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# Homicide in Los Angeles: An Analysis of the Differential Character of Adolescent and Other Homicides

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## INTRODUCTION

The avid media attention and public concern regarding child "superpredators" and youth offender-precipitated "bloodbaths" (see Howell, 1998) for origin of these terms) has waned recently in the face of dramatic declines in homicide and violence. California's 1998 homicide rate of 6.5 is the lowest in three decades and represents the fifth consecutive year of decline (California Department of Justice, 1999). Recent reductions in youth violence have reflected these more general trends. In 1998, juvenile arrests for violent crimes in the US were 19 percent lower than their peak in 1994, and arrests for murder decreased 48 percent from 1994 to 1998 (Snyder, 1999).

But concerns about serious youth violence in America persist. Several factors may influence the continuing attention to youth violence rates. We hope, but have little confidence that these declining trends will continue, in part because we don't yet fully understand the cause of changing trends in violence (Blumstein and Rosenfeld, 1998; Zimring, 1999). Highly visible incidents of school violence overshadow the more optimistic data-based analyses. Finally, even though the data trends are in the right direction, current levels of youth violence are perceived, quite justifiably, as unacceptably high, and the demographic pyramid will not be in our favor for the near future.

The rising rates of youth violence in the late 1980s and early 1990s proved a catalyst for efforts to diminish the rehabilitative aspects of the juvenile justice system.

More emphasis was placed on incarceration, transfers of juveniles to adult court jurisdiction and increasingly coercive responses by law enforcement to control juvenile crime. The limited research available on the effects of these policies suggest longer processing periods, including longer pretrial detention, less exposure to treatment programs, possible racial bias in the decision to transfer, and an increased probability of repeated offending after release (Elliott and Tolan, 1998).

In contrast to these trends, the last decade has also experienced a renewed interest in prevention and intervention programs. For example, the state of California's expenditures for youth crime and violence prevention programs in FY99-00 increased by 36 percent ($66 million) over the previous year (Steinhart and Brown, 1999). Illustrated by a prominent federal role in fostering "comprehensive" responses, advocates have argued for a balanced approach in juvenile crime policy, that is, one which accords equal status and resources to prevention and early intervention objectives as to suppression strategies (Wilson and Howell, 1995).

As the policy pendulum moves toward the prevention sector, it is critical that recommended strategies be based on sound empirical assessments of the nature of youth violence. Few youth violence prevention programs have been adequately evaluated (Sherman, Gottfredson, MacKenzie et al., 1998); only a handful have withstood the rigor of a strong scientific evaluation design and produced positive effects on their clients (see also Wasserman and Miller, 1998; Lipsey and Derzon, 1998). Researchers at the University of Colorado have identified ten "Blueprint" programs that meet rigorous standards of demonstrable effectiveness for further field testing (Elliott and Tolan, 1998).

While evaluation researchers pursue efforts to identify effective programs, other scholars researchers continue to look for the critical aspects of offenders, victims, and violent incidents to provide direction for the development of promising programs. In particular, studies that compare the characteristics of youth violence with other forms of violence have the potential to generate guidelines for the development of such programs. Characterizations of youth violence become more meaningful, and more useful, when these are contrasted with violent events that do not include youths.

The larger project from which the data reported here are derived placed emphasis on four thematic dimensions of youth violence in the Los Angeles area: patterns of gang participation, drug and alcohol involvement, weapons use, and differential patterns among ethnic minorities. OJJDP (grant #95-JN-CX-0015, 96-JN-FX-0004, and 97-JD-FX-0002) sponsored this multifaceted study with three interwoven data collection components: structured interviews with youth and their caretakers, drawn from a random sample of households in neighborhoods selected for high rates of juvenile violence; qualitative interviews with a sub sample of these youth who reported recent involvement in violent events; and extraction of incident and participant characteristics from police investigation files on homicides involving adolescents as victims or as offenders.

The four themes are woven throughout the data collection and analysis of each component. These topics formed the key research questions posed in the supplemental study funded by the National Institute of Justice (grant #97-IJ-CX-0018) which supported the collection of data from a sample of homicides which did not include youth:

1. How does the level and nature of gang involvement vary in adult as compared with adolescent homicide?

2. How does the nature and extent of drug and alcohol involvement vary in adult as compared with adolescent homicide?

3. How does the level and nature of firearms presence and use vary in adult as compared with adolescent homicide?

4. How does the nature and extent of homicide committed by or against racial/ethnic minorities vary in adult as compared with adolescent homicide?

