

Characteristics of Gang Membership and Victimization

Katrina A. Rufino

Kathleen A. Fox

Glen A. Kercher

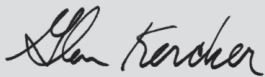
March 2011



Crime Victims' Institute • Criminal Justice Center • Sam Houston State University

...from the Director

This report addresses the relationship of victimization between gang members and those not affiliated with gangs. In addition, comparisons were made between gang members who were victimized and those who were not. An attempt is made to identify contextual factors that are often in place when victimization occurs. These results stem from interviews with incarcerated gang members and non-gang affiliated inmates. It is our hope that this report will help to inform the public about the risks associated with gang membership and the steps that could be taken to prevent it.



Glen Kercher
Crime Victims' Institute



MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Crime Victims' Institute is to

- conduct research to examine the impact of crime on victims of all ages in order to promote a better understanding of victimization
- improve services to victims
- assist victims of crime by giving them a voice
- inform victim-related policymaking at the state and local levels.



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Characteristics of Gang Membership and Victimization	3
Method	5
Measures	5
Results	6
Discussion	14
Endnotes	15

Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Ethnicity of gang and non-gang members	7
Figure 2. Educational level of gang and non-gang members.	7
Figure 3. Marital status of gang and non-gang members.	8
Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of gang and non-gang members	8
Figure 4. Theft victimization among gang and non-gang members	9
Figure 5. Simple assault victimization among gang and non-gang members	10
Figure 6. Aggravated assault victimization among gang and non-gang members.	10
Figure 7. Target of drive by victimization among gang and non-gang members	11
Table 2. Descriptors of gang membership	12
Table 3. Descriptors of gang member conduct	13

Executive Summary

The relationship between gang membership and crime victimization has only recently begun to be examined. Much remains unknown about the descriptive nature of the gang-victimization link, especially among incarcerated populations. The current study aimed to provide a backdrop to the emerging gang-victimization literature by examining: (1) characteristics of victimization for gang and non-gang members, (2) descriptors of gang membership comparing victimized to non-victimized gang members, and (3) characteristics of gang membership comparing victimized to non-victimized gang members. A sample of both gang and non-gang member prison inmates were interviewed and answered a series of questions regarding involvement in crime and experiences with victimization. Gang members answered further questions pertaining to gang membership and gang member conduct. Results indicate that gang members were significantly more likely to be victimized compared to non-gang members and gang members were more likely to be alone and under the influence of substances when victimized. Characteristics of membership and gang member conduct by victimization status are also presented.

Acknowledgements:

This research was funded by the Crime Victims Institute at Sam Houston State University. The opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the funding agency or those of the participating correctional facilities. The authors would like to thank the prison administrators and inmates who participated in this research.

Disclaimer:

The research contained in this document was coordinated in part by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Project #582-AR09. The contents of this document reflect the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

Characteristics of Gang Membership and Victimization

Katrina A. Rufino, M.A.

Kathleen A. Fox, Ph.D.

Glen A. Kercher Ph.D.

Gangs are beginning to reemerge as an important topic among policy makers and researchers¹, and interest in gangs is fast approaching the level observed in the 1980s and 1990s. At the federal level, the Gang Abatement and Prevention Act of 2009 was reintroduced (based on the federal bill from 2007 that was passed by the Senate but not the House) and recently passed by the Senate. This bill proposes expenditures of over one billion dollars to increase prosecution and prevention efforts against gangs.² While the relationship between gang membership and involvement in criminal behavior is well-established,^{3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11, 12,13,14,15} comparatively little is known about the extent to which gang members are victimized. Of the few studies that focus on the victimization of gang members, findings appear to be mixed and the extent to which gang members experience victimization remains unclear. Examining the gang-victimization link is important for gaining a deeper understanding of gang members' lives and experiences within the gang. Therefore, the current study aims to further investigate the gang-victimization link by comparing gang-related factors between victimized gang members and non-victimized gang members.

Gangs and Victimization

While the relationship between gangs and crime perpetration is well established, the association between gang membership and crime victimization is less clear. Empirical evidence suggests that perpetrators of crime are also likely to be victimized by crime.^{16, 17, 18} Therefore, there is reason to suspect that gang members not only perpetrate crime, but are also victimized by crime. Some scholars have recently pointed out that gang members are at an increased risk for victimization given their risky lifestyle (e.g., drug use, drug sales, and crime), their risk of retaliation from rival gangs (e.g., drive-by shootings and assault), and their risk of violence from within their own gang (e.g., gang initiation and punishment for breaking rules).¹⁹

Crime victimization among gang members has received limited research attention. Among the few studies that have examined this relationship, findings are mixed, although the majority of the research establishes a relationship between victimization and gang membership. Research employing qualitative methods often show support for the gang-victimization link. For example, qualitative interviews with active gang members reveal victimization from gang members' own gang (e.g., initiation rituals) and from other gangs (e.g., injuries from fighting and from being shot).²⁰ Similarly, Joe and Chesney-Lind (1995)²¹ interviewed male and female youth gang members who described victimization by family members, specifically childhood physical abuse and sexual assault. Furthermore, interviews with female gang members suggested that they often use their gender to abstain from violence with rival gangs, but that male members of their own gang therefore characterize them as weaker members and subject the female members to other forms of victimization.^{22, 23}

Of the handful of studies that have recently examined the relationship between gang membership and crime victimization using quantitative methods, the majority have shown support for the gang-victimization link among samples of adolescent youths. For

example, Peterson, Taylor, and Esbensen (2004)²⁴ were the first to empirically examine crime victimization among gang members using data from the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program. Elementary students were asked to reflect on the past six months and respond to three items measuring violent victimization, including assault without a weapon, assault with a weapon, and robbery. Peterson et al. (2004)²⁵ found that gang members were more likely to be victimized than non-gang members before, during, and after gang membership. Taylor et al. (2007)²⁶ examined this relationship using a sample of nearly 6,000 eighth grade students across eleven locations. Employing the same measures of violent victimization (using a reference of 12 months instead of six months), Taylor et al. (2007)²⁷ concluded that gang members were more likely (and more frequently) victims of violence than non-gang members. Similarly, using survey research from high school students, Gover et al. (2009)²⁸ found that gang members were more likely than non-gang members to be victimized by dating violence, sexual assault, and violent victimization (injured during a physical assault). Using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Delisi, Barnes, Beaver, and Gibson (2009)²⁹ found support for the gang-victimization link. Melde, Taylor, and Esbensen (2009)³⁰ also found support for the relationship between gang membership and victimization among a large sample of youth between the ages of 10 and 16. Interestingly, Melde et al. (2009)³¹ also discovered that gang members were not only significantly more likely to be victimized, but they were also significantly more likely to report being at an increased risk for victimization. In other words, gang members acknowledged experiencing more victimization and being more at-risk for future victimization.

