

INJURY UPDATE

A Report to Oklahoma Injury Surveillance Participants*

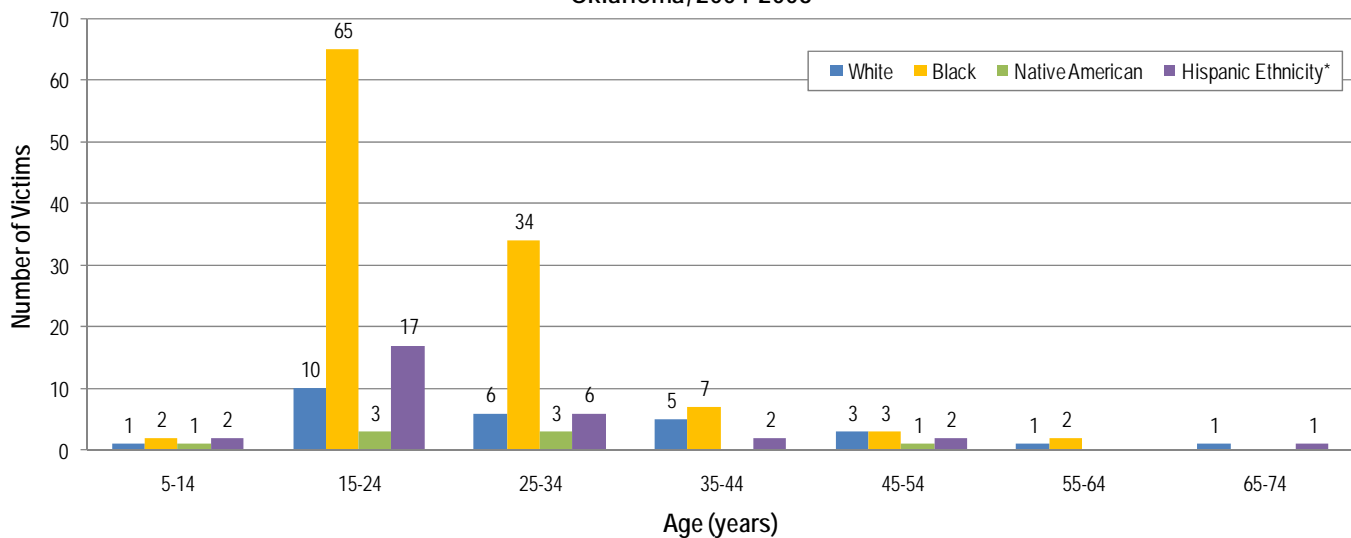
October 29, 2010

Gang and Gang-like Homicides in Oklahoma

Violence is a notable public health concern in the United States (U.S.). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), homicide was the second leading cause of death for persons 10-34 years of age in the U.S. from 1999-2007. In 2007 alone there were 18,361 homicides in the U.S.; 57% were among persons 10-34 years of age. A substantial number of these homicides were associated with criminal gangs and gang-related violence. In 2007, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported 77 gangland homicides (i.e., homicides committed by criminal organizations) and 676 juvenile gang homicides. The 2008 National Youth Gang Survey reported that there were 774,000 gang members and 27,900 active street gangs in the U.S. Another report by the National Gang Intelligence Center estimated that there were more than 1,000,000 gang members in the U.S. It is estimated that as much as 80% of crime in some communities is due to the presence of gangs. From 2004-2008, the National Drug Threat Assessment reported a 13% increase in illicit drug distribution in the U.S. due to the expansion of street gangs. Additionally, in 2007-2008, a survey of 5,970 public schools found 41,470 documented incidents of gang-related crimes on school property.

Street gangs are generally comprised of young adult males residing in impoverished neighborhoods. Gang members are frequently involved in various criminal activities. Violent crimes, including homicides, accompany much of street gang activity. The Oklahoma Violent Death Reporting System (OK-VDRS) tracks gang-related homicides using information provided in police and medical examiner (ME) reports.

Figure 1. Number of Gang and Gang-like Homicides by Age, Race, and Ethnicity, Oklahoma, 2004-2008



*Hispanic ethnicity is counted separately from race and is not a racial category.