Each of these issues is prominent in the violence research literature, but rarely are these age-based comparisons conducted. Thus the extension of the youth homicide data collection to include a comparison sample of incidents with only adults[1] permits us to frame the juvenile data within a broader context, and to assess the policy and practice recommendations that emerge in this larger context as well.

Why would we expect homicides that involve adolescents to differ from other homicides? First, the research on age-based violent offending patterns (Elliott, 1994) tells us that most juveniles "mature out," especially when they get jobs and form relationships that help keep them out of trouble. The serious and violent offender research points to only a small number of chronic offenders that continue to cause trouble well into adulthood.

Second, developmental theorists tell us there is something special about

[1] Although murders of young children by adults were included in the comparison population, only 10 (less than 4%) such cases emerged in the sample. Therefore, we refer to the comparison sample as the "adult" sample or "other" (than adolescent) sample.

adolescents: peer influences are stronger and we might expect more spontaneous or expressive violence (Elliott and Tolan, 1998; Flannery, Huff and Manos, 1998). Certainly, we expect more co-offending and youth-involved events that would have a more chaotic or less organized flavor. Status issues might come into play more and there may be less thoughtful reasoning around the use of guns.

Finally, routine activities theory tells us that youth hang out more. They have more unstructured time, engage in risky behaviors, and have more opportunity for violence exposure than do adults.

This report describes the findings from an assessment of comparable samples of adolescent homicides and homicides without youths. Following a brief description of the research methods, we present bivariate comparisons of selected incident and participant characteristics and then discuss these findings relative to the gang, drug, gun and ethnicity questions posed above. Multivariate analyses that identify the most important characteristics in differentiating between the two groups of homicides are then presented. Confirming the conclusions derived from the adolescent homicide sample only (Maxson, Sternheimer and Klein, 1998), we find that gang factors in this Los Angeles setting loom very large in the distinction between adolescent and other homicides. Also, some drug and alcohol indicators surface as important due to higher presence in adult homicides. Less important to the distinction between the two types of cases are firearms use and ethnic patterns. We conclude this report with a discussion of some policy and programmatic directions based upon these results.

## METHODS

Details regarding site selection, sampling, data collection and analysis procedures are described in a separate document (Maxson et al., 1998). Briefly, data were extracted from police investigation files for homicides within the jurisdictions of the Los Angeles Police Department and the unincorporated areas of the Los Angeles County patrolled by the Sheriff's Department. These two jurisdictions represent about 70 percent of all Los Angeles County homicides. All incidents occurred during 1993 and 1994. Approximately half of all cases (281 homicides) with at least one adolescent (12 to 17 years old) involved as a victim or offender was sampled. A comparison sample of 267 homicides was drawn from the remaining incidents; this sample represented just over 10 percent of the non-adolescent homicides. Data from the stratified random sampling design are weighted to approximate the total population of homicides from these jurisdictions in this time period.

Police investigation files in these departments include initial and follow-up reports, transcripts from interviews with witnesses and informants, autopsy reports, toxicology results, and suspect interviews and arrest reports. The files range from about a dozen pages to several hundred. Information regarding incident time, location, precipitating factors, weapon use, witness presence, participant demographics and relationship, gang indicators and drug aspects was coded from the case file materials. Coding was closely supervised and inter-coder reliability exceeded .90 on all items except counts of witnesses present, which was excluded from these analyses.

Study designs which permit direct research access to investigation materials permit broader coverage of homicide incident and participant information than

aggregated databases such as the Uniform Crime Report Supplementary Homicide Reporting system. However, it should be noted that in this study, data collection was limited to the contents of investigation case files and thus, to information available to police investigators and recorded by them. No attempt was made to interview individual case investigators to clarify ambiguities or to supplement information missing in the case file record.

## FINDINGS

A separate report provides a detailed analysis of the incident, circumstances and participant characteristics of adolescent homicides in Los Angeles (Maxson et al., 1998). By far the strongest patterns to emerge from those analyses concerned gangs and firearms. Gang members were involved in the vast majority of adolescent homicides, gang homicides were quite distinct from other adolescent homicides and the presence of firearms emerged as the most important distinguishing feature of gang homicides. The drug aspects and ethnicity issues were far less salient. The supplementary sample of homicides **not** involving adolescents provides the opportunity to examine these patterns further. Our main purpose here is comparative. Are homicides involving adolescents distinct from other homicides and if so, in what ways? Do these differences suggest policy and practice guidelines that might offer distinct directions for **youth** violence interventions? In particular, do gang, drug, gun and ethnic patterns differ in ways that suggest unique types of interventions for youth?

