

# Unit 7. Gang Crime

## What Is Gang Crime?

Gang crime refers to criminal activity committed by individual gang members or a group of gang members. Due to the seriousness of gang violence, many states have included legal “enhancements” for gang behavior. This means that if a crime is determined to be gang influenced or gang related, the offender’s sentence can be increased. Gang crime includes, but is not limited to, graffiti, extortion, drug sales, burglary, home invasion, physical assault, sexual assault, and murder.

Victims of gang violence may include—

**Non-gang members** who are harmed or killed by gangs while in their homes, on the way to work, or attending school.

**Business owners** who must deal with gang-related property crime and extortion.

**Individuals** who are or were gang affiliated.

Because of the violent nature of many gangs, whose members often carry weapons, victims of gang violence often suffer severe or fatal injuries, and may face the possibility of having multiple family members and relatives injured or killed by gang crime. Some families bury two or three of their children within a short period of time.

*I’m trying to bury my son and there are undercover cops inside and uniform cops outside doing surveillance.*

—Mother of gang crime victim

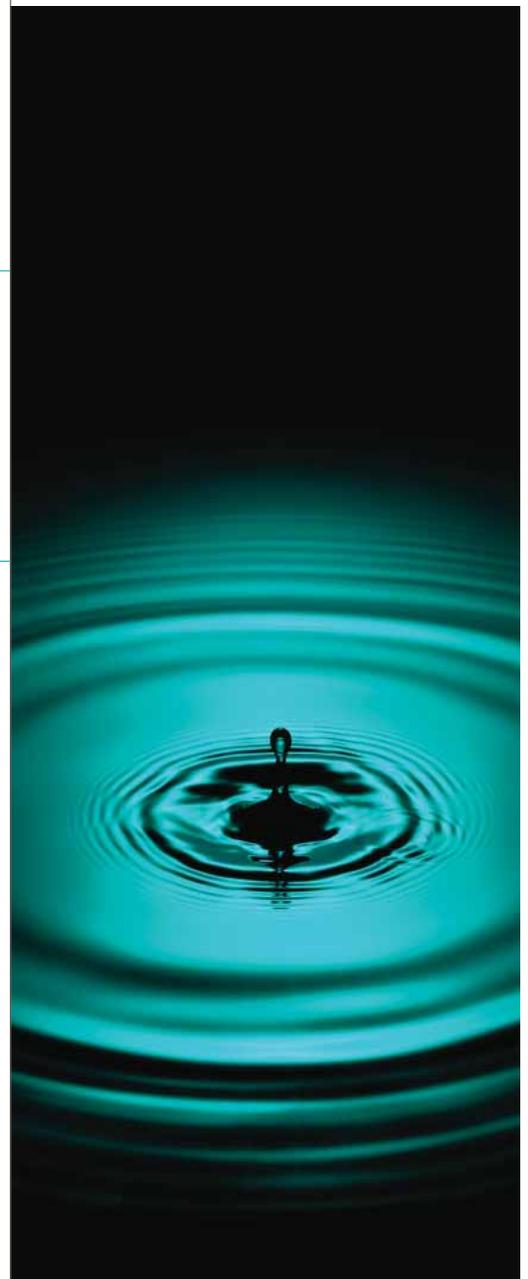
In addition, victims and witnesses often live in the same community as the offender or the offender’s gang affiliates. Individual gang members—or the entire gang—can intimidate and retaliate against the victim at the crime scene, during the court process, and upon release once the offender goes on parole or probation.

Victims of gang crime are blamed more often than victims of other crimes. They often are asked, “Why don’t you move out of the area?”; “Why did you let your child stay in a gang?”; “Why did you drive through that area of town?”; or “Why didn’t you report the first assault?” Blaming victims shifts the responsibility from offenders and creates further trauma for victims.

Gang members often lack empathy for victims or their families. They may continue to flaunt their gang allegiance at the crime scene while being arrested and continue the behavior in court. The media often glamorize or focus on gang members’ criminal acts and fail to show the reality of the impact on victims and witnesses.

## Words To Know

- Extortion
- Intimidation
- Retaliation
- Victim blaming





## In the News: Gang Crime Trends

Gang crime is a major problem in our country today. It can have a lasting impact on victims, their families, and communities. Take a look at the information about gang crimes below. Which of these trends doesn't surprise you?

- The amount of money the U.S. Government approves to address gang crimes increases each year.
- Many cities across the country have between 1,000 and 11,000 sites/areas per year that are vandalized by gang graffiti.
- Gang members are more likely to victimize younger people than older people.
- The average cost of a funeral is \$8,000.

## Examples of Gang Crimes

*Gang crime refers to criminal activity committed by gang members, alone or in a group. Murder and extortion (use of fear to compel someone to do something) are just two examples of criminal activities conducted by gangs.* As you read each story, consider the impact on victims.

### Murder

A female gang member goes along with other gang members she knows, thinking that they're going to have some fun. She doesn't know that the other gang members found out that she has been a police informant. She is stabbed, resulting in her death and the death of her 4-month-old fetus.

What is your reaction?

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A former gang member is shot and killed while removing gang graffiti as part of his work with a community program.

How would your family feel if this happened to you?

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*People tell me I should protect my kids better by moving out of the neighborhood or sending them to a different school. Why does my family have to make changes . . . why doesn't the gang have to change?*

—Father of gang crime victim

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*I buried my first kid in 1988. I buried my 128th yesterday (2004). There is a lethal absence of hope in a community like this. You get more kids planning their funerals than their futures.*

—Community gang prevention activist

### Extortion

Two gang members, Sasha and Ursula, approach Frank, an ice cream vendor, and tell him that he has to pay them \$50 every week if he wants to do any business in their neighborhood.