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

For this report, OK-VDRS data were used to examine all cases of homicides where gang activity was likely involved. Cases included homicides explicitly related to gang activity and homicides where gang-like circumstances were present. Gang-like circumstances included cases where the weapon was a gun, knife or blunt object and at least two of the following three criteria were met.

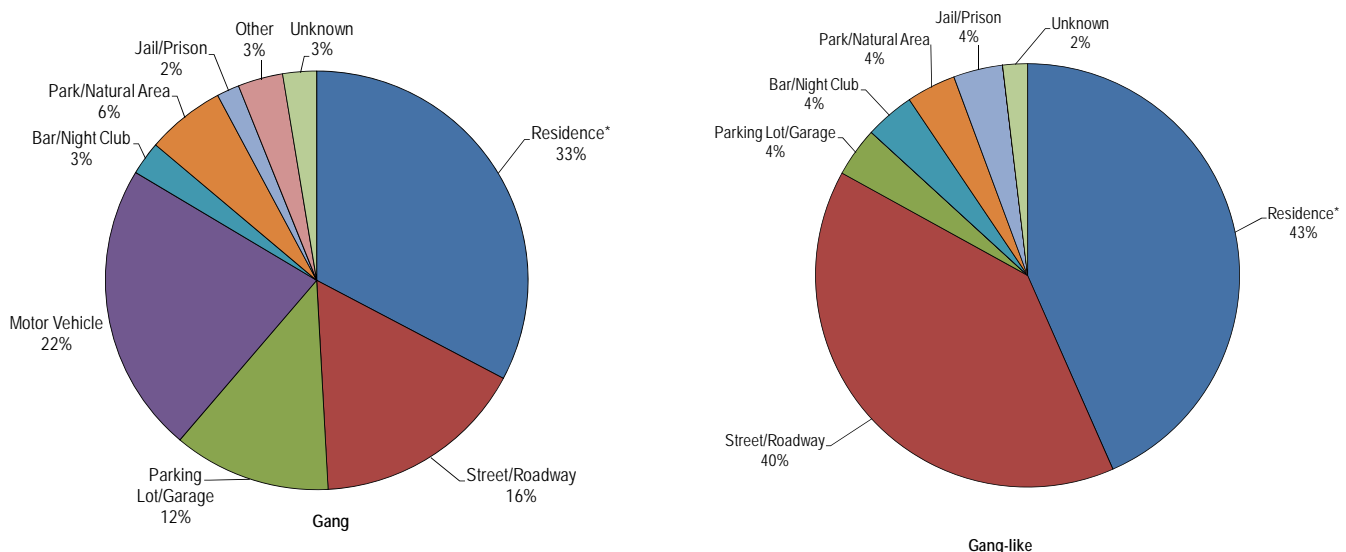
1. The victim-suspect relationship was a stranger, acquaintance, rival gang member, other person known to the victim, or unknown suspect.
2. The incident involved a drive-by shooting, death of a bystander, revenge/retaliation, or a brawl.
3. The location of the injury was a porch, street, or driveway.

From 2004-2008, 1,159 homicides occurred in Oklahoma (average of 232 homicides annually). Fifteen percent (169) of the homicides were related to gang activity or had gang-like circumstances. Of these, 69% (116) were gang-related, and 31% (53) were gang-like.

Ninety-five percent of the gang and gang-like homicide victims were male, and 5% were female. The mean age of victims was 26 years; the youngest victim was 9 years of age and the oldest was 70 years of age. Fifty-four percent of the victims were 15-24 years of age, 28% were 25-34 years of age, 14% were 35 years and older, and 3% were less than 15 years of age. Six of the victims were bystanders (not the intended victims of the shooting), ranging in age from 9 to 38 years. The occurrent rate of gang and gang-like homicides for persons 15-34 years of age (2.8 per 100,000 population) was 13 times higher than the rate of gang and gang-like homicides for all other ages combined (0.2 per 100,000).

Sixty-seven percent of gang and gang-like homicide victims were black, 16% were white, 5% were Native American, and 12% were mixed and other races. Eighteen percent of gang and gang-like homicide victims were of Hispanic ethnicity (Figure 1). Black males had the highest rate of gang and gang-like homicides (14.5 per 100,000 population).

Figure 2. Locations of Gang and Gang-like Homicides, Oklahoma, 2004-2008



*Residence includes house, driveway, porch, or yard.

