

Unit 7: Gang Crime

Words To Know

- Extortion
- Intimidation
- Retaliation
- Victim blaming

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 they 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 are. 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.





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. How do you think gang-related crime affects communities?

- The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reports that some 33,000 violent street gangs, motorcycle gangs, and prison gangs are criminally active in the United States today. All use violence to control neighborhoods and boost their illegal moneymaking activities, which include robbery, drug and gun trafficking, fraud, extortion, and prostitution rings. According to the 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment report, gangs are responsible for an average of 48 percent of violent crime in most jurisdictions, and up to 90 percent in others.³⁸
- In 2005, Congress established the National Gang Intelligence Center (NGIC) comprising representatives from the FBI, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, the United States Marshals Service, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection.³⁹
- The U.S. gang composition is approximately 88 percent street gang members, 9.5 percent prison gang members, and 2.5 percent outlaw motorcycle gang members.⁴⁰
- All-female gangs are on the rise in many jurisdictions, and female participation and full-fledged memberships within male-dominant gangs are steadily escalating. Female gang members commit violent crimes comparable to their male counterparts.⁴¹
- Street gangs are linked to crime in elementary, secondary, and high schools, and on some college campuses.⁴²
- The NGIC has identified at least 30 gangs that are involved in prostitution or human trafficking operations.⁴³
- According to the 2015 National Gang Threat Assessment report, gangs are increasing their involvement in sex trafficking and prostitution. Many gangs target juveniles for recruitment, as well as to engage in prostitution on behalf of the gang. Because these juveniles are under the age of 18, and therefore cannot legally consent, inducing them to engage in prostitution constitutes sex trafficking.⁴⁴
- Neighborhood-based gangs are responsible for more than half of the gang-related violence in the United States.⁴⁵
- Between 20 percent and 40 percent of all homicides annually were found to be gang-related.⁴⁶
- The average cost of a funeral is \$8,000.

³⁸ <https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/2011-national-gang-threat-assessment>

³⁹ <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/stats-services-publications-national-gang-report-2013/view>

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/stats-services-publications-national-gang-report-2015.pdf/view>

⁴⁵ <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/stats-services-publications-national-gang-report-2013/view>

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

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 of the following scenarios, 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?

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 a gang crime victim

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?

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?

Me, my kids, their friends, neighbors, storeowners...we're all scared that one of us will be next.
—Community member



What Is the Impact of Gang Crime?

Criminal behavior such as gang crime creates a ripple effect that has a negative impact on a number of life areas: financial, physical, emotional, and religious/spiritual. The following lists outline some examples of how gang crime affects these areas of victims' lives. Add your own examples below.

<p>Financial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical bills • Funeral expenses • Wage loss • _____ • _____ • _____ 	<p>Physical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broken bones • Stress reactions • Problems sleeping • _____ • _____ • _____
<p>Emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger • Sadness • Guilt • Depression • _____ • _____ 	<p>Religious/Spiritual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning the goodness of others • Questioning faith • Forgiveness issues • _____ • _____ • _____



OVC *Victim Impact: Listen and Learn* DVD

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

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

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

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

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



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 destroy someone's property regardless of the circumstances.**

How Can I Be Accountable for My Crimes?



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

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 in 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: _____

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

Activity C – The Tran Family

Read the following scenario and then answer the questions:

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 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 they 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. Mr. 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. Mr. Tran's children 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 he 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 Mr. Tran's wife screamed at her husband to shoot back. Mr. 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," Mr. Tran said.

How has Mr. Tran changed his lifestyle because of crime and violence?

With what special issues do Mr. Tran and his family have to deal?

What do you think will happen to the Tran family?

How do you think Mr. Tran will feel if he picks up a gun again and shoots someone?

Activity D – Victim Experiences

Read your assigned scenario and determine what the victim might experience.

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 fully cooperate with law enforcement and is willing to testify in court.

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.

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.

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