What is the impact of this crime on Frank?

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*Me, my kids, their friends, neighbors, store owners . . . we're all scared that one of us will be next.*

—Community member



## What Is the Impact of Gang Crime?

The following lists outline some examples of how gang crimes affect financial, physical, emotional, and religious/spiritual areas of victims' lives. Add your own examples below.

<p><b>Financial</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counseling</li> <li>• Repairs to property</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> </ul>	<p><b>Physical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Death</li> <li>• Paralysis</li> <li>• Brain damage</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> </ul>
<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of retaliation</li> <li>• Insecurity</li> <li>• Being labeled "gang related"</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> </ul>	<p><b>Religious/Spiritual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Why would this happen?"</li> <li>• "Why would this happen to a good person?"</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> </ul>





## Victim Impact: Listen and Learn

After viewing the *OVC Victim Impact: Listen and Learn* DVD clip about gang violence and gang crimes, answer the following questions:

What was the emotional impact of Anthony's murder on Teri?

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How did the impact of Anthony's murder affect Teri physically?

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How can gang members demonstrate accountability and remorse for harming or killing others?

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*We have trouble treating patients in the emergency room when gang members show up when an associate or a rival gang member is brought in.*

—Emergency room nurse



## Being Accountable for Your Crimes

Gang crime has a serious physical and emotional impact on victims. Families are subjected to multiple tragedies as parents, children, and relatives are seriously injured and killed. **No one has the right to harm or intimidate another person or to destroy their property regardless of the circumstances.**



**How Can I Be Accountable for My Crimes?**

*I feel good that at least I paid my restitution for the victim's funeral expenses.*

—B.C.

*I'm not proud anymore that I killed someone.*

—Shane

*Now I realize that writing my gang name on buildings is disrespecting the owner of the building.*

—Cedric

*I have to think about the fear I caused to people in my neighborhood, people I lived around.*

—Sherry

**Additional Activities**

**Activity A – How Does Gang Crime Affect Its Victims?**

Select one of the examples of gang crime on pages 34–35 of your workbook and think about the very specific ways that victims would be affected or harmed. Write your answers in the chart below.

Chosen example:

<p><b>Financial</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> </ul>	<p><b>Physical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> </ul>
<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> </ul>	<p><b>Religious/Spiritual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> <li>• _____</li> </ul>



### Activity C – The Tran Family

Read the following scenario.

When Mr. Tran fled his war-torn country 24 years ago, he vowed he would never pick up a gun again. As a member of this country's Special Forces, he had seen enough killing.

But Friday, Mr. Tran took up a shotgun while trying to defend his family from alleged gang members who had showered his home with 43 bullets. The Tran's house has been shot at five times in 6 months. No one has been injured, but family members are scared they will be killed the next time.

The detective assigned to the case said that the attacks are a feud between two Asian gangs. Tran, who immigrated to the United States in 1984, didn't ask for police help until after the third attack. The detective investigating the case said that this is common and that the shooters know their victims don't usually call police. Tran's children have told police they don't know the shooters' identities, but detectives think that the children aren't telling all that they know. The gangs have been known to retaliate against entire families.

One son was in a gang, but got out after being shot and nearly killed. He moved away from his family. Frightened for the rest of his children's lives, Mr. Tran sent some of his children to live in another city, but they miss their parents and younger siblings, so they come home to visit.

The daughter and some of the other children were home the day of the most recent afternoon attack. A van drove by the house firing shots. The shooting went on so long that Tran's wife screamed at her husband to shoot back. Tran hadn't carried a gun since his vow, but he could no longer ignore the assault raging outside. Too afraid to leave the house, he simply fired two warning blasts into the wall of his kitchen.

He spent \$1,000 on a home-security system to help identify the young men he saw cruising his street and laughing at the bullet holes. The police department offered to put Mr. Tran's family up in a hotel after the attack as part of a witness-protection program, but they refused.

The family knows the danger they pose to the rest of the neighborhood, and they are ashamed of how their neighbors may view them. Mr. Tran's daughter cried when describing how she feels. "It hurts," she said, turning her head as she wiped away tears. "We don't want people to think we are bad people."

After the first few shootings, neighbors stopped coming by to check on them, except for one neighbor, who helps fill the bullet holes. "We do not want to live in fear. I am a father, I am working so hard to support my children," he said.

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*They surrounded me and asked,  
"Where are you from?" I didn't  
answer, and they shot me.  
I'm from another country,  
I don't speak English . . .  
I didn't understand.*

—Attempted murder victim

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### Activity D – Victim Experiences

Read your assigned scenario and determine what the victim might experience. (The facilitator will assign each group one scenario to discuss.)

A 50-year-old businessman is assaulted by gang members when he attempts to stop them from spraying a local business with graffiti. His briefcase and cell phone are also stolen. He is willing to cooperate fully with law enforcement and is willing to testify in court.

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An 18-year-old single mom is raped by two gang members and later threatened by other gang members at her job. She is on probation for a burglary and has been “gang-free” for 2 years.

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A gang member is killed in front of his house by a rival gang member. His mother does not speak English, and her other son is 10 years old.

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A 5-year-old child is at the park with his aunt, where he is killed during a drive-by shooting. There are many adults and children at the park who may have witnessed the shooting.

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