



GET SWITCHES STITCHES

youth, gangs, and
witness intimidation
in massachusetts

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Julie L. Whitman
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Executive Summary

The problem of witness intimidation has plagued the United States criminal justice system for at least half a century. The Witness Security Program, the initial—and still primary—response of the federal government, was developed to address serious witness tampering, including the murder of witnesses, in organized crime cases. In more recent decades, state and local courts have become aware of and begun responding to the pervasive witness intimidation common in domestic violence cases. But few jurisdictions have developed a comprehensive response to the more recent phenomenon of witness intimidation of primarily teen and young adult witnesses by street gangs.

The study described in *“Snitches Get Stitches”: Youth, Gangs, and Witness Intimidation in Massachusetts* aimed to increase knowledge and understanding of (a) the critical factors that deter youth witnesses from reporting gang crimes and testifying against perpetrators, and (b) the kinds of policies and programs that can encourage victim and witness cooperation. In particular, this project sought to gather data about factors that influence youths’ decisions to cooperate in the criminal justice process and the extent and nature of intimidation in their communities after crimes occur.

Research methods included an on-line survey of 641 Massachusetts youth ages 12 to 20, in-person individual interviews with 39 youth ages 13 to 21, and interviews with seven public officials. Youth were recruited with the help of seven Boys & Girls Clubs around Massachusetts, and state officials helped identify police and prosecutors in these same cities for interviews.¹ Youth surveys and interviews focused on the prevalence and impact of gangs in the youths’ communities and schools, their experiences with gang-related crime and witness intimidation, their relationships with law enforcement, and their ideas for making it safer for youth to report crime to law enforcement and school officials. Interviews with police and prosecutors elicited views on the extent of the gang problem and witness intimidation in their jurisdictions, their approach to youth witnesses, and methods currently in use to combat witness intimidation.

¹ The participating cities were Boston (Roxbury, specifically), Holyoke, Lowell, Lawrence, Lynn, Springfield, and Worcester.



Key Findings

Overall, the findings of the youth surveys and interviews were consistent and did not differ greatly by city or by demographic variables, indicating that urban youths' experiences with gang crime and witness intimidation, relationships with police officers, and ideas for addressing the problems are similar throughout the state. Public officials who were interviewed clearly recognized the problem and the obstacles to solving it, and provided some ideas about what is and is not currently being done to protect witnesses after they come forward. Key findings include:

1. Both gang membership and gang activity are prevalent in the neighborhoods and public schools of the seven cities studied.

Youth perceived differences between the presence of gang members in a given context and problems caused by gangs, but both were prevalent. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents reported gang members being *present* in their neighborhoods, with 57% reporting that gangs are a *problem* in their neighborhoods. Eighty-one percent of the youth said at least some of their schoolmates were in gangs, and 54% said gangs were a problem in school. Interviews indicated that gang-related problems were better controlled (though not absent) in schools, whereas neighborhoods were more subject to control by the gangs.

2. Youth had a high rate of exposure to crimes through direct victimization, witnessing, and peer and family victimization.

Of the seven crimes we asked about, the three most commonly experienced by the youth were serious threats (20% experienced, 44% witnessed); beatings (26% experienced, 39% witnessed); and drug activity (16% experienced,² 40% witnessed). Most disturbingly, many youth surveyed had experienced gun violence: 7% had been the victim of a shooting; 18% reported that a friend or family member had been shot at; and 20% had witnessed a shooting. Almost one-half (45%) of the crimes witnessed by the youth were thought to be gang-related.

3. Youth are most likely to tell a parent or other family member about experiences with crime.

Both surveys and interviews indicated that, by an overwhelming margin, the youth would first turn to a family member—interviewees most often indicated a parent—to talk about victimization or witnessing a crime, and a smaller number would report to school authorities or police. One-half of the surveyed youth who had witnessed or experienced gang-related crime never reported it to anyone.

4. Community norms against “snitching” are strong, but youth were still willing to report crimes under certain circumstances.

The most common reasons youth gave for not reporting crime were that it wasn't their concern or they did not want to be seen as a snitch, while they most often attributed their peers' non-reporting to fear of being beaten up or killed.

Interviews made clear that being labeled a snitch carries a price, not just of potential violence, but of ostracism by neighbors and peers.

Youth also gave reasons they deemed valid for reporting crime and breaking the “no-snitching” code, most notably when an injured victim needed help or when the crime was directed against themselves or their family members. In most cases, if youth felt there was a low likelihood of retaliation (e.g., if the perpetrators had no way of knowing who had reported them), they would be willing to report crime.

5. Vicarious experiences of witness intimidation were far more common than personal experiences, but one in three youth had heard about someone being threatened. Twelve percent of the survey respondents who had reported gang crimes indicated that they had been threatened or harmed for doing so, and none of the interviewees reported such experiences. About one-third of both survey and interview respondents, however, had heard about others in their neighborhood or school being threatened or harmed after witnessing a crime, either because they reported it or to prevent them from reporting it.

6. Relationships between youth and school resource officers were generally positive; relationships with neighborhood police officers were mixed. Most survey respondents who had had contact with police in their school or neighborhood (whether voluntary or involuntary) reported being treated respectfully [65% by school resource officers (SROs) and 61% by neighborhood officers]. Of all survey respondents, 55% reported at least some trust in their neighborhood officers, and 66% of those who had officers assigned to their schools had some or a lot of trust in those officers. Interview subjects’ views on SROs versus neighborhood officers differed significantly, with SROs often being praised and neighborhood officers commonly being accused of harassment. Teens generally expressed great faith in the ability of police to handle crime but little awareness of their own potential role as witnesses in making their neighborhoods safer. Overall, youth expressed a desire for better relations with police officers and a sense of safety when those relationships were strong.

7. Gang unit officers have a difficult dual role in neighborhoods. In interviews, police officers assigned to gang units said they are expected to build relationships with youth while at the same time staying “on the case” of gang members and lending their authority to the strict enforcement of probation and parole conditions. The latter enforcement role generally takes precedence and gives the officers a reputation for being hard or mean, making it difficult for gang officers to build relationships with non-gang-involved youth in the neighborhoods they police.

8. Teens had hope and practical suggestions for making crime reporting safer. The teens' most common suggestions for making it safer to report crime were building better relationships between police and the community, providing confidentiality to witnesses and/or anonymous crime reporting, protecting witnesses after they report, and providing better options (economic, social, and educational) to youth to prevent them from joining gangs in the first place.

9. Nobody is keeping track of witnesses. According to the seven public officials we interviewed, felony case dispositions can take years in Massachusetts, and no single entity within the criminal justice system seems to have responsibility for maintaining contact with witnesses over the period from report to trial, when witnesses are most vulnerable to intimidation and most likely to drop out of the process.

10. Tools are available to criminal justice officials to reduce or mitigate threats, but they are seldom used. The prosecutor and the victim advocate we interviewed noted that remedies are available to head off or reduce the effects of intimidation. These tools include charging defendants with witness tampering, revoking bail when threats are made, expediting cases, and capturing witness testimony early at pretrial hearings or depositions in case witnesses later are unavailable or unwilling to cooperate. However, our interview subjects said these tools are seldom used.

Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate at least six areas where local criminal justice authorities can focus to improve the participation in the criminal justice process of young witnesses to gang crimes.

1. Increase efforts to build trust between the police and youth and their parents in high-crime neighborhoods. Based on the youths' strongly expressed desire for better relationships with the police, we recommend increased investment in school resource officers and basic community policing techniques (such as building relationships between "beat cops" and neighborhood residents) to build the trust that is required for witnesses to come forward and voluntarily share with police any information they have about crimes.

2. Increase the safety of reporting crime by providing anonymity or confidentiality whenever possible. Well-advertised anonymous tip lines, as well as measures to protect the confidentiality of witnesses' identities as long as possible (such as interviewing witnesses inside a safe location rather than on the street and not including witnesses' names on police reports), might help to ease the fear of being labeled a "snitch" (by offenders or by their neighbors) that so many of the youth expressed. These fears, whether or not they are related

to an actual threat of harm, are real and prevent a good deal of potential reporting to and cooperation with police at the investigation stage of criminal cases.

3. Mount social marketing campaigns to counter community norms against “snitching.”

Gang members and other criminal offenders have run very successful marketing campaigns to discourage witnesses from reporting crime and testifying in court—including mass distribution of “stop snitching” T-shirts and videos. Such campaigns are reinforced with the occasional assault or even murder of a witness. Yet the youth surveys and interviews indicated that even in the absence of actual violence against witnesses, the community norm against “snitching” is itself quite powerful. To counter this norm, communities should work with youth and families to come up with a positive (and believable) message about the role youth can play in making their communities safer, including reporting crime to the police. Communities should then enlist spokespeople who are credible to youth—hip-hop artists and DJs, trusted youth workers and faith leaders, and youth themselves—to deliver the message through various media. Such a campaign will succeed only if its message is believable (because authorities are genuinely trying to make reporting safer), crafted by the “experts” (youth are involved), and delivered by trusted messengers (not the “same old” adults who are always trying to get youth to “do right”).

4. Reach out to parents and offer them a positive role in making their communities safer.

Because of the reported importance of family ties and the frequent role of parents as gatekeepers between their children and the police, we recommend including parents and other family members in efforts to reach out to teens to encourage them to report crime and testify about it. For parents to be convinced that cooperating with the criminal justice system will not expose their children to undue harm, criminal justice officials must demonstrate good faith by taking measures to reduce the likelihood of intimidation while also making clear to families the link between the lack of witness testimony and the continued presence of violent gang members in their neighborhoods.

5. Keep in touch with witnesses once they’re “in the system.”

Local criminal justice officials must find ways to keep tabs on important witnesses as cases proceed toward resolution. Officials making such contact must at all times consider the witnesses’ safety and take precautions to minimize their exposure to risks that could arise from the contact itself (for example, neighborhood gossip about why a police officer or prosecutor showed up on someone’s doorstep). While ensuring that their communications do not expose witnesses to such risks, prosecutors, victim advocates, or police officers—whomever the local community deems the most appropriate ongoing contact for witnesses—must keep an open line of communication with witnesses to try to keep them invested in the process and address any intimidation or other barriers to their participation at trial.

