

# INJURY UPDATE

*A Report to Oklahoma Injury Surveillance Participants\**

August 31, 2009

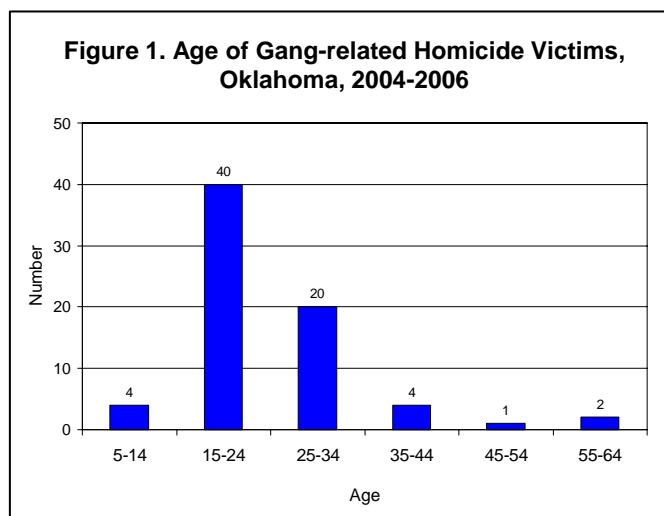
## Gang-related Homicides, Oklahoma, 2004-2006

Violence is a significant public health problem in the United States (U.S.). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were 18,124 homicides in the U.S. during 2005. During the same year, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported 96 gangland killings and 756 juvenile gang killings. From 1999-2005, homicide was the second leading cause of death for persons 10-24 years of age in the U.S. Part of the youth homicide problem has been due to street gangs and an increased level of violence by these gangs. On average, 373,000 gang violence victimizations are committed each year. The 2006 National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS) estimated there were 785,000 gang members and 26,500 active street gangs in the U.S. Street gang problems are present in 99% of all U.S. cities with a population of 100,000 or more. Reports by police departments indicate that gang problems increased substantially in large U.S. cities during the 1980s and 1990s and have since declined. However, the percentage of students reporting gang activity at school increased by 24% in urban areas and 17% in rural areas from 2004-2005.

Typically, gang members are young adult males from lower class, inner city or ghetto neighborhoods. Gang activities often involve trafficking illegal drugs and weapons, and can include a wide variety of other moneymaking criminal activities, which vary by geographical region. Additionally, studies indicate that “street gangs” may be organized around other turf issues. Violent crimes, including homicides associated with gang activity, are often not recorded as “gang-related” by law enforcement. Generally, this makes gang-related homicides difficult to track through law enforcement data systems.

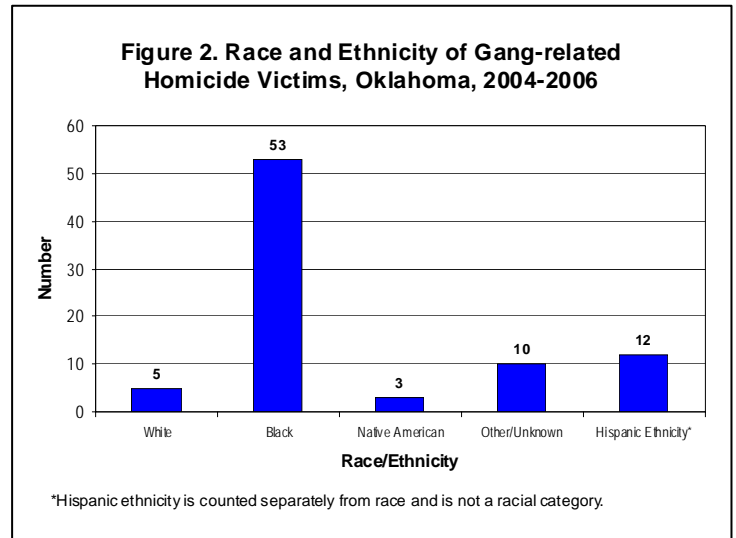
The National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) is a state-based surveillance system for suicides, homicides, unintentional firearm deaths, legal interventions, undetermined manner and terrorism deaths. Seventeen states, including Oklahoma, contribute data to the NVDRS. The Oklahoma Violent Death Reporting System (OK-VDRS) includes linked data from medical examiner reports, death certificates, police/sheriff’s reports, supplementary homicide reports, and child fatality review data in a unique database. Data are collected on the victims, suspects, weapons, victim-suspect relationships, and circumstances surrounding violent deaths. OK-VDRS provides more comprehensive information on violent deaths, including gang-related homicides, than previously available from disparate data systems.

From 2004-2006, Oklahoma had the second highest percentage of homicides that were gang-related among the seventeen states participating in the NVDRS, behind Colorado. This report examines OK-VDRS data collected on gang-related homicides in Oklahoma.



\*The INJURY UPDATE is a report produced by the Injury Prevention Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health. Other issues of the INJURY UPDATE may be obtained from the Injury Prevention Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health, 1000 N.E. 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73117-1299, 405/271-3430 or 1-800-522-0204 (in Oklahoma). INJURY UPDATES and other IPS information are also available at <http://ips.health.ok.gov>.

During 2004-2006, there were 629 homicides in Oklahoma, an average of 210 homicides annually. Seventy-one (11%) of the homicides were classified as gang-related. Four victims were bystanders not directly involved in the incident. Ninety-six percent of the gang-related homicide victims were male and 4% were female. The mean age of victims was 23 years. The youngest victim was 9 years of age and the oldest was 60 years of age. Fifty-six percent of victims were 15-24 years of age, 28% were between 25-34 years of age, and 16% were younger than 15 years or older than 35 years of age (Figure 1).