The analyses presented in this section address these research and policy goals. We begin with bivariate comparisons of the incident and participant descriptors, then move to a more detailed presentation of the four thematic issues. Finally, multivariate

analyses incorporating characteristics that span the thematic domains help identify the most important factors that distinguish adolescent from other types of homicides.

A. General (Non-thematic) Incident and Participant Descriptors

Homicides that involve adolescents differ from other homicides on the majority of the dimensions tested. As shown in Table 1, adolescent homicides are more likely to take place in public settings, such as a street, in a vehicle or parking lot. Nearly three quarters of the adolescent homicides occur in these open settings, compared with slightly more than half of other homicides. Similarly, more adolescent homicides include a vehicle (48% versus 30% in other homicides) as a relevant feature of the homicide setting. Furthermore, about one-fourth (24%) of the adolescent homicides were drive-by shootings, as compared with just 11 percent of other homicides. There were no seasonal patterns in the timing of either type of homicides. While some monthly variations are observable, homicides are equally likely to occur in all four seasons of the year. Both types of homicide typically take place in the late hours, after 10 o'clock at night.

Table 1 Here

The characteristics of the participants in the two types of homicide differed. Victims and suspects were far less likely to know one another well in adolescent homicides (12% versus 29% in other); participants were total strangers in 62 percent of adolescent incidents, but just 40 percent of other homicides. On average, adolescent homicides had more participants. In both types of homicide, there were about two participants on the victim's side, but adolescent homicides tended to have more suspect participants (3.10 versus 1.99 in other homicides). As a matter of definition,

the mean age of participants is almost ten years younger in adolescent homicides (20 years versus 30 years in other homicides). Finally, homicide participants are overwhelmingly male, but slightly more so in adolescent (93%) than in other homicides (88%).

This initial set of tests for differences in incident and participant characteristics yields a number of distinctions in adolescent homicides. While certainly not unique, adolescent homicides more often take place in public settings, often in the street, and often involve vehicles. More people participate, particularly on the offender's side, and participants on the two opposing sides less frequently know one another than in other homicides. As might be anticipated from these characteristics, the two types of homicides also reflect different patterns of motives or incident circumstances.

After reviewing all materials in the police investigation case files, the primary motive for the incident was assessed by coders. A secondary motive coding option was available, but used only rarely. As shown in Table 2, just over half (55%) of the adolescent incidents were motivated by gang dynamics, usually turf or affiliation issues. The proportion of other homicides with gang motives was far lower (22%). Other homicides were far more likely to be motivated by other (than gang or drug) types of conflicts or arguments. Drug motives were infrequent in both types of homicides, but occurred twice as often when adolescents were not involved (14% versus 6% of adolescent homicides). Finally, instrumental homicides occurred during the course of other crimes, usually robberies, in about 12 percent of both types of incidents.

Table 2 here

The large number of adolescent homicides with gang motives is striking. The various ways in which aspects of gang involvement permeate adolescent homicides in Los Angeles were discussed at length in our separate report. Four out of five adolescent homicides involved either gang member participants or gang motives, and such incidents differed markedly from the remaining adolescent homicides. The following sections report the comparative analyses focused upon the four study themes of gangs, drugs, weapons and ethnic issues, beginning with the question of whether the patterns of gang involvement in adolescent homicide differ from that in other homicides.

B. Gang Involvement

The motive data reported above indicate that homicides with adolescent participants are more than twice as likely to be precipitated by gang dynamics. In addition, adolescent homicides with other than gang motives are far more likely to involve gang members, particularly on the suspect's side. Table 3 displays the distribution of gang participants as aligned with either the victim or the offender's sides. In both types of homicide, gang participants are present on either both sides (44 % of adolescent and 13% of other) or on the suspect side only (30% of adolescent and 10% of other). Nongang offenders rarely attack gang victims. The low prevalence rate of gang participants in other homicides makes further comparisons difficult. However, it appears that gang members more evenly participate on the suspect and victim sides in other homicides (23% on suspect side; 18% on victim side) whereas gang member suspects are far more common in adolescent homicides (74% on suspect side; 51% on victim side).