6. Make more aggressive use of currently available legal tools to protect witnesses. This and previous research indicate that officials can more effectively (and widely) use existing tools,³ such as witness tampering charges, pre-trial hearings and depositions to capture witness testimony, revocation of bail or probation when there's a threat or occurrence of intimidation, and efforts to speed up case dispositions to minimize the time that witnesses are exposed to intimidation. Through legislative mandates and/or new funding streams, states can influence local criminal justice authorities to collaborate more and to shift their priorities and strategies to more strongly emphasize witness safety and protection in gang-related cases. Such changes should produce a “win-win,” with case closures and convictions increasing along with witness security.

Conclusion

Collectively, these recommendations offer hope for reducing the prevalence of intimidation and its effects on the administration of justice. These ideas are not necessarily new, and most have been tried to some extent in various jurisdictions. However, effective implementation of these ideas requires both defined leadership and a joint effort by all components of the criminal justice system to work toward the same end. One vehicle to create this kind of coordination is a state-funded demonstration program that would ask local criminal justice agencies to develop coordinated policies and practices related to witness intimidation and encourage their consistent application, with successful programs becoming models for the rest of the state. Whatever efforts communities undertake to combat gang-related witness intimidation, criminal justice officials should remember that youth—particularly non-gang-involved youth—and their parents may be an untapped community resource ready and willing to help design and implement sensible and effective responses to the crimes occurring in their neighborhoods.

³ See, for example, Peter Finn and Kerry Murphy Healey, “Preventing Gang and Drug-related Witness Intimidation,” (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1996), and Elizabeth Connick and Robert C. Davis, “Examining the Problem of Witness Intimidation,” *Judicature* 66 (1983): 439-47.

Introduction

Both the FBI's annual crime statistics and the victimization data (which include crimes not reported to police) gathered annually by the Bureau of Justice Statistics show that violent crime in the United States peaked in the early 1990s, declined steadily for a decade, and has recently plateaued and possibly begun a new rise.⁴ It is not yet known whether the current uptick in crime mirrors that experienced in the 1990s or whether different factors are at play today. Anecdotally, however, police chiefs report that the number of youth involved in street gangs is on the rise, and prosecutors indicate that witness intimidation prevents many gang members from being successfully prosecuted and locked up, possibly contributing to multiple crimes being committed by the same offenders.

In 2004 and 2005, a resurgence of youth and gang violence in Massachusetts was a disturbing reminder of the high crime of the 1990s. In Springfield, for example, there were 17 homicides in 2004.⁵ In Suffolk County, which includes Boston, Revere, Chelsea, and Winthrop, there were 67 homicides in 2004 and 80 in 2005.⁶ In youth homicides, much of this upturn has been attributed to new gang activity.⁷ While a combination of targeted law enforcement efforts and innovative community-based programs had a dramatic impact on reducing youth violence for about a decade,⁸ youth homicides and gang crime have again become matters of critical concern to the Commonwealth.

Youth, Gangs, and Drugs

A strong link exists among youth violence, gang conflicts, street drug markets, and gun availability.⁹ Gang violence typically stems from turf disputes and is directed against other gangs, but the violence also has a broader impact on the neighborhood. For example, gang homicides are more likely to occur in the street or other public places, involve strangers and

4 Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Crime in the United States, 2005: Murder," (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2006), http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/05cius/data/table_01.html (accessed February 8, 2007); Shannan M. Catalano, "Criminal Victimization, 2005," (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006), 6, <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/cv05.pdf> (accessed February 8, 2007).

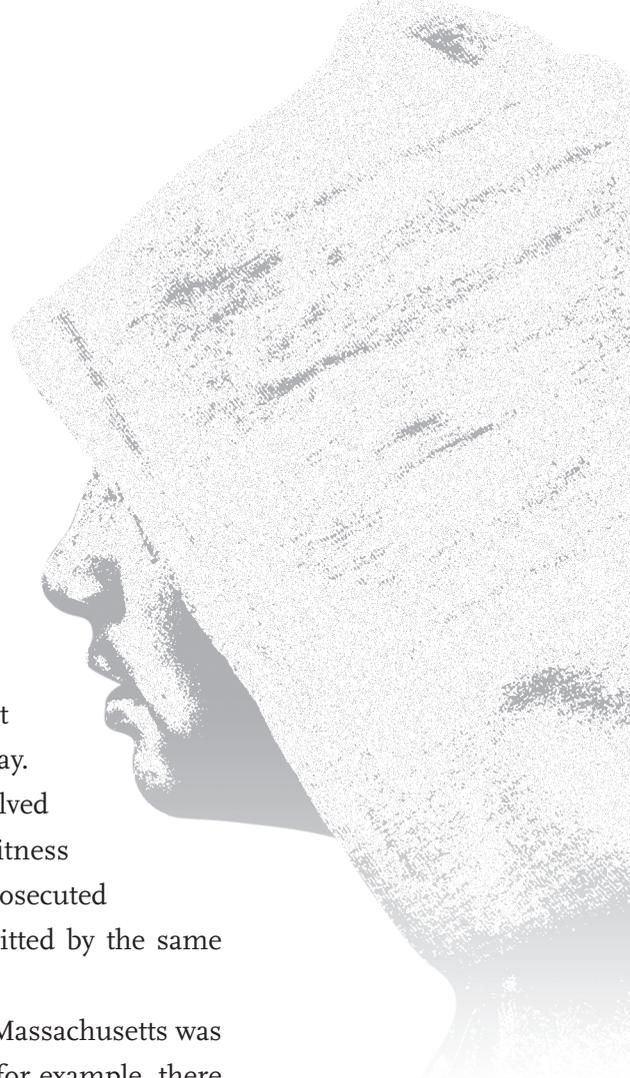
5 Natalia Muñoz, "Dreams Dashed on Street without Hope," *The Republican*, January 24, 2005.

6 Commonwealth Fusion Center, *Crime in Massachusetts, 2004-2005*, http://www.mass.gov/Eoeps/docs/misp/divisions/investigative_services/crime_reporting_unit/mass_crime_report_2004_2005.pdf (accessed December 12, 2006).

7 Boston Indicators Project, <http://www.tbf.org/indicators2004/publicsafety/overview.asp> (accessed August 15, 2005).

8 For example, the Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire had significant success in reducing violent crime by creating a multi-agency, coordinated task force involving police, faith groups, and community organizations. See David M. Kennedy et al., "Reducing Gun Violence: The Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire," (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2001).

9 See Anthony A. Braga, "Gun Violence Among Serious Young Offenders," *Problem Oriented Guides for Police Problem-Specific Guides Series*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2004).



multiple participants, be designed to intimidate, and involve fear of retaliation.¹⁰ There is evidence that younger victims of violence are more likely than older victims to believe their perpetrator was a gang member and thus perhaps more fearful about reporting the crime.¹¹ In addition, while juvenile offenders victimize people of all types, research suggests that they are more likely to target victims of similar age, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background¹²—a fact that most likely reflects the common scenario of victim and offender living in the same racially and economically homogenous neighborhood.

In Massachusetts there are estimated to be between 60 and several hundred gangs, ranging from loosely-knit, undisciplined local groups to highly structured organizations.¹³ These gangs engage in a wide range of criminal activity including “narcotics and weapons trafficking, home invasions, drive-by shootings, murder, extortion, auto theft and money laundering.”¹⁴ Drug trafficking is significant in many parts of the state—the greater Boston area is pinpointed as the primary distribution center with Holyoke, Springfield, and Worcester as secondary centers.

Concern about Witness Intimidation

Witness intimidation—a crime itself—fundamentally undermines our criminal justice system, forcing prosecutors to drop cases, demoralizing law enforcement and communities, and allowing perpetrators to remain free and true crime rates to remain unknown. Recent increases in gang activity, endemic in some neighborhoods, have raised new concerns about witness intimidation and non-cooperation in the context of gang-related crime. In September 2004, District Attorney Daniel Conley of Suffolk County testified before the State House Public Safety Committee that intimidation occurred in 90 percent of cases involving gangs and gun violence and was “an issue that has never received the attention it deserves.”¹⁵ The impact of such witness intimidation is far-reaching, for both the criminal justice system and the intimidated witnesses. One indication of this reality is that, as of March 2006, police had made arrests or identified suspects in fewer than 30% of Boston’s 2005 homicides.¹⁶

Intimidation happens on two levels: (1) direct and indirect threats and assaults directed against witnesses in particular cases, and (2) “anti-snitching” campaigns directed at the community as a whole. Besides direct assaults on witnesses, tactics of intimidation have included circulating transcripts of grand jury testimony among public housing residents; packing courtrooms with gang members; and producing and distributing “anti-snitching” videos, compact discs, and T-shirts.

¹⁰ See James C. Howell, Arlen Egly Jr., and Debra K. Gleason, “Modern-Day Youth Gangs,” *Juvenile Justice Bulletin* (Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2002).

¹¹ Erika Harrell, “Violence by Gang Members, 1993-2003,” *Crime Data Brief*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2005).

¹² R. Barri Flowers, “Youth and Violence,” in *Kids Who Commit Adult Crimes: Serious Criminality by Juvenile Offenders*, (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 2002).

¹³ National Drug Intelligence Center, *Massachusetts Drug Threat Assessment Update* (May 2003), <http://www.usdoj.gov/ndic/pubso7/908/index.htm#> (accessed August 15, 2005).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Michael P. Norton, “Witness Intimidation Prevalent As Gang Activity Rises, DA Conley Says,” *State House News Service*, September 29, 2004.

¹⁶ Raja Mishra and Suzanne Smalley, “Legislature Approves Anticrime Measure; Aims at Gang Intimidation,” *The Boston Globe*, March 17, 2006.