A few studies have also found support for the gang-victimization link among incarcerated samples. For example, Decker, Katz, and Webb (2008)³² compared current and former gang members within a sample of juvenile arrestees and determined that current gang members were more likely than non-gang members to be victimized by a number of crimes, including being threatened with a gun, shot at, shot, threatened with another weapon, injured with a weapon, and assaulted. Among a sample of incarcerated adult jail inmates, Fox, Lane, and Akers (2010)³³ found that gang members were significantly more likely to be victimized by property and personal crimes compared to non-gang members.

While the majority of prior research supports the relationship between gang membership and victimization, two recent studies cast doubt on the gang-victimization link. Among a longitudinal sample of African American youth, Spano, Freilich, and Bolland (2008)³⁴ examined the effects of gang membership on victimization (e.g., threatened with a knife or gun in the past 90 days, needed medical attention due to being cut, or had been shot-at within the past year). While the researchers initially determined that gang membership was a significant predictor of victimization, this relationship vanished after controlling for the possession of a gun and employment. Using the G.R.E.A.T. data, and the same three measures of violent victimization used by Peterson et al. (2004)³⁵ and Taylor et al. (2007),⁶ Gibson, Miller, Swatt, Jennings, and Gover (2009)³⁷ employed propensity score matching (PSM) to examine the causal relationship between gang membership and victimization. Similar to Spano et al. (2008),³⁸ Gibson et al. (2009)³⁹ also concluded that gang members were not violently victimized significantly more than non-gang members.

Overall, the limited research on the relationship between gang membership and crime victimization appears to be somewhat mixed; however, the majority of the research shows support for the gang-victimization link. While the handful of studies that have quantitatively focused on the victimization of gang members offer original and important scientific contributions, they also have several limitations that the current study aims to address. First, these studies largely sampled juveniles (for exception, see Fox et al., 2010)⁴⁰ and, therefore, the

extent to which adult gang members experience crime victimization is an underdeveloped line of inquiry. Second, the extent to which the gang-victimization link exists among a population of adult prison inmates is unknown. Third, among the limited research that examines that gang-victimization link, none have investigated this relationship further by making comparisons between victimized and non-victimized gang members in terms of a number of specific gang-related factors. The current research offers a contribution to the existing literature by addressing the limitations of prior research and by being among the first to quantitatively compare victimized and non-victimized gang members in an effort to further examine the gang-victimization link.

Method

To carry out this study, male inmates in a Texas prison were interviewed with a structured interview to garner information specific to victimization. An intake facility was explicitly chosen in an attempt to improve recall, as inmates generally remained in this facility for a maximum of two years, and only victimization in the two years prior to incarceration was examined. Furthermore, the interviewers only gathered information on victimization and gang activities outside of prison, which exacerbated our need for time limitation.

Approximately half of the sample was selected because they were identified members of an organized gang (i.e., Aryan Brotherhood, Bloods, Crips, Texas Syndicate, Mexican Mafia), and were therefore administratively segregated. All gang members in administrative segregation for gang affiliation were given the opportunity to participate. While many inmates agreed to participate, it should be noted that members of the Mexican Mafia gang were not permitted to participate by leaders of their organization. Similarly, on one day of interviewing, members of the Aryan Circle were instructed not to participate by gang leaders. In an attempt to create a comparison group of non-gang members, general population offenders were randomly selected for participation. Once in the privacy of the interview room, offenders were individually informed of the purpose of the study, which was to identify reasons for joining a gang, to identify characteristics of gang membership which increase the likelihood of being a victim of a crime, and to identify the situations in which the victimization of gang members is most likely to occur. After reviewing the consent form with the interviewer, offenders were given the opportunity to ask questions. Approximately 80% of offenders agreed to participate and signed consent forms that were retained by the interviewer.

Interviewers proceeded with demographic and background questions. All respondents were asked if they were a member of a gang. For a large majority of interviews, the response to this question was taken at face value. However, eight respondents were coded as gang members, despite their denial, due to overwhelming evidence such as visible tattoos showing gang affiliation. Furthermore, offenders who endorsed only prison gang membership or membership for less than two years were not considered gang members. Once membership status was determined, victimization and perpetration questions were asked of all respondents, and gang members were asked additional questions regarding gang membership (i.e., rules, expectations, codes of conduct, initiation).

Measures

Crime victimization. Crime victimization was measured based on modified questions from previously validated scales.^{41,42} Non-gang members were asked: “Have you had something taken from you directly by force or by threatening to hurt you in the last two years you were

outside of prison?” “Has someone attacked you, injured you, or beaten you up without the use of a weapon in the last two years you were outside of prison?” “Has someone attacked you with a weapon such as a gun, knife, bottle, or chair in the last two years you were outside of prison?” “Have you been the intended target of a drive by shooting in the last two years you were outside of prison?” and “Has anyone forced you to do sexual things even though you did not want to do those things in the last two years you were outside of prison?” Gang members were asked the same questions, except it was specified that the question pertained to the last two years they were in a gang, outside of prison. No respondents endorsed the item pertaining to sexual assault. As a result, the item measuring sexual assault was removed from further analyses. A dichotomous victimization index was calculated for the purpose of the analyses. Respondents who endorsed no victimization variables were coded as zero. Respondents endorsing any of the victimization variables were coded as having been the victim of a crime (= 1).

Gang related variables. Gang related variables were asked of all respondents who endorsed gang membership. These variables included open-ended and close-ended questions such as: “Do you have any tattoos or scars that show you are/were a member of this gang?” “Was there a code of conduct expected of members?” “What kind of things happened during initiation?” “In what ways did you gain respect from other members?” “What were the benefits of being a member?” and “Do you feel like other people had respect for you or looked up to you before you joined the gang?” Questions pertaining to gang activities and reasons for joining were also asked.

Demographic variables. Demographic variables including age, race/ethnicity (Caucasian, Hispanic, African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, mixed race, and other race), marital status (single, married, divorced, cohabiting, other) grades from respondents’ last two years of school (failing, barely passing, average, and excellent) and approximate family income during childhood (less than \$25,000; \$25,000 to \$49,999; \$50,000 to \$99,999; and \$100,000 or more) were asked of all respondents.

Results

Figures 1-3 and table 1 provides descriptive information of the gang member subsample ($N = 84$) and the non-gang member subsample ($N = 133$). The combined sample was all male and was evenly comprised with regard to race/ethnicity. Non-gang members had a slightly higher percentage of Caucasian respondents ($N = 54$; 40.6%) compared to African American respondents ($N = 45$, 33.8%) and gang-members had a higher percentage of African American respondents ($N = 38$; 45.2%) compared to Caucasian respondents ($N = 21$; 25.0%), however, these differences did not reach statistical significance. The non-gang members were significantly older (mean age of 33.86) than the gang members (mean age of 28.02) and there was a significant difference between groups regarding level of education, with non-gang members completing more education than gang members. Additionally, gang members were significantly more likely to have a juvenile arrest and to have witnessed interpersonal violence between their parents or caregivers as children compared to non-gang members. No other differences reached statistical significance.