Table 3 Here

Combining the presence of gang members with gang motives in the case yields far higher levels of involvement, and disproportionately high rates for adolescent than in other homicides. Eighty-three percent of adolescent homicides contain either gang members or motives whereas just 31 percent of adult homicides feature gang indicators. In prior studies, gang involvement has been shown to be associated with a variety of incident and participant characteristics (see Maxson, 1999 for review). These earlier findings were replicated in the separate analysis of adolescent homicides (see Table III.14 in Maxson et al., 1998). Given the far lower prevalence of gang involvement among other homicides, we wondered whether the patterns of gang involvement might be different than that in adolescent homicides. Therefore, we replicated the test of more than twenty features of homicides by comparing gang with nongang cases in the adult homicide sample. These features spanned aspects of the homicide setting, firearm use, drug indicators and participant numbers and demographic characteristics. In nearly every instance, the gang/nongang differences (or similarities) in other homicides were the same as those found in adolescent homicides.

In both types of homicides, gang involvement was associated with higher levels of firearms and fear of retaliation, more suspect participants who were more often male and strangers to victim participants. The drug indicators did not distinguish gang from nongang cases in either the adolescent or other homicides.

Four variables showed different patterns. Gang cases without adolescents more often included additional violent case charges whereas no differences were found in adolescent gang and nongang homicides. The higher level of street settings and

vehicle involvement in adolescent gang homicides was not evident in the adult gang/nongang comparison. Finally, adolescent gang homicides were more likely to include Hispanic participants than nongang cases; there were no differences among black participants. However, other gang homicides more often included black participants than did nongang cases and Hispanic participants were equally likely to be involved in gang and nongang, other homicides. Further analyses found that these ethnic patterns reflect differences among suspects rather than victims. There were predominantly black suspects in about 30 percent of the adolescent gang homicides and in almost 50 percent of the other gang homicides. Conversely, Hispanic suspects predominated in 58 percent of the adolescent gang homicides and 46 percent of the adult homicides.

Overall, the differences between gang and nongang cases appear to be stable in adolescent and adult homicides. Adolescent gang cases occur more often in public settings and more often include Hispanic suspects whereas adult gang cases are equally likely to include black or Hispanic suspects. In most other respects, the nature of gang homicide does not show much impact of adolescent involvement. Given the marked differences between adolescent and other homicides reported thus far, it appears that the sheer volume of gang involvement in adolescent homicides overwhelms any other aspect. We find a far lower prevalence of gang involvement in adult homicide, yet the gang impact is visible among these homicides as well.

These findings have rather clear implications for policymakers and youth service practitioners. When adolescents are involved in lethal events in Los Angeles – as either victims or as offenders – chances are high that there is gang involvement as well.

Any policy that targets youth violence reduction as a goal must take this finding into account, stressing **gang** prevention and control specifically.

C. Drug Involvement

As reported in Table 2, we found relatively low levels of drug motives in either adolescent (6%) or other homicides (14%). As in the case of gang involvement, a limited focus on motive may mask other aspects of drug involvement in homicide. Other drug indicators gathered from the case material included reports of drug use by any participant on the day of the incident, any participant who was a known drug seller, and any participant who was a known drug seller. Alcohol use by participants in the incident context was also coded where it was recorded in the case file material.

The prevalence of these drug indicators is displayed in Table 4. While indicators were coded separately for victims and suspects, these are collapsed in the table due to low cell sizes. Adolescent homicides are about half as likely to reflect each of the drug indicators. Alcohol use by participants on the day of the incident was the most common indicator, recorded in 16 percent of adolescent homicides and 37 percent of the other incidents.

Table 4 Here

Given the well-documented association between alcohol and violence, and the high rates of positive drug tests among those arrested, we approach these data with considerable skepticism. Local law enforcement officials have suggested to us that drug and alcohol use might be underreported in the case file materials due to prosecution concerns and also due to costs associated with toxicology testing. Our informants felt that these influences would affect the processing of adolescent and

other homicides equally, so the relative rates in the two types of cases may be valid. Finally, the recording of drug motivation was felt to be an important aspect of the investigation. While caution in interpreting these data is required, it seems likely that, except for alcohol consumption, drug aspects do not loom large in adolescent homicides nor require much focus from policy makers. Studies that use alternative methods to examine the link between alcohol and violence are better able to address the issue of particular patterns of adolescent use and violence.