Although not as common as less overt forms of intimidation, documented cases of assaults against witnesses serve to reinforce the basic norm in high-crime urban communities that “snitching” is dangerous. In 2006, Massachusetts newspapers were peppered with accounts of violent intimidation of witnesses,¹⁷ including one case in which a 15-year-old middle school student assaulted a 13-year-old classmate and told him to “stop snitching” after the youth had agreed to testify against the 15-year-old’s friend, who had previously assaulted the younger boy.¹⁸

While homicides have not reached the peak levels of the 1990s, there has been sufficient concern to prompt calls for a more “coordinated strategy” to address the problem of gang violence and witness intimidation.¹⁹ Most notably, state legislation passed on March 30, 2006, holds great promise for addressing the problem in Massachusetts. Chapter 48 of the Acts of 2006, “An Act Reducing Gang Violence,” established a statewide witness protection program, eased the legal standard for proving perjury, and criminalized improper use of grand jury transcripts and “community guns,” among other measures. Despite the important strides represented by the 2006 legislation, more still needs to be learned about witness intimidation and how it operates in communities for the legislation to have its desired effects of encouraging more witnesses to come forward and increasing the rate of successful prosecution of homicides and other gang-related crimes.

Gap in the Research

Intimidation of victims and witnesses was identified as a significant problem as far back as 1979, when the American Bar Association (ABA) held special hearings on the topic. The ABA Committee on Victims concluded that “There was virtual unanimity . . . that the criminal justice system is presently unable to respond adequately to intimidation” and further, that “intimidation can undermine public confidence in our legal process.”²⁰

Despite recognition of the problem, published research on this issue is scant. What has been done provides a spotty, yet troubling, picture of the impact witness intimidation has on our justice system. The earliest comprehensive research was conducted by one of the authors of this report (Davis) at New York’s Victim Services (now Safe Horizon). Those studies, based on surveys of victim/witnesses and interviews with court officials, revealed that about one-third of victims and witnesses in New York City courts were threatened, and, even among those not threatened, a majority feared reprisal.²¹ The studies recommended that witnesses be informed when defendants are released from custody; that judges expedite cases in which threats are reported; and that prosecutors

17 Karen Goulart, “Two Silver Lake Students Charged with Intimidating a Witness,” *The Patriot Ledger*, April 29, 2006; Lisa Redmond, “No Bail for Alleged Gang Member in Lowell Man’s Killing,” *Lowell Sun*, September 15, 2006; “Teen Charged with Threatening Alleged Victim,” *The Patriot Ledger*, October 17, 2006.

18 Cristina Silva, “Teen, 15, Arrested on Assault Charge; Police Say Youth Attacked Witness,” *The Boston Globe*, April 9, 2006.

19 “Reducing Gang Violence in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts,” Report of the Joint Committee on Public Safety, (January 2005).

20 American Bar Association Committee on Victims, *Reducing victim/witness intimidation: A package*, (Washington, DC: American Bar Association, 1979).

21 Elizabeth Connick and Robert C. Davis, “Examining the Problem of Witness Intimidation,” *Judicature* 66 (1983): 439-47; Robert C. Davis et al., *Victim/Witness Intimidation in the Bronx Courts: How Common Is It, and What Are the Consequences?* (New York: Victim Services, 1990).

adopt policies that restrict pleas to reduced charges when witnesses have been threatened.

Two studies funded by the National Institute of Justice delved further into the criminal justice system's response to intimidation. A 1995 study that interviewed prosecutors concluded that intimidation of victims and witnesses was a major problem for 51% of prosecutors in large jurisdictions and 43% of prosecutors in small jurisdictions.²² It noted that intimidation can be specific to victims and witnesses in particular court cases or can be "community-wide," i.e., intended to foster a general atmosphere of fear and noncooperation within a neighborhood or community. A follow-up paper by the same author defined for prosecutors the nature of intimidation committed by gangs and made recommendations about how court officials can prevent and mitigate threats. Among the report's recommendations were removing gang members from the courtroom, closing the courtroom, and accompanying witnesses to court.²³

In his 1985 book on what prosecutors can do to discourage threats and intimidation, law professor Michael H. Graham recommended getting witnesses' testimony on record through producing witnesses at preliminary hearings; taking depositions; or creating "preservation hearings" for the express purpose of recording witness testimony in case witnesses later become unavailable or refuse to cooperate.²⁴

Little is known about intimidation of teens who witness crimes committed by youth gangs. A 1998 study of criminal behavior by youth gangs found that 42% of gang members, by self-report, had intimidated or assaulted a witness,²⁵ but the study did not include any information on the intimidated witnesses themselves. Currently, there is no detailed picture of the extent and nature of witness intimidation in Massachusetts, let alone a specific assessment of its impact on youth. Nor is there any indication of the extent to which current policies and programs are making an impact on witness cooperation. This information is vital to guide policymakers and practitioners as they strive to develop more effective anti-gang strategies.

The current study aimed to increase knowledge and understanding of (a) the critical factors that deter youth witnesses from reporting gang crimes and testifying against perpetrators; and (b) the kinds of policies and programs that encourage victim and witness cooperation. In particular, this project sought to gather data about factors influencing youths' decisions to cooperate in the criminal justice process and the extent and nature of intimidation in their communities after crimes.

22 Kerry Murphy Healey, *Victim and Witness Intimidation: New Developments and Emerging Responses*, (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1995).

23 Peter Finn and Kerry Murphy Healey, *Preventing Gang- and Drug-related Witness Intimidation*, (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1996).

24 Michael H. Graham, *Witness Intimidation: The Law's Response*, (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1985).

25 C. Ronald Huff, "Comparing the Criminal Behavior of Youth Gangs and At-Risk Youths," *Research in Brief*, (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1998).

Methodology

The study consisted of three components: an on-line survey of 641 youth, in-person individual interviews with 39 youth, and interviews with seven public officials. The researchers partnered with Boys & Girls Clubs (BGCs) from seven Massachusetts cities to recruit participants for the youth surveys and interviews, and relied on state officials and the Internet to identify local law enforcement officials in these same cities to interview.²⁶ Data were collected between May and September 2006.

Youth Survey Development

The survey was developed as an on-line instrument, using a commercial Web survey product as the platform, on the theory that completing a survey on-line would be more appealing to teens than completing a pen-and-paper survey. The computerized delivery allowed for “skips” to be programmed, so that youth were shown only the sub-questions that followed from their answers, making the survey seem shorter and less intimidating than it would have appeared on paper with every possible sub-question included. For example, if a participant in the on-line survey responded positively to the question “Have you ever been involved in a gang?” the next question shown was “How old were you when you first joined a gang?” Those that responded negatively, on the other hand, were not shown the question about age at joining and instead skipped to a question about the characteristics of their neighborhood (which the current or former gang members would see after answering two sub-questions related to their gang involvement).

The survey was pilot-tested twice. Three high school students participating in a job shadow day at the National Center for Victims of Crime reviewed the survey in paper form and gave feedback on the wording of several of the questions. A group of six youth from a Gaithersburg, Maryland, Latino youth program then took the on-line version of the survey and met with one of the researchers to discuss their impressions of the survey and the wording of the questions. Their feedback was incorporated into the final version, which was then made available on-line to each of the seven Boys & Girls Clubs, with surveys taking place at a total of 11 BGC clubhouses in those seven cities.

The survey aimed to gather data on gang prevalence and impact in the seven target cities, youths’ experiences with gang-related crime and reporting crime, any instances of witness intimidation they had heard about or experienced, how their relationships with law

²⁶ The participating cities were Boston (Roxbury, specifically), Holyoke, Lowell, Lawrence, Lynn, Springfield, and Worcester.



enforcement officers might affect their views on reporting crime and testifying, and any ideas the youth had for making it safer to report crime. The survey had 66 possible questions (as explained above, not every respondent was asked every question), which were divided into eight sections: demographics, gang experience (personal or proximal), witnessing gang crime, vicarious experience of gang crime, personal experience of gang crime, witness intimidation, contacts with police, and youths' ideas for making reporting safer.

Survey Participant Recruitment and Consent

Researchers had a goal of 700 completed surveys, about 100 from each participating Boys & Girls Club. The process of recruiting survey participants involved several steps. First, a letter was mailed to the parent or guardian of all club members ages 12 and up (except those who were 18 or older, as no parental consent was needed). The letter was drafted by the researchers but sent on BGC letterhead by the clubs, and contained an opt-out consent, instructing parents to contact the club if they wanted to see the survey questions or did not want their child to participate. To give parents sufficient time to read and respond to the letter, three weeks were allowed between sending the letters and beginning the surveys, and any letters that were returned with bad addresses were construed as non-consent for that child. Researchers, with the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB),²⁷ determined that a negative (opt-out) consent procedure was sufficient as the survey presented minimal, if any, risk to the participants. A teen-friendly version of the consent letter was included as the first screen of the computerized survey, and youth were asked to read the page and give consent before completing any of the other survey questions.²⁸

Next, the researchers developed recruitment posters to publicly announce in each Boys & Girls Club the purpose and nature of the survey, the risks and benefits of participating, and the incentive available to survey participants (ten dollars). Along with the posters, copies of the survey questions were also posted publicly in the clubs. These postings served two purposes: first, to inform the club members of the opportunity to participate, and second, to dispel any fears that the survey might be asking for youth to put themselves at risk by “snitching” on gang members. The posters (and survey questions) made clear that youth were not being asked to name names in the survey, that the questions were general in nature, and that their responses would be anonymous.

Before beginning the surveys, each club identified a few staff members who would be responsible for recruiting participants and managing the incentive payments, and these staff members received phone training on protecting the confidentiality of the participants' identities as well as managing the logistics of the survey administration. Surveys took

²⁷ The IRB for this project consisted of a former prosecutor, two other attorneys, a mental health therapist, an experienced criminal justice researcher, and an administrator from a local youth program. The group met twice: once to review the survey instrument and protocols, and a second time to review the interview schedule and protocols, both times providing feedback on plans for ensuring the safety of the youth survey and interview subjects.