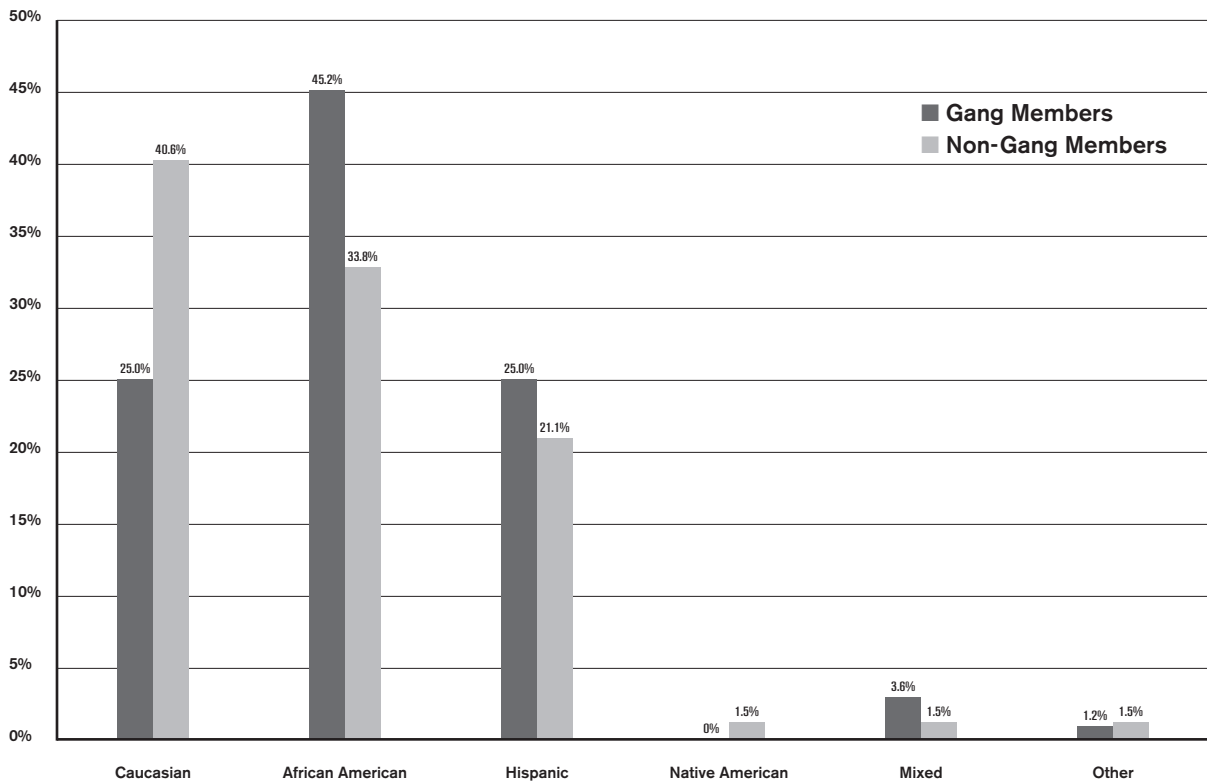


Figure 1. Ethnicity of gang and non-gang members

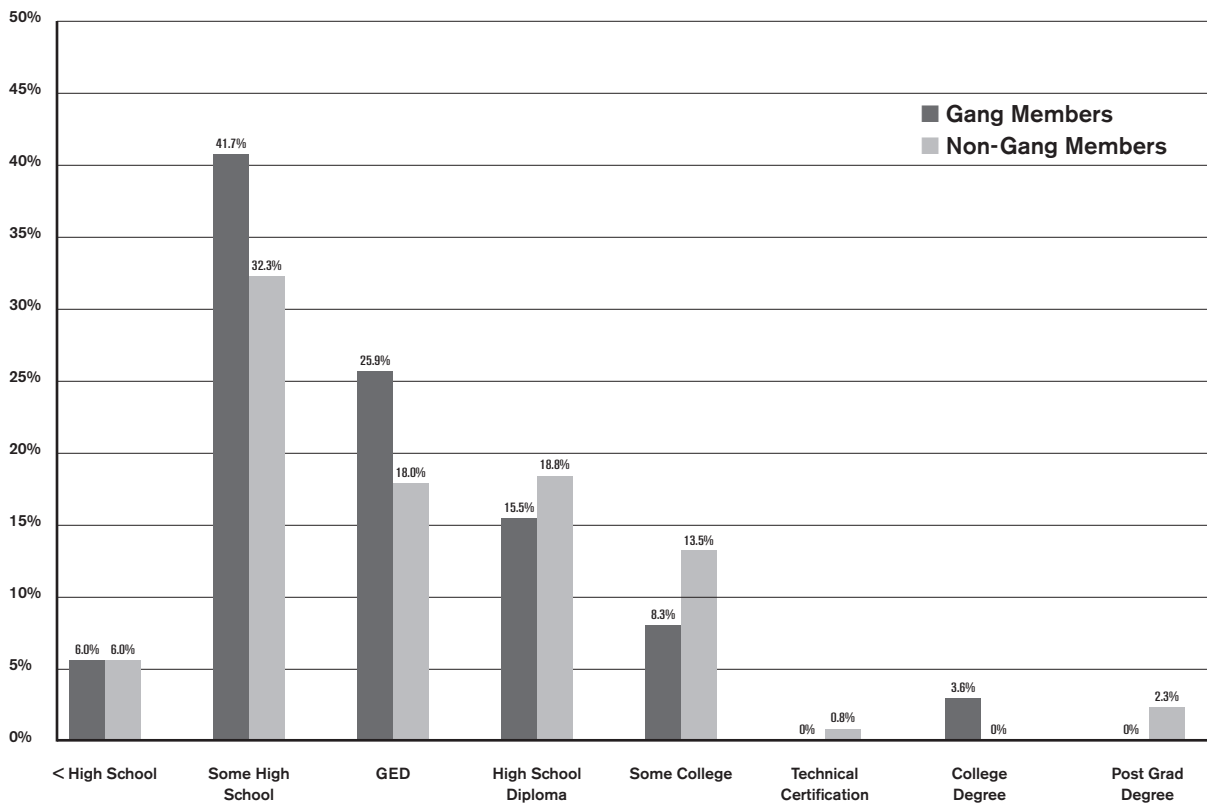


Figure 2. Educational level of gang and non-gang members

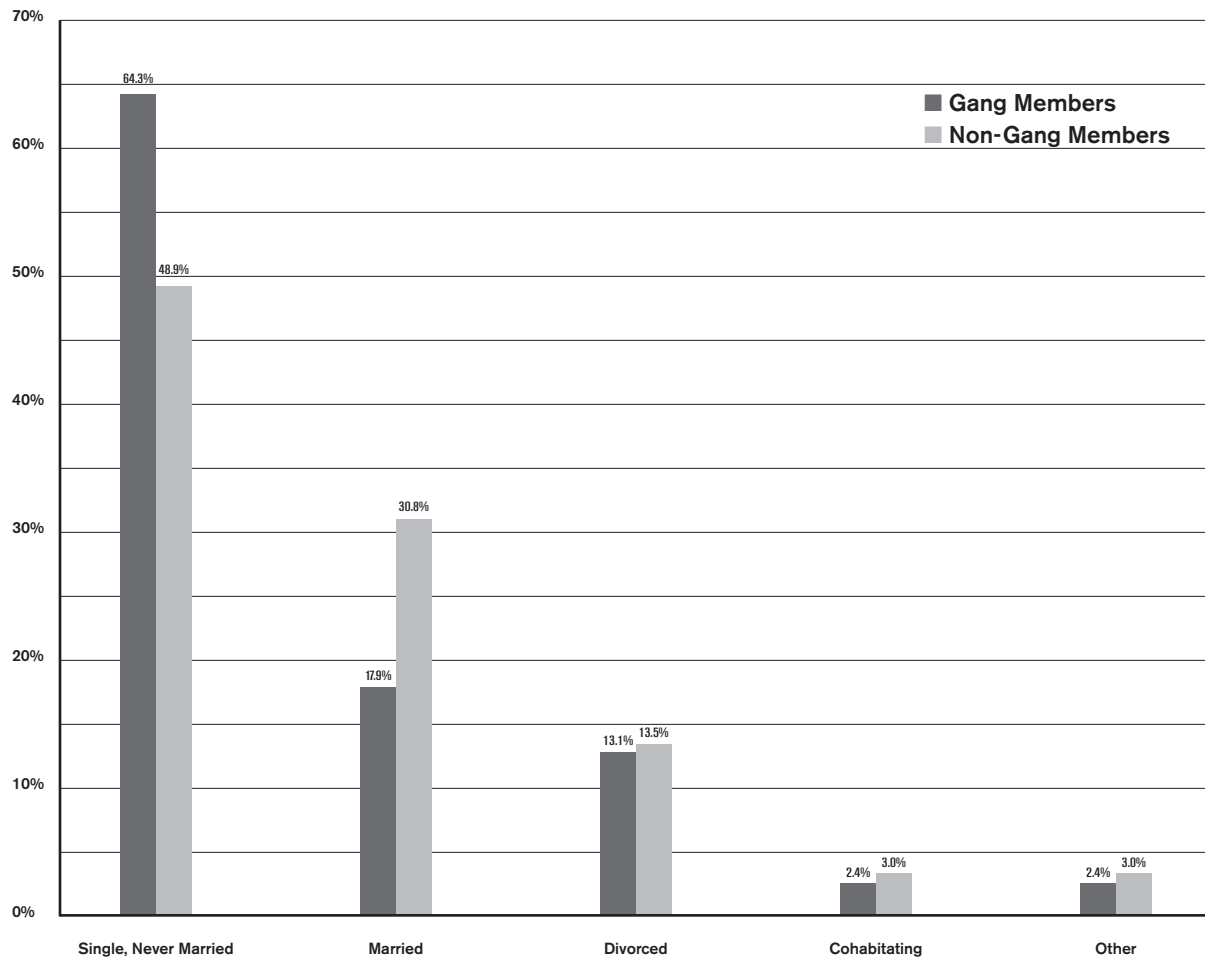


Figure 3. Marital status of gang and non-gang members

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of gang and non-gang members

	Gang Members (N = 84) N (%)	Non-Gang Members (N=133) N (%)
Age***		
Mean/Median/Mode	28.02 / 27 / 30	33.86 / 32 / 23
SD	(6.69)	(10.48)
Juvenile Arrest***	63 (75.0%)	55 (41.4%)
Number of Times in Prison		
Mean/Median/Mode	2.04 / 2 / 1	2.02 / 2 / 1
SD	(.096)	(1.41)
Employed before Prison***	48 (57.1%)	110 (82.7%)
Drug or Alcohol Abuse before Arrest	57 (67.9%)	82 (61.7%)
Witness IPV	47 (56.0%)	45 (33.8%)
*** p <.001		
Asterisks indicate a significant difference between gang and non-gang members.		

Figures 4-7 present descriptive information pertaining to victimization among both gang and non-gang members. Gang members were significantly more likely than non-gang members to be victims of simple assault, aggravated assault, and drive-by shootings. Theft was the only type of victimization for which the difference between groups did not reach statistical significance. Figures 4-7 also provides information regarding each victimization type, such as whether the respondent was alone or with others at the time of the offense, whether or not they were under the influence of substances during the offense, and their relationship to the perpetrator of the offense. Chi-square analyses revealed that gang members who were victims of simple assault and aggravated assault were significantly more likely to be alone and under the influence of substances at the time of the offense than non-gang members. With regard to victims of drive-by shootings, gang members were more likely to be under the influence of substances at the time of the offense, and the drive-by shooting was significantly more likely to be committed by a stranger when compared to non-gang members.