D. Firearms Involvement

Recent analyses find that the homicide spurt during the mid-eighties and early nineties was attributable to increased gun assaults among young people (Blumstein and Rosenfeld, 1998; Zimring, 1999). Trends among nongun homicides and cases with adult offenders are relatively flat or show slight decreases. Interviews with representative samples of youth find gang membership to be significantly related to gun ownership (Bjerregaard and Lizotte, 1995). Thus, we might expect that during the peak years of homicide incorporated in this study, adolescent homicides should reflect higher rates of firearm usage than other homicides. Data on weapons use are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Here

While firearms were used in most homicide incidents, homicides with adolescents were more likely to include a firearm (90%) than were other homicides (79%). This difference is also reflected in the use of handguns, which represent the vast majority of all firearms used in homicides. Guns were brought to the incident

setting by participants in both sides of the conflict in about 10 percent of both adolescent and other homicides.

The elevated rate of firearm usage in adolescent homicide reinforces efforts currently underway to limit youths' access to guns. Handguns, in particular, are prevalent in youth homicides. About one-fourth of the youth we interviewed from high violence areas in Los Angeles said they could easily obtain a gun and listed an average of four specific places they could go to get a gun.

Adolescent homicides with gang involvement reveal even higher rates of firearms use – 19 out of 20 gang incidents included firearms. Gang involvement and firearms usage represent two vectors for prevention activities; efforts such as the Boston Gun Project which target weapon-carrying by gang members are particularly relevant to the Los Angeles adolescent violence setting.

E. Ethnic Patterns

Analysis of ethnic patterns among Los Angeles adolescent homicides confirm the findings of other homicide research; homicide is primarily intra-ethnic, involving participants among the same ethnic group, and disproportionately occurs among Hispanic and black populations. Among adolescent incidents, victims and offenders are of the same ethnicity in 70 percent of the homicides in which participant ethnicity information was available (see Table III:6, Maxson et al., 1998). The ethnic distribution of adolescent and other homicide participants is displayed in Table 6. Analyses of victim and suspect characteristics reveal few differences, so all participants are aggregated to simplify the presentation.

Table 6 Here

The 1990 census figures for the race/ethnicity distribution of the general population in the city of Los Angeles are 40 percent Hispanic, 37 percent white, 13 percent black, and 9 percent Asian. Compared with the general population profile, both Hispanics and blacks are over-represented in homicide. Although Hispanics have higher participation levels in homicide than blacks, this is due to the higher numbers of Hispanics among Los Angeles' resident populations. As expected, participation by white and Asian individuals is quite low. Differences in ethnic participation in the two types of homicide are evident in Table 6. About 60 percent of participants in adolescent homicides are Hispanic and about 30 percent are black. Other homicides are somewhat more diverse, revealing a higher participation of blacks and levels of white participation more than twice that of adolescent homicide (although far lower than Hispanic and black participation).

The disproportionately high level of Hispanic and black participation in adolescent homicide suggested that special interventions might be geared to youth in these ethnic categories. However, detailed analyses of case characteristics comparing incidents with predominantly Hispanics and predominantly black participants revealed no differences between the two types of homicides. Cases with predominantly Hispanic participants were no more likely to include gang features or firearms, nor did they differ in characteristics of the homicide setting. The analyses provided no empirical direction for customizing interventions for Hispanic, as compared with black, youth populations, but the disproportionately high prevalence rate of Hispanic and black participation in adolescent homicide suggests that these groups should be persistent targets for intervention efforts.

F. Multivariate Analyses

The analyses reported thus far have revealed a number of distinctions between adolescent and other homicides. Adolescent homicides differ in their settings and motives, as well as in the type and number of participants. Further analyses of gang, drug, weapon, and ethnic patterns each revealed substantial differences when adolescents were involved in homicides. Taken together, these differences provide evidence that adolescent homicides reflect distinct patterns of characteristics and they offer a basis for recommendations for interventions to reduce youth violence. Multivariate analyses can be helpful in identifying the characteristics that are most important in differentiating adolescent homicides and thereby set priorities for intervention practitioners.

