628 suspected gang members were reported by 31 of the grantees with single agency responses ranging from zero



members to a group high of 2,200. On the average each agency reported 375 suspected members during this period. Three months after grant implementation the total number of suspected members dropped from 11,628 to 7,732. The average number of reported suspected members also dropped from 375 to 234 (37.6%).¹

The number of individuals claiming gang membership also dropped during the two periods with a total of 3,103 claiming membership prior to project implementation and a lesser 3,063 claiming membership three months later. The average number, per agency, experienced a slight decline of less than 1 percent, dropping from 100 to 99 persons who self-reported gang membership.

A total of 246² different gangs were reported by the grant project directors during the pre-implementation reporting period. This equates to an average of slightly more than seven gangs per agency. During the first three months of project operation this number dropped to 159 or 4.8 gangs per reporting agency.

A total of 410 on-going investigations were reported during the three month pre-implementation period with a lower 224 reported three months later. This equates to an aggregate 45 percent drop with the average number of gang investigations per agency declining from 13 to seven (- 47.0%). Declines also occurred for joint federal and interstate investigations dropping from a total of 78 to 44 after grant implementation. The average number of these investigations dropped from 2.5 to 1.4 per agency (-44.0%).

Declines were also present for federal and state indictments moving from 54 to six over the two periods. The average number of indictments dropped a substantial 88 percent from pre-implementation to the first three months after the grant funds were allocated.

Table 3 (on the following page) depicts the average number of reported gang crimes, or criminal activity which can be attributed to known gangs, for the three-month period prior to grant implementation as well as the first three months after project start-up. Increases occurred for six of the 12 listed offenses with reported rape and larceny-theft experiencing the most sizeable increases at 135 percent and 130 percent respectively.¹ The total number of reported rapes grew from nine to 21 while the total



¹ Given the low number of reporting periods thus far it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the programs have directly impacted reported crime. It is possible that increases have occurred due to other non-programmatic factors such as increased awareness and reporting of gangs and gang crime by the public. Likewise declines could have also occurred due to factors extraneous to the programs. A more reliable assessment will be available at the end of the grant cycle.

² Some agencies received multiple grants thus the number of gangs reported by these agencies were only counted once. Also, if a gang with the same name was reported by both a city police department and its corresponding sheriff's office then this gang was counted as two distinct gangs. This only occurred once in this analysis.

number of reported larcenies grew from 246 to 567. Increases also occurred in the average number of reported incidents of auto theft (91.3%), robbery (33.3%), aggravated assaults (10.0%) and burglary (3.5%). A total of 72 auto thefts, 144 robberies, 224 aggravated assaults and 370 burglaries were reported by the 32 grantees during the three-month period prior to beginning their respective grant programs. During the first three months of project implementation, a total of 142 auto thefts, 192 robberies, 246 aggravated assaults and 385 burglaries were reported by these same agencies.



Declines occurred for five offense categories with the most sizeable reduction being reported for weapon sales which were reduced 100 percent down to no offenses. However, it should be noted that the total number of such incidents were comparably low with only 10 cases being reported prior to implementation and none thereafter. The average number of weapon possession cases declined by 47 percent with the aggregate number of such cases dropping from 190 to 98. Drug possession and drug manufacturing/distribution incidents declined as well moving down 18 percent and 20 percent respectively. The total number of drug possession incidents dropped from 550 to 452 while the total number of manufacturing/distribution incidents declined from 126 to 99. Arson was a rare event with only two incidents being attributed to gangs during both study periods.

Table 3: Average Number of Reported Gang Crimes by Reporting Period

| Crime | Three Months Prior to Grant Implementation | Three Months After Grant Implementation | Percent Change |
|---------------------------------|--|---|----------------|
| Homicide | .44 | .41 | - 6.8 |
| Forcible Rape | .28 | .66 | + 135.7 |
| Robbery | 4.5 | 6.0 | + 33.3 |
| Aggravated Assault | 7.0 | 7.7 | + 10.0 |
| Burglary | 11.6 | 12.0 | + 3.5 |
| Larceny | 7.7 | 17.7 | + 129.9 |
| Auto Theft | 2.3 | 4.4 | + 91.3 |
| Arson | .06 | .06 | 0 |
| Drug Possession | 17.2 | 14.1 | - 18.0 |
| Drug Manufacturing/Distribution | 3.9 | 3.1 | - 20.5 |
| Weapon Possession | 5.9 | 3.1 | - 47.5 |
| Weapon Sales | .31 | .00 | - 100 |

Note: Despite substantial percentage declines and increases for several offense categories, no statistically significant differences were found to exist between the average number of reported offenses over the two periods.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were derived from the commission's prior and current gang research, discussions with practitioners and policy makers as well as members of the statewide GangNet steering committee.

1. Appropriate state funding should be allocated to operate and maintain GangNet

Currently GangNet is 100 percent federally funded with no other supporting source of funding. Should the U.S. Congress reduce or eliminate the Byrne/JAG program, GangNet would in effect cease to exist or at least be shut down temporarily. State funds, roughly \$600,000 to \$1 million, should be allocated to ensure that the GangNet system remains functional and available to participating law enforcement agencies.



2. Operational and maintenance functions associated with GangNet should be housed within the State Bureau of Investigation

Currently GangNet is housed in multiple locations with an eastern node in Durham, a central node at the State Bureau of Investigation and a western node in Charlotte. For consolidation purposes, data and records should be housed in a central location and on a single server.



3. Funding for gang intervention and suppression programs should require replication of the High Point Model

Given the widespread publicity and demonstrated effectiveness of the High Point Model for addressing gang issues and gang related criminality, new programs should be required to follow this model. Replication of the High Point Model seems to be a more effective and efficient best practice for allocating scarce resources. This model returns the responsibility of curtailing gang and gun violence back to the communities by insisting on law enforcement and communities to enter into agreed partnerships that will empower neighborhoods, cities and towns to become proactive in isolating, identifying and removing the gang threat from their streets.



4. Encourage law enforcement and local school districts to properly identify and recognize gangs

Gang denial has diminished statewide but still exists in certain areas of North Carolina. Organizations that deal with teens and young adults should be encouraged to openly admit a gang presence, if one exists, and tackle this issue in a proactive and rational manner. Denying the existence of gangs only exacerbates current and future problems and may be worse than having the negative stigma associated with admitting a gang presence.