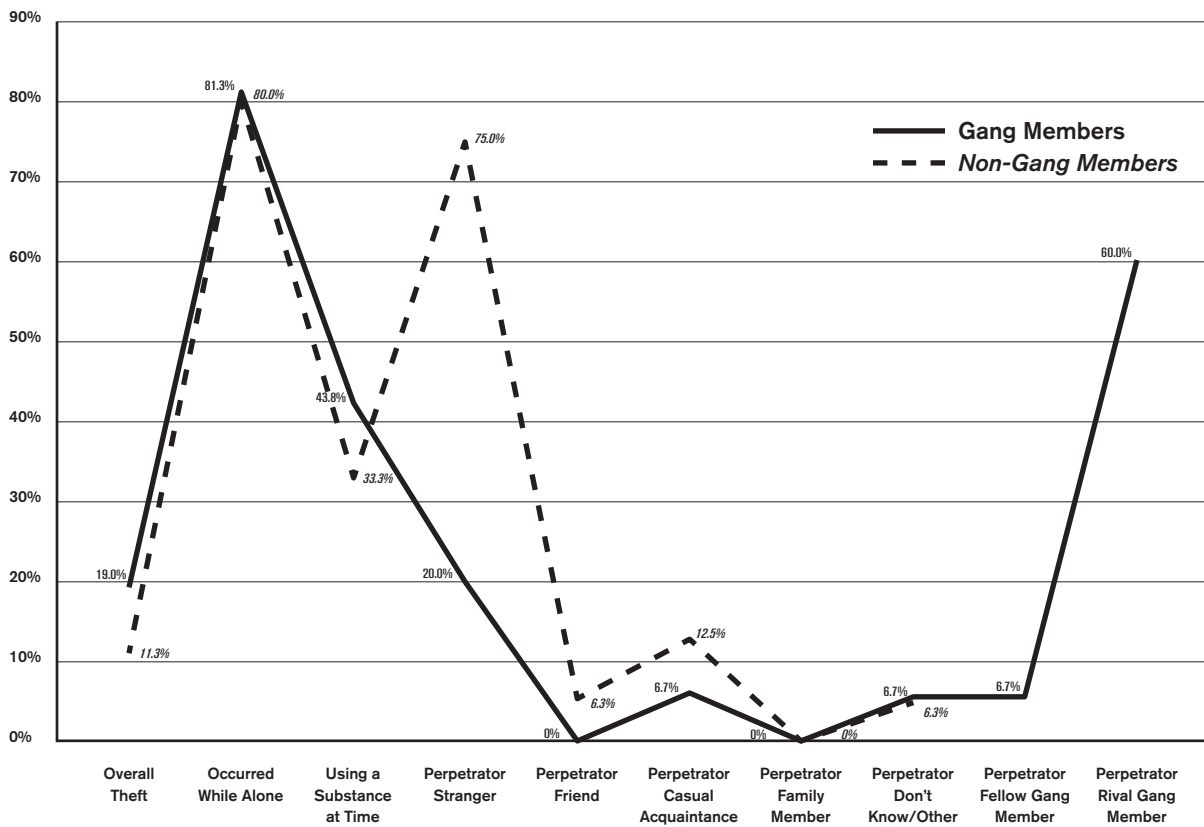


Figure 4. Theft victimization among gang and non-gang members

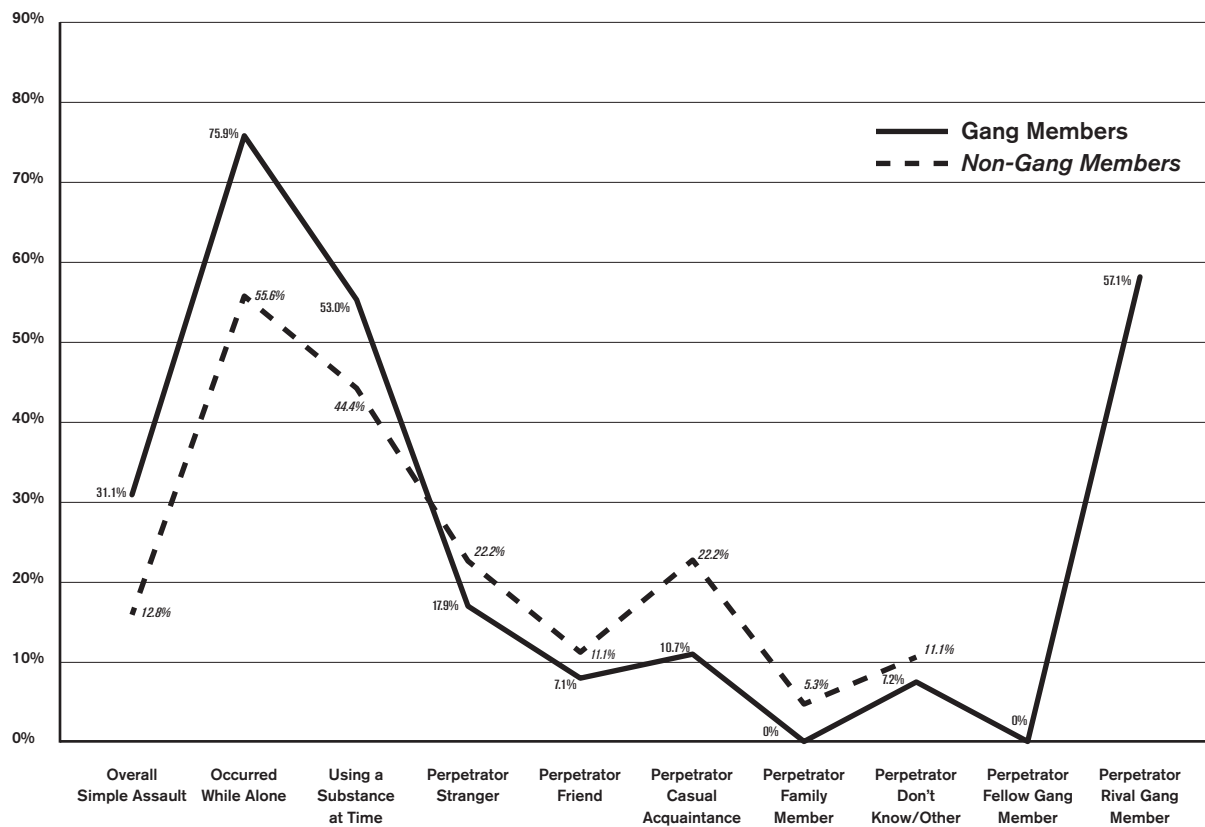


Figure 5. Simple assault victimization among gang and non-gang members

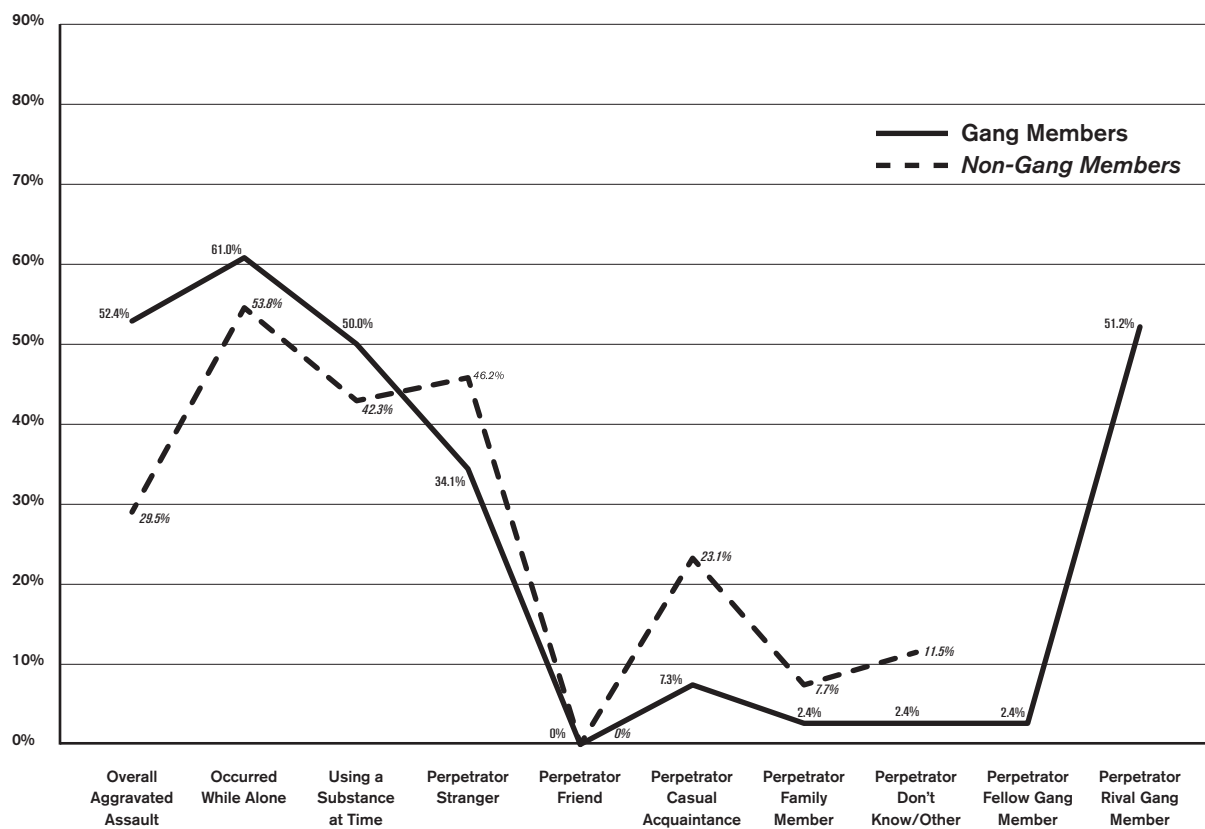


Figure 6. Aggravated assault victimization among gang and non-gang members

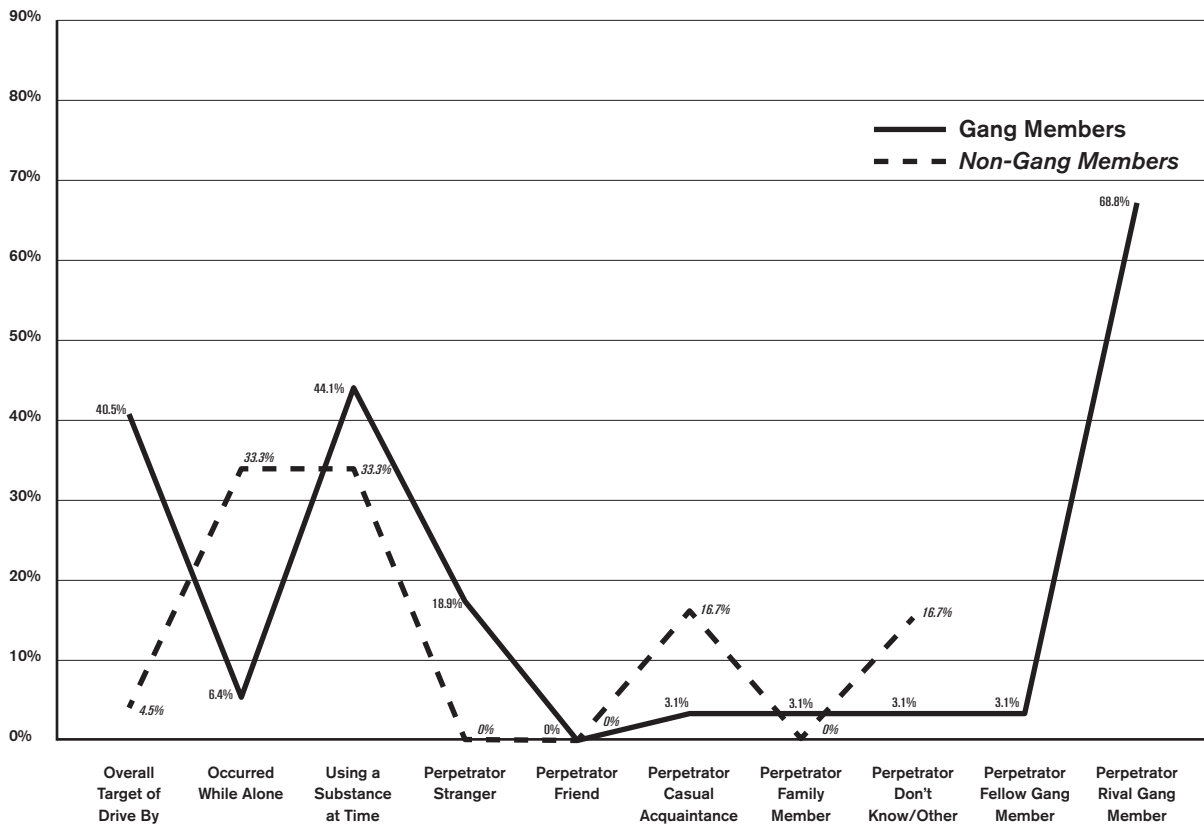


Figure 7. Target of drive by victimization among gang and non-gang members

Table 2 provides in-depth information about gang membership and these data are derived only from the gang member subsample. For the purpose of these analyses, information is provided for the total sample of gang members ($N = 84$) as well as by victimization status: gang members who reported victimization ($N = 60$) and gang members who reported no victimization ($N = 24$). Comparisons of means revealed that victimized gang members were significantly younger when they joined a gang (mean age of 14.43) compared to non-victimized gang members (mean age of 18.57). Furthermore, chi-square analyses revealed that victimized gang members were more likely to join a gang before coming to prison and have visible tattoos or scars that represent their gang membership status. Additionally, victimized gang members were more likely to report having a parent or adult relative in their gang as a reason for joining. Finally, victimized gang members were more likely to have held a special rank within their gang.

Table 3 presents descriptors of gang conduct among all gang members and among victimized gang members versus non-victimized gang members. Chi-square analyses revealed that non-victimized gang members were significantly more likely to report that there would be no consequence if they decided to leave their gang. Alternatively, victimized gang members were significantly more likely to report that their gang had control over an area of their neighborhood (i.e., turf). Furthermore, victimized gang members were more likely to report having rival gangs and also having conflicts with their rival gangs. Other aspects of gang membership that did not statistically differentiate between victimized and non-victimized gang members included having a code of conduct, being punished for breaking a rule, methods of conflict resolution, whether members attempted to leave the gang, perceived consequences if one left the gang, methods of turf control, and the number of rival gangs.