Among victims 25 years of age and older, 46% (33) had a high school diploma or GED, 39% (28) had a 12th grade education or less, and 14% (10) had some college or an associate’s degree. None of the victims had a bachelor’s degree or higher. Seventy-nine percent of victims were single, 16% were married, and 5% of the victims were divorced or had an unknown marital status.

Homicides related to gang activity occurred at or in residences (33%), motor vehicles (22%), streets/roadways (16%), parking lots (12%), or other locations (17%). In contrast, gang-like homicides occurred primarily at residences (43%) or on streets/roadways (40%) (Figure 2).

Firearms were used in nearly all (94%) of the gang homicides and 68% of the gang-like homicides. Eighty-one percent of firearms were handguns and 19% were rifles, shotguns, or unknown firearm types (Table 1). Other weapons used included sharp instruments, blunt instruments, personal weapons such as fists or feet, and strangulation. Fifty-four percent of the victims suffered firearm injuries or stab wounds to the chest, 42% to the head/face or neck, 28% to the arms, 25% to the abdomen, and 19% to the legs (Figure 3). Thirty-four percent of victims in gang and gang-like homicides tested positive for alcohol and 4% tested positive for drugs.

The circumstances associated with gang and gang-like homicides included criminal activity (23%), illegal drug activity (22%), arguments over money or property (11%), other arguments (28%), and brawls (15%). Among persons 15-24 years of age, the leading circumstances associated with gang and gang-like homicides were arguments not involving money or property (34%), illegal drug activity (16%), and criminal activity (16%). Among persons 25-34 years of age, the leading circumstances were illegal drug activity (35%) and criminal activity (31%). Among persons 35 years of age and older, the leading circumstances were criminal activity (29%) and illegal drug activity (17%). Brawls were more often associated with gang-like homicides than gang-related homicides (26% and 9%, respectively), as were other arguments (40% and 23%, respectively) (Figure 4).

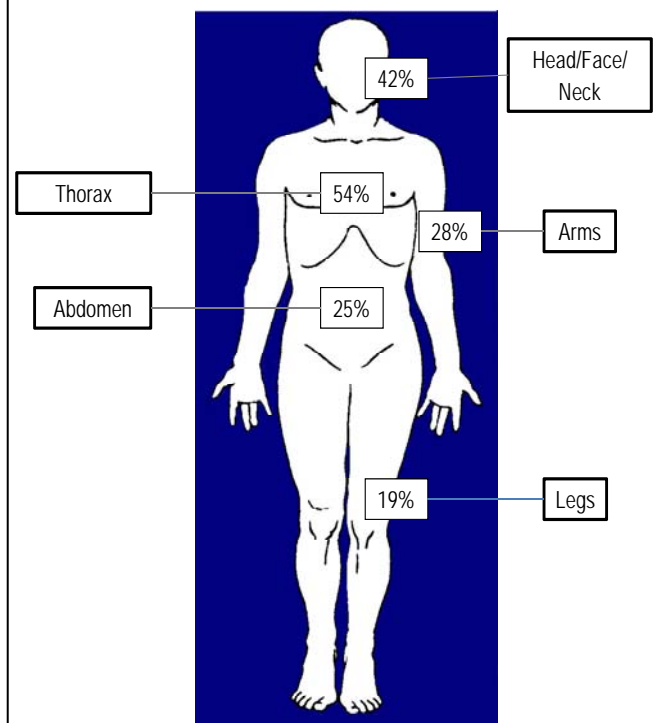
Eighty percent of all the gang and gang-like homicides occurred in Oklahoma, Tulsa, and Comanche counties. Oklahoma County had the highest number (82), followed by Tulsa County (47), and Comanche County (7). Twenty percent of the incidents occurred in 19 other counties including Beckham, Bryan, Caddo, Canadian, Carter, Choctaw, Custer, Greer, Harmon, Le Flore, Logan, McCurtain, Muskogee, Okmulgee, Pittsburg, Pontotoc, Stephens, Tillman, and Wagoner (Figure 5).