Multiple logistic regression is the statistical technique used to assess the unique contribution of each of a series of independent variables to a dichotomous dependent variable (in this case, adolescent homicide versus all others). The variables included in the regression model reflect characteristics of the incident setting, motive, gang and drug involvement, firearms use and a variety of participant descriptors. The results are reported in Table 7. The R statistic reflects the strength of that variable (ranging from .0 to 1.0), net the effects of all other variables in predicting the presence of adolescents in a homicide. An odds ratio over 1 is interpreted as the amount of change in the likelihood of being an adolescent homicide for each unit of change in the independent variable, net of the effects of all other variables. For example, an additional participant on the suspect's side increases the likelihood that the incident involves adolescents by about one-third.

Table 7 Here

As shown by the $R^2$ statistic, the variables in these models explain 42 percent of the variance in adolescent and other homicides. However, the coefficients for most of the variables are negligible and odds ratios hover around 1. While most of the variables distinguish the two types of homicides when tested individually, just six produce unique effects in predicting adolescent homicide. Gang membership, particularly on the suspect side, is a strong predictor. The presence of a gang member suspect increases the likelihood of adolescent involvement by a factor of more than 4. Gang member victim participants more than double the odds of adolescent involvement. The presence of an arrest is also a strong indicator of adolescent homicides, as are, to a lesser degree, more participants on the suspect's side.

The negative sign on two significant coefficients identifies alcohol use on the day of the incident and drug seller participants as indicative of non-adolescent homicide. Neither the gang nor drug motive categories surface as important. It is interesting that firearms presence, ethnicity or gender of participants, and the setting characteristics are not significant. As discussed earlier, these are features associated with gang involvement. It is quite possible that the gang member variables dominate these other characteristics in the multivariate analysis. It would seem that gang member participation is a defining element in adolescent homicide in Los Angeles.

## CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study compared the characteristics of homicides with at least one adolescent victim or offender with other homicides that occurred in the city of Los

Angeles or unincorporated county areas in 1993 and 1994. Thus, the unique context of Los Angeles during a peak period of homicide incidence is reflected in these data. Local law enforcement sources designated from 35 to 45 percent of all Los Angeles County homicides as gang-related during the first half of the 1990s. Such high proportions of gang homicides are startling to public officials in most U.S. cities, yet our analyses find that gang involvement in adolescent homicides is far higher than the aggregated data suggests. More than four out of five adolescent homicides during this period included at least one gang member participant. The figure for other homicides is far lower; about 3 out of 10 homicides without adolescents have gang involvement.

Gang involvement appears to bring with it a set of defining elements that further characterize adolescent homicides: more public settings, including vehicles, increased levels of firearms (particularly handgun use), and more participants (particularly those aligned with the offender group), who are less likely to know their victims. Hispanic participants are somewhat more frequent among adolescent homicides, and this disproportion increases in gang homicides. Drug issues are more prominent in non-adolescent incidents, but have generally decreased levels from the mid-1980s (Maxson and Klein, 1996). Thus, these findings confirm our prior research on the relative independence of gangs and drugs in homicides in Los Angeles.

The high levels of gang involvement, and the broad impact that this involvement appears to have on the nature of adolescent homicides, requires a cautionary note. Police-reported levels of gang homicide in Los Angeles County reached their peak in 1995 and have decreased by 50 percent since then. The gang-driven adolescent/adult differences reported in this document might well be far smaller if the study had been

conducted in a period of radical decline in gang violence rather than at its peak. However, the proportion of all homicides with gang involvement remains high (37 % in 1999), supporting our contention that street gangs are a compelling facet of youth violence in Los Angeles.

Gang involvement clearly permeates adolescent homicides in Los Angeles and hence the primary policy implication of this is that both law enforcement and violence prevention practitioners need to recognize and focus on the gang elements of youth violence. As was anticipated in the introductory portions of this report, adolescent violence reflects developmental risks of adolescence and their routine activities–more unsupervised and unstructured time, hanging about in peer groups in public, visible settings, and risky behaviors including gang affiliation and possession of firearms. Youth violence prevention efforts should address these developmental risks (see Elliott and Nolan, 1998, for description of developmentally based strategies). Long term prevention efforts are needed that simultaneously reverse neighborhood social and economic decline, and provide meaningful alternatives to the lure of the streets for young socially disadvantaged males. Comprehensive efforts that emphasize cross agency collaboration such as the Safe Futures programs are steps in a promising direction, but evaluation results of this multiple-city intervention are not yet available.