²⁸ See Appendix A for the parental consent form and Appendix B for the youth consent and survey questions.

place between May and August 2006. In total, 641 surveys were completed. All the clubs except one exceeded, achieved, or nearly achieved the goal of 100 surveys, with one club administering just 39 completed surveys before beginning its summer program, which was held at a location without Internet access.

Youth Interviews

A group of five to six interview subjects was recruited at each of the seven participating Boys & Girls Clubs. Parent letters were again provided to the clubs, with a parent signature required this time for youth under 18 to participate in the interviews. The interviews were not publicly announced as the surveys were because the recruiting was more targeted and the risk to participants, while still small, was viewed as higher than the risk involved in the survey. BGC staff was asked to recruit youth ages 15 and older where possible, as researchers felt that those youth would be more likely to have had experiences relevant to the study and also to be better able to judge their own safety while participating in the interview (e.g., being aware of other youth present in the club who might pose a threat to interview subjects because of a relationship with gang members).

After BGC staff at each club had recruited five to six interview subjects, interviewers traveled to each club location and met with the youth one at a time in a private room (generally an office, conference room, or classroom), with one interviewer asking questions and the second taking notes on a laptop computer. Interviews lasted an average of twenty minutes, and youth were paid twenty dollars for participating. Signed parental consent forms (for those under 18) were collected before starting the interview, and the interviewers began each interview by obtaining the youth's informed consent through oral review and signature of the youth consent form.²⁹

Public Official Interviews

For the interviews with police officers, a prosecutor, and a victim advocate from around the state, researchers gathered possible contacts from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety, the Boys & Girls Clubs, and police department Web sites for the seven cities where the youth surveys and interviews took place. One of the researchers made initial contact by phone with these officials to set up appointments for the interviews, which were conducted in person, over the phone, and (for one respondent who preferred it) by fax.

²⁹ See Appendices C, D, and E for the interview consent forms and questions.

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Youth Survey Results

Sample Characteristics

The vast majority of youth who participated in the survey ranged from 12 to 18 years of age. A few (2%) were either 19 or 20 years old. The average age for survey respondents was 14.4 years. Fifty-seven percent of respondents were male and 43% female. A majority (57%) of respondents were Hispanic, 27% were black, 7% white, 2% Asian, and 2% Native American. Nine percent of respondents classified their race as “other,” with the majority of these reporting their ancestry as either Caribbean, Cape Verdean, or mixed.

The Boys & Girls Clubs directors we worked with indicated that their club membership tends to be more minority, more poor, and more likely to live in single-parent households than the general population of their cities. As seen in Tables 1 and 2 below, a comparison with U.S. Census data shows that survey respondents were, in fact, much more likely to be from minority racial and ethnic groups than the general population of their cities, with the exception of Roxbury respondents. Roxbury is a neighborhood rather than a city, and this may explain the closer match between respondents and the general population of the area. This discrepancy indicates that the findings may not be generalizable to the population at large of these cities; however, the BGC (and consequent survey) populations may, in fact, be representative of the particular Massachusetts communities with entrenched gang problems. An analysis of crime and gang surveillance data would be needed to confirm this hypothesis.

Table 1: Breakdown of Survey Respondents by Race and City*

	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Latino</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Native American</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
Holyoke	6%	6%	85%	0%	0%	4%	(n=101)
Lawrence	5%	6%	88%	2%	1%	3%	(n=116)
Lowell	13%	23%	56%	8%	1%	8%	(n=96)
Lynn	5%	21%	68%	3%	0%	5%	(n=38)
Roxbury	2%	62%	10%	0%	5%	17%	(n=96)
Springfield	6%	48%	38%	0%	3%	10%	(n=99)
Worcester	9%	25%	56%	4%	2%	11%	(n=100)

* Percentages for each city total more than 100, because respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer.

Table 2: Census 2000 Data on Race and City

	White	Black	Latino**	Asian	Native American	Other**
Holyoke	66%	4%	41%	1%	0%	26%
Lawrence	49%	5%	60%	3%	1%	37%
Lowell	69%	4%	14%	17%	0%	7%
Lynn	68%	11%	18%	7%	0%	10%
Roxbury*	11%	63%	25%	1%	1%	18%
Springfield	56%	21%	27%	2%	0%	16%
Worcester	77%	7%	15%	5%	0%	7%

*Roxbury census data were searched by zip code (02119) because it is a geographically small section of the city of Boston. All other census data were called up by city name.

**Census forms ask respondents to identify Latino/Hispanic ethnicity separately from race; therefore, census respondents choose a race category (white, black, Asian, Native American, other, or more than one), as well as identifying as Latino or not. Research has shown high overlap between the race category of “other” and the identification as being of Latino/Hispanic ethnicity.³⁰

Survey results suggested that most respondents lived in extended family situations. Ninety-seven percent reported living with at least one parent, and 47% lived with two parents. The vast majority (94%) reported at least one other child in their household. Many had adults other than their parents living in the household as well: 45% said they lived with one or more adult relatives and 28% said they lived with at least one unrelated adult.

According to respondents, about two-thirds of their parents (67% of fathers and 63% of mothers) had completed high school. However, mothers of respondents were more likely to have attended college than fathers: 41% of mothers and 31% of fathers had had at least some college education.

Prevalence of Gangs in Respondents' Neighborhoods and Schools

We asked respondents about problems in their neighborhoods. The most common problem reported was fights, indicated as a problem by 57% of those who completed the survey (see Figure 1). Nearly one-half of the teens viewed crime and drugs (48%) or gang activity (44%) as problems. Signs of physical decay (graffiti and abandoned buildings) were less likely to be seen as problems.

Most respondents reported positive aspects of their neighborhoods as well (see Figure 2). Fully 73% of those completing the survey reported feeling safe in their neighborhoods, and a majority (56%) also described their neighborhood as a place where people help each other out. However, only one in three teens (35%) said that people in their neighborhood worked together to solve problems.

Figure 1: Perception of Neighborhood Problems

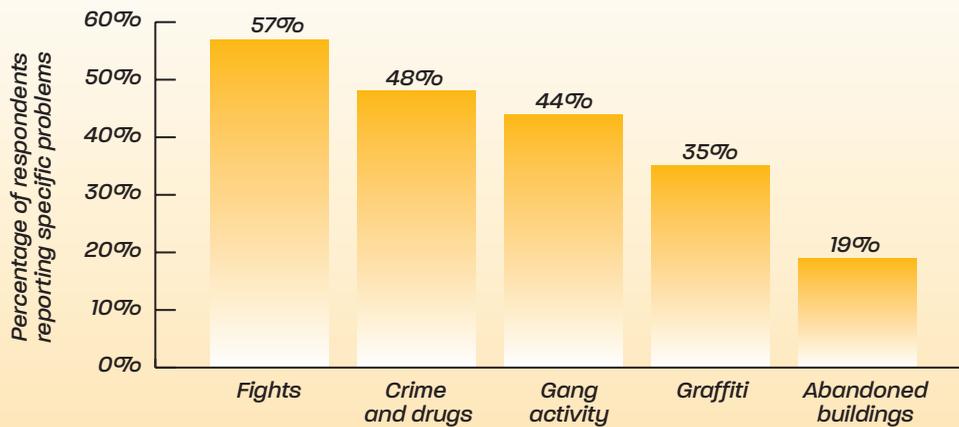
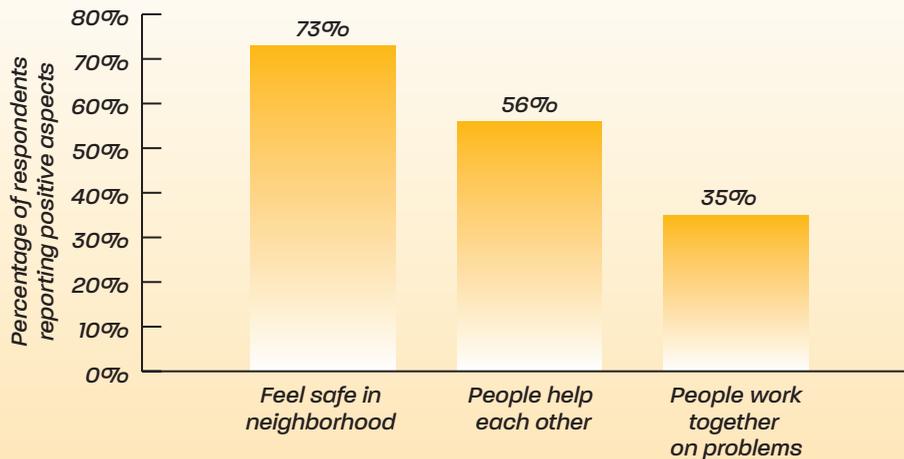


Figure 2: Positive Aspects of Community



A majority of respondents (57%) reported gangs as a problem in their neighborhood, but only 22% said that gangs posed a “big problem.”³¹ Three in four knew of neighborhood residents who belonged to a gang (see Table 3), but just 22% said that “a lot” of residents were in gangs.³² Figures were similar for gang activity in respondents’ schools. Fifty-four percent of those completing the survey said that gangs were a problem in their school, but just 17% said that gangs represented a big problem. Eighty-one percent of teens said that at least some of their schoolmates were involved in gangs, but only 27% said that a lot of kids in their schools participated in gang activities. Nearly one-half (46%) reported that they had friends in gangs, and 22% said that they had family members in gangs.

³¹ The reason for the apparent contradiction between this number and the percentage reported in Figure 1 is that the questions measure slightly different concepts: gang activity in the neighborhood (44%) and gangs as a problem in the neighborhood (57%). It may be that youth view the presence of gang members in their neighborhoods as a problem, even if they are not aware of gang-related crime or activity occurring there. It’s also possible that the later question allowed more time for reflection on gangs in the neighborhood, and the youth became more inclined to identify this as a problem as they progressed through the survey.

³² Terms like “big problem” and “a lot” were used in the survey (rather than “significant problem” or estimated percentages of people) to make the survey more comprehensible to teen respondents. See Appendix B for a copy of the survey questions.