Table 2. Descriptors of gang membership

	Victimized Gang Members (N = 60)	Non-Victimized Gang Members (N = 24)
Age at Joining Gang**		
Mean (SD)	14.43 (4.04)	18.57 (6.23)
Employment before joining gang	12 (21.8%)	8 (42.1%)
Drug/alcohol abuse before joining gang	43 (76.8%)	14 (70.0%)
Had respect before joining gang	30 (72.7%)	14 (70.0%)
Belonged to more than one gang	7 (12.5%)	1 (4.8%)
Gang member before prison*	53 (88.3%)	16 (66.7%)
Gang tattoos/scars*	47 (83.9%)	13 (65.0%)
Frequency of gang association		
Daily	45 (80.4%)	13 (68.4%)
Weekly	11 (19.6%)	4 (20.0%)
Monthly	10 (17.9%)	2 (10.0%)
Less than Monthly	13 (23.3%)	2 (10.0%)
Frequency of non-gang association		
Daily	22 (39.3%)	12 (60.0%)
Weekly	11 (19.6%)	4 (20.0%)
Monthly	10 (17.9%)	2 (10.0%)
Less than Monthly	13 (23.3%)	2 (10.0%)
Reasons for joining - Mean (SD)		
Brother, sister or cousin in group	3.42 (3.77)	2.85 (3.17)
Parent/other adult relative in group*	3.75 (4.07)	1.90 (2.77)
Protection/Safety	2.73 (3.05)	3.21 (3.58)
Friendship/Popularity	5.13 (3.89)	5.21 (3.77)
Belong to something	4.98 (3.86)	4.58 (3.82)
Peer Pressure	2.71 (2.90)	2.21 (2.39)
Forced or Intimidated	1.48 (1.82)	1.05 (0.23)
Way to make more money	5.98 (4.23)	4.47 (3.63)
It would be fun and exciting	5.61 (3.97)	5.68 (4.24)
Increase respect	6.07 (3.91)	4.74 (4.09)
Gaining respect from other members		
Showing your ability to fight	26 (44.8%)	8 (40.0%)
Committing crimes	12 (20.7%)	1 (5.0%)
Carry yourself/Showing loyalty	10 (17.2%)	4 (20.0%)
Make money/Wear nice clothes	8 (13.8%)	4 (20.0%)
Other	2 (3.4%)	3 (15.0%)
Held special gang rank*	32 (58.2%)	6 (30.0%)
Benefits of gang membership		
Respect	20 (37.0%)	4 (20.0%)
Protection	7 (13.0%)	6 (30.0%)
Fun	3 (5.5%)	1 (5.0%)
Money	13 (24.1%)	5 (25.0%)
Drugs	3 (5.5%)	2 (10.0%)
None	3 (5.5%)	2 (10.0%)
Other	5 (9.3%)	0