Evaluations of gang-specific prevention programs implemented in the last decade are quite rare. Researchers have examined the effectiveness of the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) school based prevention program in multiple school sites. After promising cross-sectional findings (Esbensen and Osgood, 1999), the longitudinal evaluation of the GREAT program yielded negative results, and

developers are in the process of restructuring the program design based on the evaluation results (personal communication with Finn-Aage Esbensen). Recent reviews of gang prevention and intervention efforts over the last several decades catalogue a number of "promising" programs, but empirically based positive outcome data are all but absent (Howell, in press; Esbensen, 1999).

Currently, in Los Angeles, law enforcement officials have implemented several targeted suppression programs that focus on active members of violent gangs. The CLEAR program was launched in 1996, in the wake of a widely publicized shooting of a young girl in the Northeast sector of Los Angeles. This program brings together city and district attorneys, LAPD gang officers and probation personnel, and an LASD unsolved homicide unit to reduce crime among the Avenues gang. Early evaluation results showed decreases in gang crime in the target area as compared to surrounding areas (Lodestar, 1998). Since its inception, the program has been expanded to six additional sites in the Los Angeles region, but the evaluation results have failed to replicate the initial success evident in Northeast. Although part of the program design, community impact teams have been slow to develop.

A different approach to targeted suppression can be found in the dozen or so civil gang injunctions that have been implemented in the Los Angeles area within the last five years. Police officers work with prosecutors to develop legal materials to petition a judge to issue a civil order to declare problematic gangs a public nuisance and enjoin identified gang members from engaging in a variety of specified behaviors, including associating with one another in a defined area. While increasingly popular

among Southern California communities, this strategy has not been adequately evaluated and some crime analyses have found increases in the targeted areas (ACLU, 1997; Maxson and Allen, 1996). Proponents offer anecdotal evidence of improved safety in targeted communities. Injunction provisions may seek to alter the routine activities of potentially violent gang members, but the provision of opportunities for alternative, pro-social engagements has not been featured in injunction strategies. The possibilities of displacement of gang activities to geographic areas beyond the boundaries of the injunction seem high.

A third approach to targeted suppression is a local modification of the Boston Gun Project (Kennedy, 1996) with implementation planned in one Los Angeles neighborhood in upcoming months. With its narrow focus on gun carrying and gun violence by gang members, this program seems well suited to the characteristics of adolescent homicide reflected in the Los Angeles data. The strategy involves clear notice to targeted gang members that carrying firearms will precipitate a swift and severe response. The details and agreements regarding the Los Angeles response, or in Kennedy's terms, the levers to be pulled, are still under development. Researchers at the Rand Corporation have worked with law enforcement to develop this program and will conduct an evaluation of its short-term impact. In Boston, community groups vocally supported the law enforcement operation and provided alternative avenues to targeted gang members. Efforts are being made in Los Angeles to foster a similar community response. The history of such efforts has not been strong in Los Angeles.

One policy approach which strikes us as less than promising is the Gang Violence and Youth Crime Prevention Act, which California's voters recently approved

via Proposition 21 on the March 2000 ballot. This proposition requires statutory waiver into adult court for juveniles 14 or older arrested for certain violent crimes, generally makes "fitness" for juvenile court more difficult to retain, and requires all individuals convicted for a gang crime to register with local law enforcement agencies. Despite its title, no funds in this act are allocated to prevention programs.

The results of the evaluations of violence prevention and intervention programs described in this report may help persuade policymakers to invest more resources in prevention. For the Los Angeles context, it is critical that resources be targeted toward gang prevention efforts in recognition of the very strong association between gang membership and violence. The suppression orientation reflected in California's disingenuously named Gang Violence and Youth Crime Prevention Act issues a challenge to advocates of balanced, comprehensive responses to youth violence to convince the public that incarceration is not the most effective approach to reducing youth violence.

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Table 1: Incident and Participant Characteristics[a]

| | Adolescent Homicides | Other Homicides | P[b] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Incident occurred... | | | |
| During summer months | 30% | 24% | n.s. |
| During late night hours | 48% | 51% | n.s. |
| In public setting | 75% | 53% | ** |
| Involving vehicle | 48% | 30% | *** |
| Shooting from vehicle | 24% | 11% | ** |
| | | | |
| Participant characteristics | | | |
| Close relationship between victim and suspect participants | 12% | 29% | *** |
| | | | |
| Mean number participants | 5.66 | 4.27 | *** |
| On victim's side | 2.54 | 2.24 | n.s. |
| On suspect's side | 3.10 | 1.99 | *** |
| | | | |
| Mean Age of participants | 19.91 | 29.76 | *** |
| On victim's side | 22.97 | 30.78 | *** |
| On suspect's side | 18.71 | 28.38 | *** |

[a] Weighted percentages and means are provided in table. Unweighted sample Ns are 281 adolescent and 267 other homicides. Weighted sample Ns are 105 adolescent and 442 other homicides. Number of valid cases varies slightly by variable.