When asked if they themselves belonged to a gang, one in ten respondents replied affirmatively. Most of these teens described gang involvement as something in their past: fewer than 3% of respondents said that they belonged to a gang currently, and most of these youths described themselves as wanting out. The average age for joining gangs was 12 years, with some joining even before their tenth birthday. About one-half of respondents described their reasons for joining gangs as seeking friendship or protection while about one-third said that they joined because they were following the example of other family members.

Table 3: Prevalence of Gangs in Respondents' Neighborhoods and Schools

	<i>Neighborhood</i>	<i>School</i>
<i>Gangs a problem?</i>		
Big problem	22%	17%
Small problem	35%	37%
No problem	43%	46%
<i>How many people belong to a gang?</i>		
A lot	22%	27%
Some/a few	53%	54%
None	25%	19%

Differences in Gang Activity by City

Table 4 breaks down differences among cities in perceptions of gang activity in both schools and neighborhoods. In general, schools were seen as having somewhat smaller gang problems than neighborhoods. Lawrence had the largest proportion of respondents who rated gangs as a big problem in both schools (25%) and neighborhoods (29%), while Lynn had the least (13% rated gangs as a big problem in schools, and 11% rated gangs as a big problem in their neighborhoods). However, overall, differences among cities were not striking.

Table 5 depicts the prevalence of gang involvement among schoolmates, neighborhood residents, friends, family, and self according to city. No striking patterns emerge. Respondents from Roxbury were substantially more likely than those from other cities to know of someone in a gang in their neighborhood. Respondents from Roxbury and Lawrence were the most likely to have family members involved in gangs, and respondents from Lawrence were also more likely to report having been involved in gangs themselves.

Table 4: Perceptions of Gang Problems by City

	<i>Gangs a big problem in school</i>	<i>Gangs a big problem in neighborhood</i>
Holyoke	12%	29%
Lawrence	25%	29%
Lowell	18%	12%
Lynn	13%	11%
Roxbury	15%	26%
Springfield	20%	20%
Worcester	14%	19%

Table 5: Prevalence of Gang Membership by City

	<i>Someone in school</i>	<i>Someone in neighborhood</i>	<i>A friend</i>	<i>Someone in family</i>	<i>Self</i>
Holyoke	70%	62%	33%	18%	4%
Lawrence	84%	76%	46%	30%	17%
Lowell	85%	66%	40%	19%	3%
Lynn	84%	66%	63%	13%	11%
Roxbury	82%	89%	52%	28%	8%
Springfield	84%	75%	44%	21%	13%
Worcester	80%	73%	41%	21%	14%

Experiences with Gang Crime

Respondents were asked a series of questions about gang crimes they had experienced, crimes that their friends or family had experienced, and crimes that they had witnessed. Survey results indicated a high rate of exposure to crimes. The most common crime experienced by the teens was assault. Twenty-six percent of respondents reported having been the victim of a beating; 39% had seen someone else being beaten; and 47% reported a family member or friend who had been the victim of a beating.³³

Many respondents had also been exposed to serious threats or drug activity (see Table 6). Fewer had been exposed to robberies or attacks with weapons, but still 20% reported having witnessed a shooting or attempted shooting, 18% reported that a friend or family member had been shot at, and 7% reported that they had been the victim of a shooting or attempted shooting. The crime that the teens had been exposed to least frequently was sexual assault; nevertheless, nearly one in ten had witnessed a sexual assault and a similar proportion knew of a friend or family member who had been the victim of sexual assault.

Many of the crimes that the teens had been exposed to apparently were gang-related. Forty-five percent said that they believed that crimes they had witnessed were

³³ The crime category of “assault” is broader than beatings; however, the youth who pilot-tested the survey recommended removing the words “hit” and “slap” from questions about assault, fearing that some youth would interpret it to apply to every instance of hitting a friend in jest with no intended or resulting harm.

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gang-related; 36% believed that crimes experienced by friends or family were gang-related; and 24% believed that crimes of which they had been a victim were gang-related. About one-half of respondents said that they had reported gang crimes they experienced, witnessed, or heard about (see Table 7). Whether they had been personally victimized or had witnessed or heard about a crime, teens were far more likely to report incidents to their parents or other family members or adults than to police or school authorities.

Table 6: Experience with Crime

	<i>Crime experienced by respondent</i>	<i>Crime witnessed by respondent</i>	<i>Crime experienced by family/friends</i>
Beatings	26%	39%	47%
Serious threats	20%	44%	32%
Drug activity*	16%	40%	28%
Robbery	11%	29%	21%
Attack with other weapon	10%	27%	25%
Shooting	7%	20%	18%
Sexual assault	4%	8%	9%

*Direct experience with drug crime was defined as “being asked to buy, sell, use or ditch drugs.”

The one-half of respondents who did not report the gang crimes they experienced gave a variety of reasons for their decisions. The most common reasons teens gave for not reporting were that the crime wasn’t their concern (for crimes witnessed or heard about) or that they did not want to be seen as a snitch. Although few teens admitted to being frightened about reporting the crime, many also said that they just didn’t feel comfortable telling someone about it.

Table 7: Reporting of Gang Crime

	<i>Crime experienced by respondent</i>	<i>Crime witnessed by respondent*</i>	<i>Crime experienced by family/friends</i>
Told anyone	54%	46%	51%
<i>Who they told:</i>			
Family member	65%	50%	60%
Other adult	45%	32%	44%
Police	14%	11%	15%
School authorities	14%	3%	13%
Friend	3%	4%	4%

* Reporting rates are lower for crimes witnessed because respondents were inadvertently limited to selecting just one option.

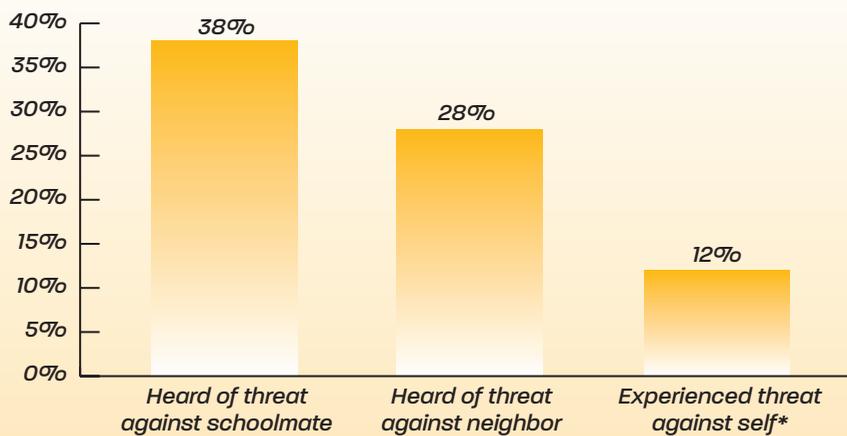
Witness Intimidation

Roughly one in three survey respondents had heard about threats made against schoolmates (38%) or neighbors (28%) as a result of reporting gang crimes. However, relatively few had themselves been the targets of threats: of those who had reported gang crimes, 12% said they had experienced threats as a result (see Figure 3).

The most common way that threats were made against schoolmates, neighbors, and the respondents themselves was face-to-face (see Table 8). A sizable proportion of the warnings were accompanied by physical assaults. In fact, about one in two of the threats that respondents had heard about against schoolmates and neighbors involved beatings. This figure may be inflated, given that respondents may have been more likely to hear about those threats that involved violence, and the 17% rate of beatings reported against respondents themselves who had reported gang crimes may be more representative of the true rate of violence in intimidation attempts. Telephone calls were the next most frequent method used to make threats against schoolmates, neighbors, and respondents themselves. Frequently, threats also were delivered via notes or on-line. Sometimes, threats were delivered indirectly by following or stalking persons who had reported crimes, vandalism against their property, or social isolation of reporters.

The most likely place for threats to be made against school or neighborhood reporters or respondents who had reported was on the street (see Table 9). Another common place for threats to be made was in public places such as malls or movie theaters. This finding is somewhat discouraging because threats made in public locations are probably the most difficult for authorities to influence. However, a significant percentage of threats were also made in schools or social gatherings, where school and other authorities might be able to exercise more control over interactions between teens.

Figure 3: Experience with Threats



*Includes only those who reported crimes.

Table 8: How Threats Were Made

	<i>Threats against respondents</i>	<i>Threats against schoolmates</i>	<i>Threats against neighbors</i>
In person	53%	72%	64%
Over the phone	22%	30%	23%
Exclusion/isolation	19%	12%	14%
Beaten up	17%	49%	41%
Notes	17%	35%	17%
On-line	14%	23%	15%
Followed/stalked	11%	22%	24%
Vandalism	6%	17%	24%

Table 9: Where Threats Were Made

	<i>Threats against respondents</i>	<i>Threats against schoolmates</i>	<i>Threats against neighbors</i>
On the street	67%	66%	81%
At school	39%	58%	25%
At home	25%	17%	19%
Social gathering	14%	23%	20%
Public space	11%	24%	17%
Boys & Girls Club	8%	7%	5%

Teens felt that many of their neighbors and classmates would hesitate to report crimes committed by gang members (see Figures 4 and 5). About one in four respondents believed that all or most of their peers would be willing to report gang crimes, the same proportion who believed that none of their neighbors or schoolmates would report. The remaining half of respondents believed that some of their peers would report gang incidents that they had witnessed.