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 3. Descriptors of gang member conduct

	Victimized Gang Members (N = 60)	Non-Victimized Gang Members (N = 24)
Code of conduct expected of members	48 (88.9%)	17 (85.0%)
Defend Others	20 (41.7%)	7 (41.2%)
Make Money, Sell Drugs	1 (2.1%)	0
Carry Yourself	13 (27.1%)	6 (35.3%)
Loyalty/Respect	6 (12.5%)	3 (17/6%)
Other	8 (16.7%)	1 (5.9%)
Punishment for breaking rule		
Punished with violence	38 (65.5%)	14 (70.0%)
Kicked out of the gang	4 (6.9%)	2 (10.0%)
Violated/Disciplined	6 (10.3%)	4 (20.0%)
Killed	5 (8.6%)	0
Other	5 (8.6%)	0
Member conflicts solved by		
Fight	24 (44.4%)	9 (45.0%)
Decision by the leader of the gang	6 (11.1%)	1 (5.0%)
Decision by the hierarchy	15 (27.8%)	5 (25.0%)
Talking it out	8 (14.8%)	5 (25.0%)
Other	1 (1.9%)	0
Ever attempted to leave gang	32 (58.2%)	9 (45.0%)
Perceived consequence if left gang		
Death	16 (39.0%)	3 (18.8%)
Violence/Jumped Out	13 (31.7%)	4 (25.0%)
Impossible to leave	2 (4.9%)	2 (12.5%)
Nothing*	3 (7.3%)	5 (31.3%)
Other	7 (17.1%)	2 (12.5%)
Gang had control of turf***	45 (80.4%)	8 (42.1%)
Method of turf control		
Violence	17 (38.6%)	6 (75.0%)
Fear	4 (9.1%)	0
Drugs/Money	8 (18.2%)	0
Presence	12 (27.3%)	1 (12.5%)
Other	3 (6.8%)	1 (12.5%)
Gang had rival gangs*	47 (85.5%)	15 (75.0%)
Number of rival gangs		
Mean / Median / Mode	3.44 / 3 / 3	3.43 / 3 / 2
(SD)	(3.52)	(2.23)
Conflicts with rival gangs*	43 (95.5%)	11 (45.8%)
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001		

Discussion

The current study first examined the characteristics of victimization among gang and non-gang members, and results revealed that gang members were significantly more likely to be the victims of crime compared to non-gang members. Furthermore, with regard to both simple and aggravated assault and drive-by shootings, gang members were overwhelmingly more likely to be under the influence of a substance at the time of their victimization. This finding is consistent with the arguments made by Taylor and colleagues (2007)⁴³ that the risky lifestyle associated with gang membership increases the risk of victimization. Additionally, when physically assaulted, gang members were more likely to be alone and over half reported that the attack was perpetrated by a rival gang member. Again, this finding further supports Taylor et al. (2007)'s⁴⁴ contention regarding the likelihood that gang members are victimized as a form of retaliation from rival gang members.

The current study also examined the descriptors of gang membership as a function of victimization. The findings suggest that victimized gang members were significantly more likely than non-victimized gang members to have joined prior to prison, have tattoos or scars indicative of membership, and were significantly younger when they joined a gang. Furthermore, victimized gang members cited having a parent or other adult relative in the gang as an important reason for joining a gang and were significantly more likely to report holding a special rank in their gang. Interestingly, there were no significant differences between victimized and non-victimized gang members with regard to frequency of gang and non-gang association. In other words, victimized gang members did not socialize more or less often with their gang compared to non-victimized gang members. Therefore, victimization appears to have little to do with the degree of exposure to the gang, as suggested by some theoretical perspectives such as routine activities theory. However, recent research has found empirical support for lifestyle and routine activities theory as theoretical explanations for the gang-victimization link among a sample of juveniles.⁴⁵ Therefore, future research is needed to apply lifestyle and routine activities theory to adult samples, and incarcerated samples, similar to the one utilized in the current study, in an effort to further understand the complex relationship between gang membership and victimization.

Lastly, the present study examined descriptors of gang member conduct between victimized and non-victimized gang members. Victimized gang members were significantly more likely to report the presence of rival gangs and conflicts with rivals during their victimization. Victimized gang members were also more likely to report having control over an area or turf, which is consistent with the finding that victimized gang members reported violence as their most frequent method of maintaining turf control.

The findings of the present study have practical implications for gang prevention. While many individuals often join gangs for protection, this study reveals that individuals who join a gang are more likely to be victimized.⁴⁶ Furthermore, this study revealed characteristics of gang membership and gang member conduct most associated with victimization, and directly compared victimized to non-victimized gang members, which revealed the characteristics of gangs that may put members at increased risk of victimization. This information could prove useful for gang educators to pinpoint behaviors that increase the likelihood of victimization.

While the present study has practical implications, it has limitations as well. First, it is important to consider the population and location of the study when attempting to generalize the findings. The respondents in the present study were incarcerated in a Texas state prison that administratively segregates confirmed members of organized gangs. Although respondents were assured of confidentiality and non-affiliation with the prison, inmates may have perceived

a risk in admitting membership. While it is possible that inmates may have attempted to conceal their gang membership status, this occurred infrequently given that only eight respondents who were identified by staff as gang members denied their membership. Furthermore, due to the prison setting and restrictions, researchers were not permitted to randomly select respondents. Although the correctional officers who randomly selected respondents were not fully informed of the purpose of the study, it is possible non-confirmed gang members were suspicious as to the reason behind their selection and thus may have been less likely to participate or less forthcoming in their responses. In other words, the current study is plagued to a certain degree by a selection effect, given that participation was voluntary and the sampling was non-random. It is important to recall, however, that the current study obtained a high response rate (approximately 80%). Future research in this area should consider addressing the limitations of the present study. For example, random selection by the researchers could improve the generalizability of the sample.