Table 1. Weapons Used in Gang and Gang-like Homicides, Oklahoma, 2004-2008

Type of Weapon	Number*
Firearms:	
Semiautomatic Handgun	99
Handgun (unknown type)	25
Revolver	7
Rifle (unknown type)	7
Automatic Rifle	1
Semiautomatic Rifle	5
Shotgun (unknown type)	1
Double Barrel Shotgun	1
Unknown Type	15
Sharp Instruments	15
Blunt Instruments	8
Personal Weapons (fists, feet, etc.)	2
Strangulation	1
Total	187

*Includes a total of 187 weapons cited in 169 gang and gang-like homicides.

Figure 3. Wound Locations of Firearm Injuries and Stab Wounds in Gang and Gang-like Homicides, Oklahoma, 2004-2008*

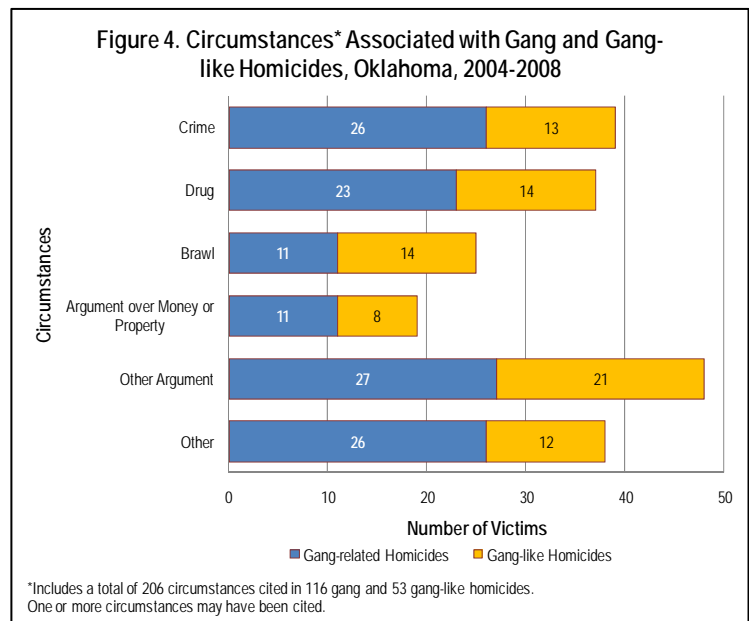


*A total of 319 firearm injuries or stab wounds were documented for 169 victims. Victims may have more than one wound.

CASE BRIEFS

Gang-related homicides:

- Following an altercation between gang members inside a club, a crowd began gathering outside the club. A 17-year-old male was shot in the head when one of the gang members fired a gun into the crowd that was gathering. He was transported to a hospital where he died a few hours later.
- A 20-year-old male gang member was involved in a physical altercation over a drug deal with the suspect, who was a rival gang member. The victim suffered multiple stab wounds and died four days later.
- A 14-year-old male gang member was leaving a store when he was shot in the arm. He attempted to crawl away, but was shot three more times by a rival gang member. The incident was sparked by a major gambling crime and involved rival gang members.



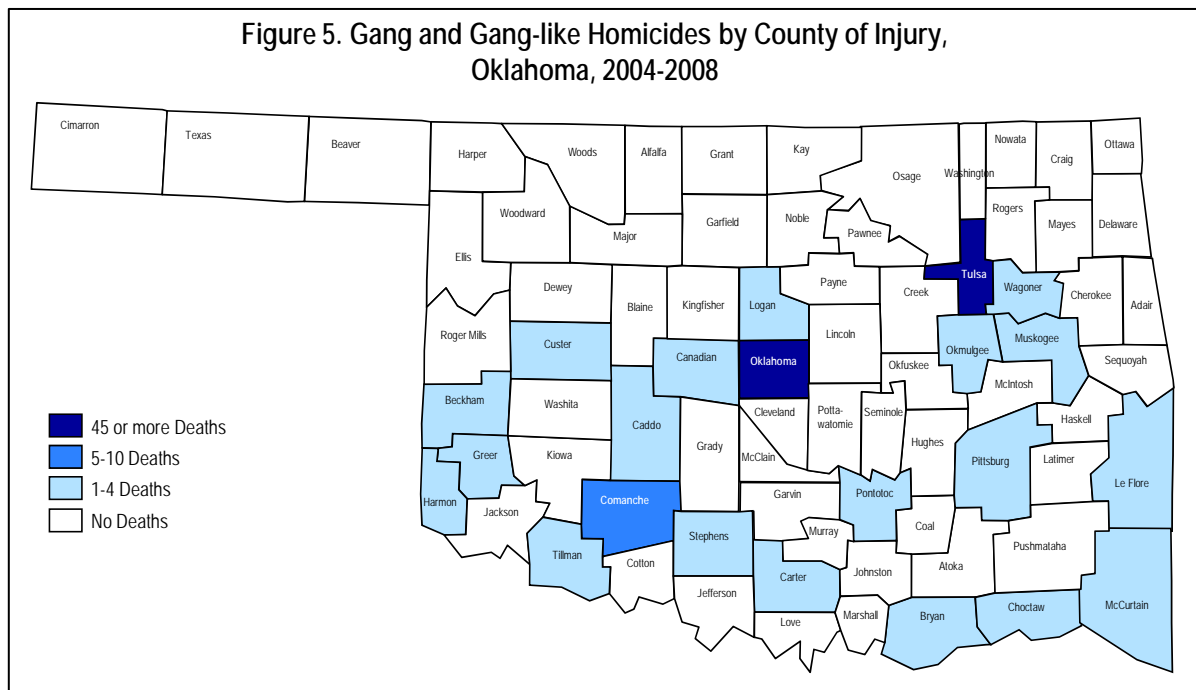
Gang-like homicides:

- A 53-year-old male was beaten to death by a large group of people in a suspected drug house. After being beaten and kicked in the head and abdomen multiple times, he was driven around town by his attackers to show others what had been done to the man.
- A 25-year-old male was with friends at an apartment building when a car pulled up and an occupant within the vehicle fired multiple shots. The victim was struck multiple times in the chest and abdomen and was pronounced dead at the hospital.
- A 14-year-old female was in an apartment parking lot with a family member where two men were fighting. One of the men began shooting at the other and a stray bullet struck the female victim in the forehead.

PREVENTION

Reports by police departments suggest that gang activity has decreased since the 1990s. However, recent trends reveal that street gangs have been migrating from metropolitan to suburban and rural areas. Street gang presence is now seen in 99% of U.S. cities with populations greater than 100,000 and these gangs are also more violent than before. The increase of youth gangs is of particular concern. By understanding the risk factors for gang formation, it may be possible to address the issues of gang violence. The risk factors are multifactorial and include individual and family factors, along with personal attributes, peer groups, and school and community factors. Formation of gangs is frequently linked with poverty, unemployment, racism, delinquency, and a lack of education and family structure. The strategies used to prevent formation of youth gangs are much like those used to prevent youth violence and delinquency.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention promotes the Comprehensive Gang Model to decrease gang-related activities. OK-VDRS data for 2004-2008 suggest that the demographic at greatest risk for gang violence are black males between 15-24 years of age. Additionally, the data show that victims of gang and gang-like homicides were less likely to have a college education. Social interventions are a necessity for reducing gang violence. Local citizens, community organizations (faith-based, grassroots, etc.), and the educational system have an important role in suppressing gang activity among youth. Gangs offer youth a sense of belonging, which is frequently the primary reason for joining a gang. To prevent the



development of youth gangs, it is important to provide youth with proper avenues to develop socially so that gang involvement is not desired. Strategies to promote educational attainment among at-risk youth will have a positive impact on academic, economic, and social opportunities. A strong law enforcement presence is important for monitoring and controlling gang activity. The Oklahoma City Metropolitan Gang Task Force and Tulsa Safe Streets Task Force are two law enforcement programs in Oklahoma involved in the investigation and suppression of gang activity. These programs also work with community groups to implement outreach programs to prevent gang violence.

RESOURCES

- Comprehensive Gang Model: <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/comprehensive-gang-model>
- 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
- Data and Statistics on Youth Violence: http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/statistics/statistics_data.asp#D
- Gang Fact Sheets: <http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/facts/gangs.asp>
- 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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The Oklahoma Violent Death Reporting System (OK-VDRS) is a statewide surveillance system for suicides, homicides, undetermined manner deaths, unintentional firearm injury deaths and legal intervention deaths. Data are collected from medical examiner reports, death certificates, law enforcement reports, and child fatality review data. The data are included in the National Violent Death Reporting System and can be accessed at <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/>.