Figure 4: Perceived Willingness of Neighbors to Report Gang Crimes

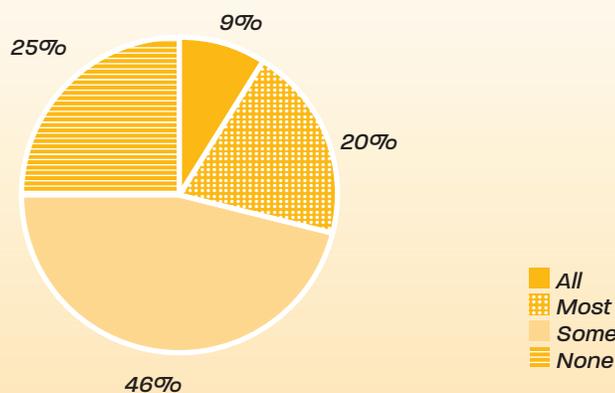
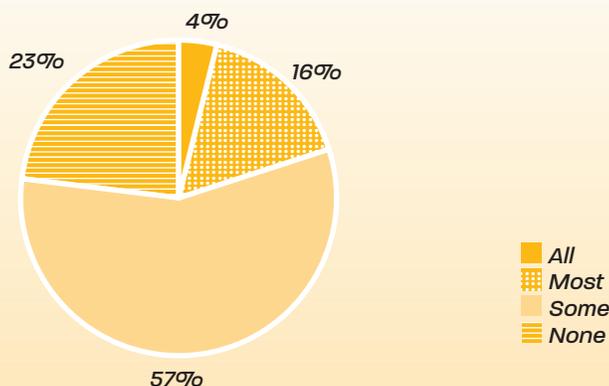
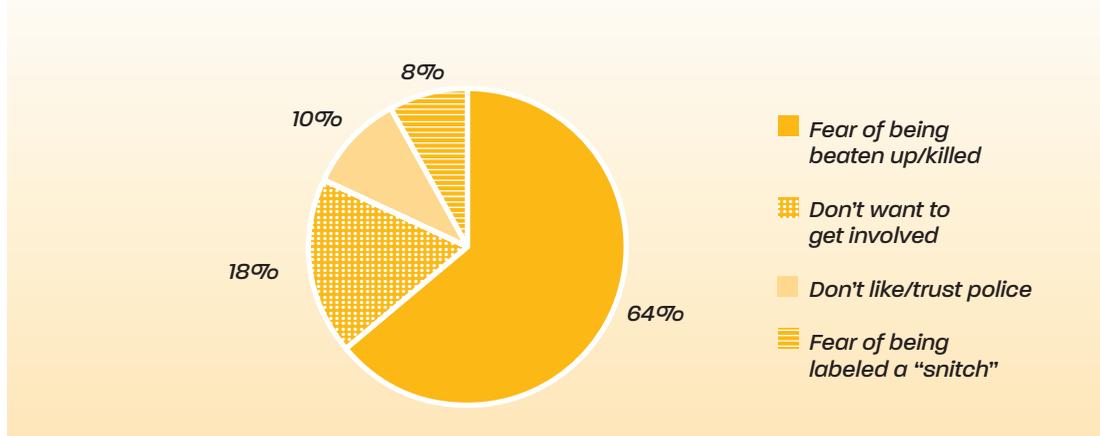


Figure 5: Perceived Willingness of Classmates to Report Gang Crimes



By far, the most common reason that respondents gave for believing that their peers would not report gang crimes was fear of being beaten up or killed: fully two in three teens mentioned these fears as the primary reasons that schoolmates and neighbors fail to report crimes to authorities (see Figure 6). About one in ten respondents cited fear of being labeled a snitch or not liking or trusting the police as reasons for their peers not reporting crimes. These results differ sharply from the reasons presented earlier for respondents themselves not reporting crimes they had witnessed. Teens tended to ascribe their own hesitation to report to unwillingness to get involved or reluctance to be seen as a snitch, rather than to fear of physical reprisal. It is possible that, in ascribing their peers' hesitation to report to fear of retaliation, the youth were, in fact, describing their own fears, which they were unwilling to report when asked directly because it felt unsafe or "uncool" to describe themselves as being afraid.

Figure 6: Reasons Why Peers Would Not Report Gang Crimes



Contacts with Police

We asked respondents about their contact with police in their neighborhoods and schools during the past year. Only about a third (30%) of respondents had contact with a police officer in their neighborhood. The most common reasons for contact with police were voluntary—stopping to say hi or talk, reporting a crime, or asking for information or other assistance (see Table 10). But many of the encounters were involuntary contacts initiated by police officers—being present when someone else was questioned, being questioned oneself, or receiving a warning. A smaller number of teens were stopped and searched or arrested.

About the same proportion (30%) of respondents reported having contact with a school resource officer over the past year. However, just over half (52%) of the sample reported that their school had resource officers. Therefore, about two in three teens who attended schools with resource officers reported at least one contact over the past year. As with neighborhood police contacts, contacts with school resource officers were most often voluntary (see Table 10). A much larger proportion of contacts with school resource officers involved stopping just to talk, reinforcing the idea that these officers play a different role with teens than neighborhood officers. About one in five contacts with school resource officers involved the respondent receiving a warning or being questioned about a crime, and one in ten involved a stop and search and/or arrest.

Table 10: Reasons for Contact with Police

	<i>Neighborhood Officers</i>	<i>School Resource Officers</i>
<i>Voluntary contacts</i>		
Reported crime	23%	16%
Asked for help	21%	23%
Stopped to talk	31%	45%
<i>Involuntary contacts</i>		
Officer initiated, no reason given	13%	10%
Present when someone else questioned	23%	18%
Warned	16%	22%
Stopped and questioned	17%	17%
Stopped and searched	10%	13%
Arrested	7%	10%

Respondents held similar, predominantly positive, opinions of their neighborhood police and school resource officers. Sixty-five percent of those who had had contact with a school resource officer felt that they were always or mostly treated with respect during the encounter. Similarly, 61% of those who had had contact with a neighborhood police officer felt that they were treated respectfully. Two in three (66%) of all teens surveyed said that they trusted their school resource officers some or a lot, while 55% trusted their neighborhood police officers. See Figures 7 and 8 for details.

Figure 7: Trust in Police

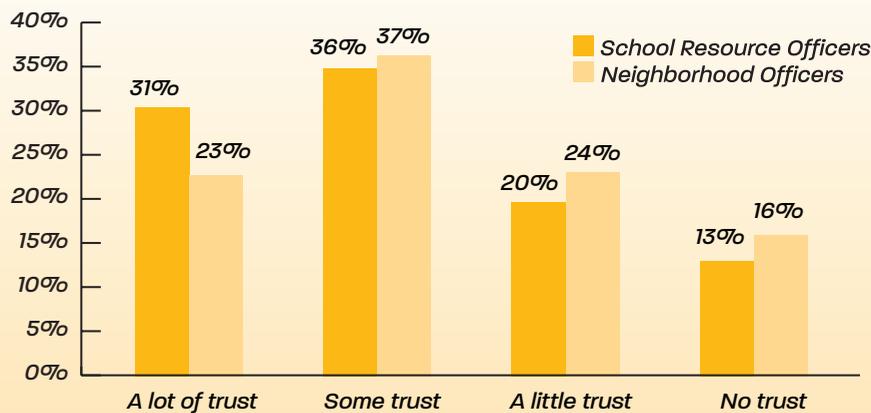
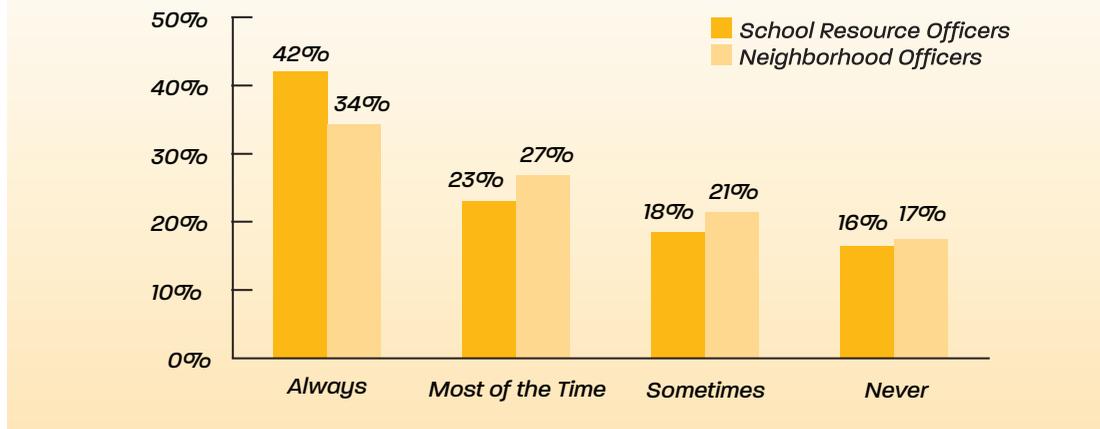


Figure 8: How Often Police Treated Youth with Respect



We did not find that trust of either school resource officers or neighborhood officers varied significantly among cities (see Table 11). Trust in school resource officers in five of the seven cities was remarkably similar. While trust in school officers in Holyoke and Lynn stood substantially higher than in the other cities, the number of students in Lynn who reported having school resource officers was quite small (N=11), making the Lynn data unreliable. Similarly, in comparisons of the seven cities, trust in neighborhood police officers did not vary significantly. Again, trust of police officers among students was higher in Lynn (this time with a somewhat larger N).

Table 11: Trust in Police Officers by City

	Neighborhood Officers	School Resource Officers
Holyoke	57%	78%
Lawrence	60%	67%
Lowell	55%	62%
Lynn	76%	91%
Roxbury	48%	60%
Springfield	48%	59%
Worcester	51%	59%

Where Teens Turn for Help with Crime Problems

Teens were asked to whom they would turn for help if they had witnessed a crime, been threatened, or been physically assaulted. They were also asked to whom they *actually had* turned for help in such a situation. As shown in Table 12, in both the hypothetical and actual scenarios, the top sources of support were family, friends, police, BGC staff, guidance counselors, and teachers. Fewer than one in five said they would turn to or had turned to other sources, including doctors, coaches, peer counselors, hotlines, youth workers, religious leaders, therapists, or the Internet.