Despite the previously mentioned limitations, this study offers an important contribution to the emerging gang-victimization line of research. For example, this is the first study to quantitatively compare victimized versus non-victimized gang members incarcerated in prison. This study is also innovative in its analysis of gang membership and gang member conduct among victimized gang members. Overall, the current study provides a descriptive backdrop to the recent body of literature that has begun to examine the relationship between gang membership and crime victimization, which is an important topic that is nevertheless underdeveloped and ripe for future research.

Endnotes

- 1 Barrows, J., & Huff, C. R. (2009). Gangs and public policy: Constructing and deconstructing gang databases. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 8, 675-703.
- 2 Feinstein, D. (2009). Gang Abatement and Prevention Act of 2009: Bill summary. Available electronically at murray.senate.gov/justice/gangbill.pdf
- 3 Cohen, A. K. (1969). Forward and overview. In C. R. Huff's (Ed.) *Gangs in America* pp 7-21. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- 4 Decker, S., & Van Winkle, B. (1996). *Life in the gang: Family, friends, and violence*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- 5 Esbensen, F. A., & Huizinga, D. (1993). Gangs, drugs, and delinquency in a survey of urban youth. *Criminology*, 31(4), 565-589.
- 6 Hagedorn, J. (1988). *Gangs in America*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- 7 Huff, R. (1998). *Comparing the criminal behavior of youth gangs and at-risk youths*. Research in Brief (Oct.). Washington: U.S. Department of Justice.
- 8 Klein, M. W. (1971). *Street Gangs and Street Workers*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- 9 Klein, M., & Maxson, C. (2006). *Street gang patterns and control*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 10 Maxson, C. L., & Klein, M. W. (1990). Street gang violence: Twice as great or half as great? In C. R. Huff's (Ed.) *Gangs in America* pp 77-100. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- 11 Miller, W. B. (1966). Violent crimes by city gangs. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 364, 96-112.
- 12 Spergel, I. A. (1964). *Slumtown, Racketville, Haulberg*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 13 Thornberry, T., Krohn, M., Lizotte, A., & Chard-Wierschem, D. (1993). The role of juvenile gangs in facilitating delinquent behavior. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 30, 55-87.
- 14 Thrasher, F. (1927). *The gang: A study of 1,313 gangs in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 15 Vigil, J. D. (1988). *Barrio gangs: Street life and identity in Southern California*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- 16 Lauritsen, J. L., Sampson, R. J., & Laub, J. H. (1991). The link between offending and victimization among adolescents. *Criminology*, 29, 265-292.

- 17 Lauritsen, J. L., Laub, J. H., & Sampson, R. J. (1992). Conventional and delinquent activities: Implications for the prevention of violent victimization among adolescents. *Violence and Victims*, 7, 91-108.
- 18 Lauritsen, J. L., & Laub, J. H. (2007). Understanding the link between victimization and offending: New reflections on an old idea. *Crime Prevention Studies*, 22, 55-75.
- 19 Taylor, T., Peterson, D., Esbensen, F., & Freng, A. (2007). Gang membership as a risk factor for adolescent violent victimization. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 44, 351-380.
- 20 Supra Note 1
- 21 Joe, K., & Chesney-Lind, M. (1995). Just every mother's angel: An analysis of gender and ethnic variations in youth gang membership. In M. Chesney-Lind & J. Hagedorn (Eds.), *Female Gangs in America* (pp. 210-232). Chicago: Lake View Press.
- 22 Miller, J. (1998). Gender and victimization risk among young women in gangs. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 35, 429-453.
- 23 Molitor, C. E. (1996). Female gang members: A profile of aggression and victimization. *Social Work*, 41(3), 251-257.
- 24 Peterson, D., Taylor, T. J., & Esbensen, F. (2004). Gang membership and violent victimization. *Justice Quarterly*, 21(4), 793-815.
- 25 Ibid
- 26 Supra note 19
- 27 Ibid
- 28 Gover, A. R., Jennings, W. G., & Tewksbury, R. (2009). Adolescent male and female gang members' experiences with violent victimization, dating violence, and sexual assault. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 34, 103-115.
- 29 Delisi, M., Barnes, J. C., Beaver, K. M., & Gibson, C. L. (2009). Delinquent gangs and adolescent victimization revisited: A propensity score matching approach. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 36, 808-823.
- 30 Melde, C., Taylor, T. J., & Esbensen, F. (2009). "I got your back." An examination of the prospective function of gang membership in adolescence. *Criminology*, 47, 565-594.
- 31 Ibid
- 32 Decker, S. H., Katz, C. M., & Webb, V. J. (2008). Understanding the black box of gang organization: Implications for violence, drug sales, and violent victimization. *Crime & Delinquency*, 54, 153-172.
- 33 Fox, K. A., Lane, J., & Akers, R. L. (2010). Do perceptions of neighborhood disorganization predict crime or victimization? An examination of gang member versus non-gang member jail inmates. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38, 720-729.
- 34 Spano, R., Frelich, J. D., & Bolland, J. (2008). Gang membership, gun carrying, and employment: Applying routine activities theory to explain violent victimization among inner city, minority youth living in extreme poverty. *Justice Quarterly*, 25, 381-410.
- 35 Supra note 24
- 36 Supra note 19
- 37 Gibson, C. L., Miller, J. M., Jennings, W. G., Swatt, M., & Gover, A. (2009). Using propensity score matching to understand the relationship between gang membership and violent victimization: A research note. *Justice Quarterly* 26(4), 625-643.
- 38 Supra note 34
- 39 Supra note 37
- 40 Supra note 33
- 41 Supra note 32
- 42 Supra note 33
- 43 Supra note 19
- 44 Ibid
- 45 Taylor, T., Freng, A., Esbensen, F. A., & Peterson, D. (2008). Youth gang membership and serious violent victimization: The importance of lifestyle/routine activities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 10, 1-24.
- 46 Supra note 30

To view additional research publications relating to victims of crime please visit the
Crime Victims' Institute website at:

www.crimevictimsinstitute.org

**Texas State University System
Board of Regents**

Charlie Amato
Chairman
San Antonio

Jaime Garza
San Antonio

David Montagne
Beaumont

Michael Truncale
Beaumont

Donna N. Williams
Vice Chairman
Arlington

Kevin J. Lilly
Houston

Trisha Pollard
Bellaire

Chris Covo
Student Regent
San Marcos

Ron Mitchell
Horseshoe Bay

Rossanna Salazar
Austin

Brian McCall
Chancellor
Austin



The Crime Victims' Institute
Sam Houston State University
Criminal Justice Center
Huntsville, Texas 77341-2180

phone: (936) 294-3100; fax: (936) 294-4296
email: terin@shsu.edu
www.crimevictimsinstitute.org

Sam Houston
STATE UNIVERSITY
A Member of The Texas State University System