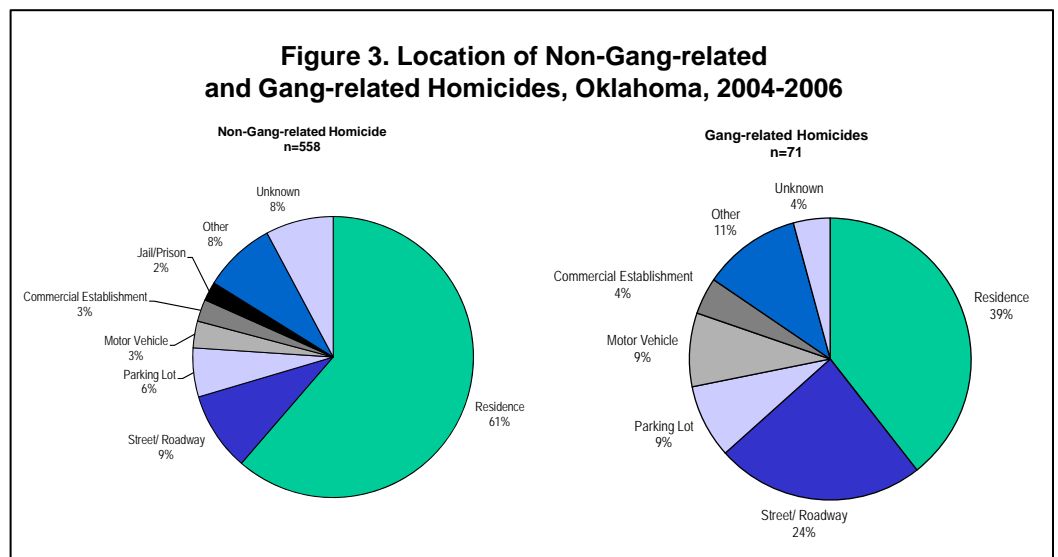
The rate of gang-related homicide among persons 15-34 years of age (2.0 per 100,000 population) was 20 times higher than the rate of gang-related homicide among all other ages combined (0.1\* per 100,000 population). Seventy-five percent of gang-related homicide victims were black, 7% were white, 4% were American Indian and 14% were other races. Seventeen percent of gang-related homicide victims were of Hispanic ethnicity (Figure 2). Black males had the highest rate of gang-related homicide (11.6 per 100,000 population).

Among victims 25 years of age and older, the majority (52%) had a high school diploma or GED, 37% had a 12<sup>th</sup> grade education or less and 11% had some college education. Eighty percent of victims were single, 17% were married, and 3% percent of victims were divorced or had an unknown marital status.

Forty percent of gang-related homicides occurred in a residence, 25% on a street or roadway, 8% in a vehicle, 8% in a parking lot and 15% in other locations including commercial establishments (e.g. grocery store), bar or nightclub, hotel/motel, jail/prison, office building, natural area, and park/playground. The location was unknown for 4% of the incidents. Compared to all other homicides, gang-related homicides occurred more often on a street or roadway (9% and 25%, respectively), and less often in a residence (61% and 40%, respectively) (Figure 3).

Firearms were used in almost all (94%) of the gang-related homicides; other weapons used included blunt and sharp instruments and personal weapons such as fists or feet. Thirty-eight percent of victims in gang-related homicides tested positive for alcohol and 4% tested positive for drugs.

Circumstances associated with gang-related homicides included illegal drug activity (27%), criminal activity (24%), arguments over



\* Rates based on numbers less than 20 may be unstable.



## PREVENTION

While gang activities have declined in large urban areas in the U.S. during the past two decades, gang activities in other areas have increased. Gangs that were usually active in large metropolitan areas are now active in almost all cities with more than 100,000 population and are larger and more violent than before. The increase of youth gangs is of particular concern. To address the problem of gang violence, one needs to understand the risk factors of gang formation. These risks are multifactorial and include individual and family factors, personal attributes, peer group, school and community factors. Several studies have indicated that the formation of gangs is associated with poverty, unemployment, delinquency, lack of family structure, lack of education and racism. Strategies to prevent the formation of youth gangs are similar to those designed to prevent youth violence and delinquency.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention promotes the Comprehensive Gang Model to decrease gang-related activities. This model involves the following strategies:

- Community mobilization: Involve local citizens and organizations in working together to understand the gang structure and provide interventions and social opportunities for youth.
- Social intervention: Involve schools, grassroots organizations, faith-based organizations, police and other criminal justice organizations working together to reach out to youths who are unable or have a difficult time connecting with legitimate social institutions.
- Provision of social opportunities: Develop and involve programs that facilitate access to academic, economic, and social opportunities for youths who are at risk of becoming gang members.
- Gang suppression: Work with community and law enforcement agencies/organizations to increase surveillance, arrest, probation and imprisonment of gang members.
- Organizational change and development of local agencies and groups: Involve local community agencies and groups to work together to address gang problems.

## RESOURCES

- The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/index.html>
- Preventing Gangs in School: <http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/faq/prevgangs.asp>
- Youth Gangs Programs and Strategies: [http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/summary\\_2000\\_8/home.html](http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/summary_2000_8/home.html)
- Data and Statistics on Youth Violence: [http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/statistics/statistics\\_data.asp#D](http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/statistics/statistics_data.asp#D)
- Gang Fact Sheets: <http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/facts/gangs.asp>
- Best Practices to Address Community Gang Problems: OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model <http://www.iir.com/nygc/publications/gang-problems.pdf>
- The National Youth Gang Center: <http://www.iir.com/nygc/>
- National Violent Death Reporting System Data and Injury Data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS): <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>

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