Table 12: Where Teens Turn for Help

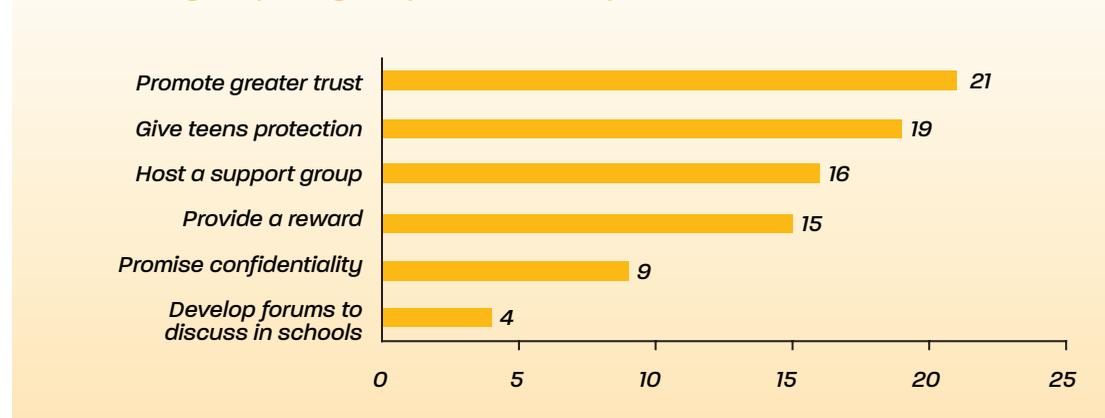
	<i>Where teens would turn for help</i>	<i>Where teens have turned for help</i>
Family	69%	60%
Friends	54%	49%
Police	37%	19%
B&G Club	32%	18%
Guidance counselors	29%	15%
Teachers	27%	19%
Coach	17%	11%
Youth worker	15%	7%
Doctor	14%	6%
Peer counselor	13%	6%
Psychologist	11%	6%
Religious leader	8%	3%
Hotline	7%	3%
Internet chat	3%	3%
Other	4%	6%

Thirty-nine percent of respondents said that they knew of programs in their schools designed to help teens feel safe reporting crimes. Most teens mentioned counselors—guidance counselors, crisis counselors, or social workers. Some also mentioned staff of after-school programs or mediation programs. Surprisingly, only seven respondents (1%) mentioned police officers either through DARE or school resource officers. Forty-five percent of teens knew of programs to help them feel safe reporting at their Boys & Girls Club. A handful of teens named the Keystone program at their clubs,³⁴ but most mentioned specific staff members or club staff in general. A smaller proportion (22%) of respondents knew of programs to facilitate reporting in their neighborhoods. Here, the most common responses were church programs, Boys & Girls Clubs, and after-school programs.

34 Keystone is the Boys & Girls Club national teen leadership program, available in most BGC clubhouses.

Finally, respondents were asked what other kinds of help might encourage more teens to come forward and report gang crimes. The most frequently mentioned ideas involved making teens feel safe in reporting, including promoting greater trust between youth and the police and ensuring teens that they would be protected if they came forward (see Figure 9). Promises of confidentiality also ranked high. Other frequently mentioned ideas included initiating peer support groups for teens who report crimes and providing financial incentives or other rewards for reporting crimes. A handful of teens also mentioned setting up hotlines for persons wanting to report and providing forums in schools to discuss the value of reporting gang crimes.

Figure 9: Ideas to Encourage Teens to Report Crime (by frequency of open-ended responses)



Analysis by Respondent Demographics

To determine whether there were differences among respondent subgroups, we analyzed some of the key survey questions according to gender, age, and race. The analysis was based on logistic regression models, a form of multivariate analysis that allows for determination of the importance of each predictor variable while holding constant the other variables in the model. A summary of the results is presented in Table 13. We examined the effect of demographic factors on responses to 14 of the survey questions, including the extent of gang problems in schools and neighborhoods, experience with crime, and opinions about school and neighborhood police officers. A “+” sign in a cell indicates a statistically significant positive relationship (as one variable increases, the other also increases), while a “-” sign indicates an inverse relationship (as one variable increases, the other decreases).

The table shows that responses to only one of the questions differed by gender: girls were less likely than boys to have heard about crimes from friends and family members. Likewise, responses differed little by race. Relative to whites and Asians

(combined because numbers of each were low), blacks were more likely to have acknowledged gang problems in their neighborhoods but less likely to have heard of threats. Latino respondents were more likely than other groups to have heard of crimes committed against friends and family. They were also more likely to have witnessed crimes and more likely to have heard of threats against schoolmates. Without additional context, it is difficult to pinpoint the reasons for these differences, but they may be related to the gang context of particular communities with a dominant ethnic group. For example, 88% of survey respondents from Lawrence were Latino, while 62% of respondents from Roxbury were black, and so the racial differences may actually reflect a broader difference between communities.

Responses to a number of questions differed by age. Older respondents were more likely to have experienced crime personally, through witnessing an event, and through stories from family and friends. Older respondents were also more likely to believe that their schoolmates and neighbors were willing to report crimes committed by gang members. These differences are easier to explain: older youth are bound to have more experience (direct and indirect), both with crime and with reporting it. Detailed results of the multivariate analyses are reported in Appendix F.

Table 13: Breakdown of Responses by Respondent Demographics

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Latino</i>
Gang problems in school		-		
Gang problems in neighborhood		-	+	
Experienced crime vicariously	-	+		+
Experienced crime personally		+		
Witnessed crime		+		+
Heard threat against schoolmate			-	+
Heard threat against neighbor			-	
Experienced threat against self				
Neighbors willing to report		+		
Schoolmates willing to report		+		
Contact with neighborhood officer				
Contact with SRO		-		-
Trust in neighborhood officers		-		
Trust in SROs		-		

+ indicates significant multivariate positive correlation, e.g., blacks are more likely than others to report gang problems in their neighborhood

- indicates significant multivariate negative correlation, e.g., older respondents are less likely to report contact with SROs

Discussion

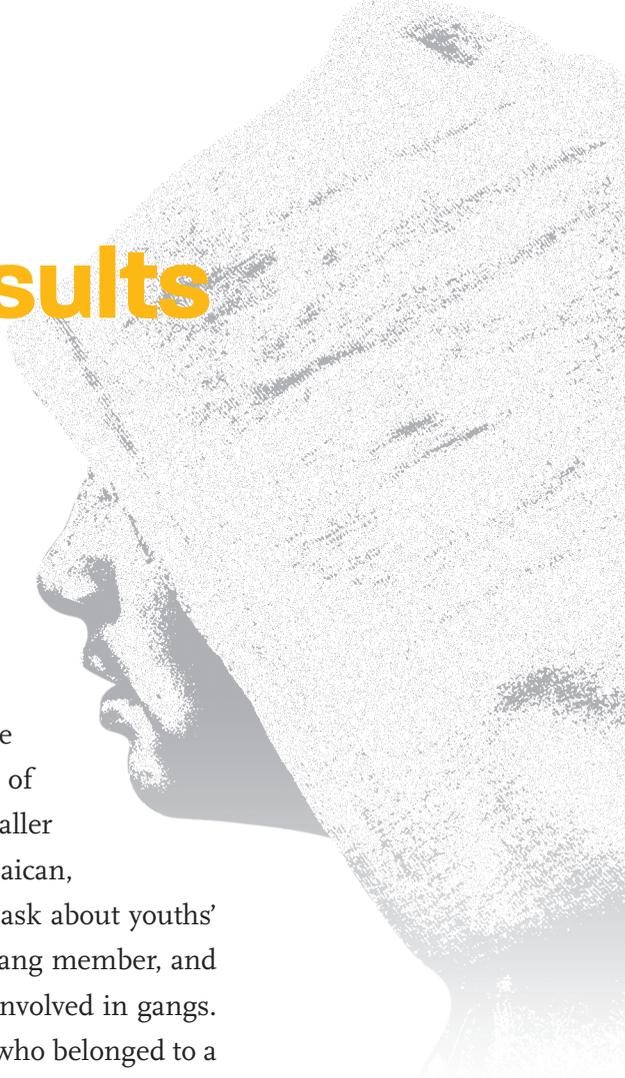
The youth surveys revealed several useful insights about how to increase willingness of teens to report gang crimes that they experience, witness, or hear about. The survey results suggest that increasing teens' willingness to report crimes requires a two-pronged strategy. First, teens need to be convinced of the value of reporting gang crimes. They need to appreciate the harm that gangs can cause the community and the importance of working with school and law enforcement officials to create an environment in which gang activity that harms others is discouraged and in which consequences ensue for those who do break the law. Reporting illegal behavior of gang members needs to be viewed as positive action that benefits the community rather than the act of a "snitch." School authorities, law enforcement officers, faith leaders, and popular personalities such as radio DJs and recording artists can play important roles in bringing about this kind of change in the youth culture.

Second, to encourage more teens to report, communities need to reduce disincentives to reporting. The survey revealed that teens considered safety for reporters a serious concern, and this concern was often reinforced by actual threats or violence directed against peers who had reported gang crimes to authorities. While a majority of respondents said they trusted school resource officers and neighborhood police, nearly one-half did not trust neighborhood police officers and one-third did not trust their school resource officers. Further, few teens named school or law enforcement authorities as the source they would turn to in order to report a crime. Clearly, if teens are to report crimes to authorities, a necessary first step is to win their trust.

To feel safe enough to report crimes, teens need to be protected against reprisal. It is difficult to meet this need without relocating families—an option not available or desirable except in the most serious criminal cases. The survey revealed that many intimidation attempts occur in schools. School officials may be able to take steps to discourage incidents that happen on school property, even if they cannot affect what happens in the neighborhood. A number of teens suggested that promises of confidentiality might make them more willing to report crimes. To address that concern, officials might explore tip lines or other means of providing anonymity for those willing to come forward.

The survey also shows that the source teens turn to most frequently when they have experienced a gang-related crime is their parents or other family members. As a recent study on reporting crimes against children suggests, parents are important gatekeepers between their children and the police.³⁵ This finding indicates that programs to win the trust of teens should also reach out to their families. Because parents may be even more worried about their children's safety than the youth themselves, authorities and trusted community leaders must convince parents that everything possible will be done to keep their children safe from retaliation if they report crime.