[b] Probability of difference: * = p<.05; ** = p<.01; *** = p<.001; ns = p>.05

Table 2: Primary Motive or Circumstances[a]

| | Adolescent Homicides | Other Homicides |
|---|---|---|
| Gang related | 55% | 22% |
| Other argument | 19% | 36% |
| Drug | 6% | 14% |
| Other crime | 13% | 12% |
| Other | 7% | 16% |

[a] Weighted percentages provided in table. P<.001. Weighted sample Ns for known motives are 100 adolescent and 375 other homicides.

Table 3: Gang Member Participants[a]

| | Adolescent Homicide | Other Homicides |
|---|---|---|
| Gang members on suspect side only | 30% | 10% |
| Gang members on victim side only | 8% | 5% |
| Gang members on both sides | 44% | 13% |
| No gang members involved | 19% | 72% |

[a] Weighted percentages provided in table. P<.001. Weighted sample Ns are 105 adolescent and 442 other homicides.

Table 4: Drug Indicators[a]

| | Adolescent Homicide | Other Homicides | p[b] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Any alcohol use on day | 16% | 37% | *** |
| Any drug use on day | 7% | 16% | * |
| Any participant a known drug user | 12% | 22% | * |
| Any participant a known drug seller | 12% | 21% | * |

[a] Weighted percentages provided in table. Weighted sample Ns for drug mentions are 105 adolescent and 442 other homicides.

[b] Probability of difference: *=p<.05; **=p<.01; ***=p<.001; ns = p>.05.

Table 5: Weapon Use[a]

| | Adolescent Homicides | Other Homicides | p[b] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Firearms present | 90% | 79% | * |
| Handguns present | 83% | 72% | * |
| Knives present | 13% | 19% | n.s. |
| Guns present on both sides | 13% | 9% | n.s. |

[a] Weighted percentages provided in table. Weighted sample Ns are 105 adolescent and 442 other homicides.

[b] Probability of difference: * = p<.05; ** = p<.01; *** = p<.001; n.s. = p>.05

Table 6: Ethnic Characteristics of Participants[a]

| | Adolescent Homicide | Other Homicides | p[b] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Percent black participants | 30.48 | 39.74 | n.s. |
| Percent Hispanic participants | 61.34 | 47.15 | ** |
| Percent white participants | 3.65 | 10.11 | * |
| Percent Asian participants | 3.39 | 2.19 | n.s. |

[a] Mean percentages of all case participants within particular ethnic categories provided in this table. Cases are weighted to approximate homicide population. Weighted sample includes 105 adolescent and 441 other homicides.

[b] Probability of difference: *=p<.05; ** = p< .01; *** = p<.001; n.s. = p>.05

Table 7: Multivariate Logistic Regression of Adolescent and Other Homicides[a]

| | R | Odds |
|---|---|---|
| Street setting | .00 | 1.31 |
| Vehicle involvement | .00 | 1.31 |
| Any firearm present | .00 | 1.46 |
| Close relationship between victim and suspect | .00 | .96 |
| **Alcohol use on day of incident** | **-.20*** | **.18** |
| Drug use on day of incident | .00 | .74 |
| **Drug seller participants** | **-.11*** | **.29** |
| Number participants on victim's side | .00 | .92 |
| **Number participants on suspect's side** | **.11*** | **1.35** |
| Percentage male participants | .00 | 1.00 |
| Predominantly Latino participants | .00 | 1.24 |
| Predominantly black participants | -.05 | .49 |
| **Any participant arrested** | **.17*** | **3.64** |
| **Gang members on victim's side** | **.08*** | **2.43** |
| **Gang members on suspect's side** | **.18*** | **4.36** |
| Gang motive | .00 | .83 |
| Drug motive | .00 | .69 |

Nagelkerke $R^2$ = .42
Percent correct clarification = 86%



[a] The samples are weighted to approximate the homicide population.
* = p<.05