Youth Interview Results



Interview Respondents

We interviewed 39 youth, ages 13-21, at the seven participating Boys & Girls Clubs. The demographic profile of the interview respondents was similar to that of the survey respondents, who were recruited from the same clubs. Interview subjects included 22 males (56% of respondents) and 17 females (44% of respondents), with an average age of 16 years (somewhat older than the average survey respondent's age of 14.4 years). The majority of subjects identified as Hispanic (19), with smaller groups of African-American (8), white (6), and other immigrant (6) (Jamaican, Nigerian, Somalian, and Cape Verdean) subjects. Although we did not ask about youths' personal affiliation with gangs, one volunteered that he was a former gang member, and a few mentioned having family members or friends who were heavily involved in gangs. Almost all the youth knew of someone in their school or neighborhood who belonged to a gang.

Interview questions were grouped into six sections: demographics, neighborhood and school safety, experience with crime as a victim or witness (including reporting), involvement in the criminal justice system as a witness, relationship with law enforcement, and ideas for making it safer for youth to report crime. Several themes emerged that were common to many of the interviews. Despite conventions to the contrary, we have included some of the youths' more unvarnished language in the quotations, for the sake of accurately portraying their feelings about the topics discussed.

Gang Impact in the Neighborhood

When asked whether they felt safe in their neighborhoods, almost all youth answered "yes," or gave a qualified yes (such as "sometimes" or "mostly"). In follow-up questions, youth who were equivocal about the safety of their neighborhoods said they avoided violence by staying home, not "messing with" gang members, or by attending community centers or extracurricular activities. When asked what made them feel safe in their neighborhoods, one-third of the youth indicated that relationships with neighbors felt protective, for example: "Everybody knows everybody," "Everybody is cool with everybody," and "I live right across the street from a cop. We're real close friends with them, so we don't have any problems."

The majority (82%, N=32) of youth described some gang presence in their neighborhood, school, or both, with the gang presence more often being problematic in the neighborhood. (The survey elicited a similar response to questions of gang presence and impact in the school and neighborhood.) One young man described the impact of the gang presence in his neighborhood this way:

It affects everybody. They think they own the block. They're gonna run things. They think that's their territory. It affects everyone. You can't walk through a street without looking back. . . . They just think everything is theirs. They want to be the president of the block.

Relationships with gang members in their neighborhoods made youth feel both safe and unsafe. Many youth seemed to feel both loyalty and disapproval toward their neighbors who were in gangs. One girl summed it up this way:

They try to keep us safe. The gang is for other people, against other 'hoods. They try to keep their own neighborhood safe. When others come in the neighborhood, they shoot. But they're not keeping us safe, because a bullet don't have a name on it—it can hit anybody.

Gang Impact in Schools

As with their neighborhoods (and in keeping with the survey results), most youth reported feeling safe at school. Twelve of the youth (31%) described feeling safe in school because of relationships with their peers—a finding that parallels the protective effect of neighborhood relationships. Many youth emphasized the importance of not making enemies and not having problems with anyone. As one youth put it, “I feel safe at school. I have a lot of friends, and I don’t have any enemies.”

Having relationships with adults they felt they could trust also appeared to enhance students’ sense of safety at school. Students listed teachers, principals, deans, guidance counselors, and school resource officers as some of the adults they trusted most. What these adults had in common, according to the youths’ descriptions of them, was a willingness to listen, a desire to help, and, often, the ability to keep their conversation confidential.

While nearly all youth identified at least one trusted adult in their school, a few said they didn’t trust any of the adults in their school, and several youth commented that they felt the teachers or principal didn’t take the students seriously or wouldn’t listen to them. Speaking about teachers’ role in helping students avoid gangs, one youth said:

I would change the way teachers talk to you. Teachers talk to kids like they're stupid; they don't try to relate to kids. They're on a high horse, and they have better things to do than talk to kids. If teachers gave the kid some incentive, it would help. It would inspire the kid to gain more knowledge.

Thirteen of the youth (33%) felt that their schools had been successful in keeping gang activity—if not gang members—out of the schools, while eleven others (28%) felt

that gang activity was present and created a climate of fear in their schools. (The remaining youth who reported a gang presence simply described the gang members as “trying to be cool” or being disruptive, but not necessarily threatening). One young woman who had just graduated from high school recounted the impact of gangs in her school:

Q: Were there gang members in your school?

A: Oh, yeah, the whole gang. We'd have lock-downs; we'd have police, metal detectors. People came from other schools to fight people at my school. It felt like a prison.

Most youth felt that school officials were aware of the gang problems in the schools, but they were divided about how effectively their administrators were handling the gang issue. Efforts youth cited as effective included establishing a night school for students who have poor attendance or are disruptive and “mess it up for the other kids” during normal school hours; having rival gang members work on projects together; and suspending or expelling gang members. Nearly all the youth who reported a gang presence in their school said their school had a dress code that prohibited wearing gang colors or other gang-related clothing, and they gave mixed reviews on whether those were helpful. As one youth commented, “They're still gonna be in a gang even if they can't wear the colors.” Some students felt that their schools weren't making gangs a serious enough issue and that school administrators should be working with the entire student body to prevent youth from joining gangs. One teen described her school as simply out of control:

What can they do? The adults in our school, they really mind their business. The kids are out of control. The students don't only fight students, they fight teachers, too. They can't do anything but tell them to go to class. We can't wear hats or hoodies. We all still wear hoodies and hats. Some teachers will tell you to take it off.

Relationships with gang members (ranging from acquaintance and neighbor relationships to family members and close friends) were fairly common among the youth we interviewed, although the youth were often careful to say that, while they knew or socialized with gang members, they were not themselves part of any gang. For example, a young man who was about to enter high school said,

I knew most of them that were in gangs. It was about half of the 8th-grade guys. They would try to get me into it, but I'm not like that. I would chill with people from it, but that doesn't mean I'm in it.

Several of the youth who avoided joining gangs nevertheless cited their relationships with gang members as a reason they felt safe in their school or neighborhood. One female athlete said, “Yes, [I felt safe in school] because I knew everyone. I had friends in different types of gangs, and they respected me because I'm not in that type of stuff.”

When asked what would make their schools safer, many youth suggested traditional discipline or security measures, such as suspending or expelling gang

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members or installing security cameras or metal detectors. Some youth offered more socially focused suggestions, such as counseling for youth, family interventions, or better educational and program opportunities to give youth alternatives to gang involvement. A few were stymied by questions about how to improve school safety or make it easier to report crimes in school:

It could be a room, but then whoever went in that room, everyone would know they were telling something. Or have a secret person, but no, everyone would have to know who they are.

They have cameras, but you can get around them.

There's nothing they can do unless they can put them all in jail.

Across the board, those subjects who reported attending private schools, as well as small and charter schools (15%, N=6), felt completely safe and reported no gang problems within their schools. Although we did not specifically ask what type of school the youth attended, they volunteered this information in explaining why their schools were safe. For example:

Q: Do you feel safe in school?

A: Yeah. Everybody's paying money, so they're not there to fool around.

Q: Do you feel safe in school?

A: Yeah. It's good the way it is. It's well organized. It's a Catholic school. The security's good. I don't feel threatened by any of the students. In my opinion, I don't think it could be any safer.

Witness Intimidation

The youth we interviewed were no strangers to gang-related crime. Twenty-nine of the youth (74%) reported having witnessed or experienced at least one crime, and at least 19 of the youth (49%) had gang-related crime experiences. (The actual number may be higher, because youth were not always asked whether crimes witnessed were gang-related.) Five of the youth (13%) reported that a brother or cousin had been shot or stabbed, some fatally, most by gang members.

More than half of the youth (54%) reported ever having talked to the police about a crime—usually because the police came to them and not because they went to the police. We asked whether they felt safe talking with the police, and eight of these respondents (38%) said they did feel safe talking with police, while the other 13 youth who had spoken with police about a crime (62%) felt at least somewhat uneasy. To better understand each group of respondents (those who felt safe talking to police and those who didn't), we looked at their reported reasons for feeling safe or unsafe, as well as whether the crimes about which they had talked to police were gang-related.

The youth who said they felt safe talking with police—and gave a reason for feeling safe—said they were not afraid because there was no one around to see that they were talking to the police. (For example they were interviewed inside their homes and away from neighbors' prying eyes.) Based on their comments, it was clear that being seen talking to police—regardless of what they actually said—could expose youth to neighborhood gossip and possible retaliation. One-half of the crimes discussed by youth who felt safe talking with police were gang-related.

Among those youth who had talked with police about a crime and reported not feeling safe doing so, reasons for discomfort included fear of being labeled a snitch, fear of being forced to disclose private information, and police rudeness. Just over 60% of the crimes these youth discussed with the police were gang-related.

We also asked the youth whether they had ever been asked to testify in court. Just three of the 39 youth we interviewed (8%) had ever been asked to testify. All three reported feeling safe testifying, but none of the crimes in question were gang-related.

Although many of the youth were clearly uncomfortable talking with police (or being seen talking with police), none reported incidents of being directly harmed or threatened for doing so. Nonetheless, as one young man's account suggests, the community-wide fear of retaliation can be as effective as a direct threat in preventing witnesses from reporting crime or testifying about it:

I've seen a shootout. The police came. Me and two kids saw it. [One of the other kids] told something to the police, but I didn't tell anything to the police. I just told them my name and my address where I live. If I told them, the drug dealers would come back to me and make more trouble. I told my mom, and she was scared. She went back to the drug dealers and told them that I didn't say nothing.

This form of community-wide intimidation, seen in the teens' and their parents' fears of retaliation for talking to police, was commonly given as a reason for teens not reporting crime or not giving all known facts to the police when they were interviewed after a crime. Most interviewees expressed a community norm against "snitching" in some form; the specific words "snitch" or "snitching" were mentioned in 18 (46%) of the interviews (e.g., "I don't want be seen as a snitch," and "If you snitch on a person, you can get killed. That's why I don't snitch").

Although none of the youth had been personally intimidated, one in three (the same proportion as the survey respondents) had heard about specific threats or assaults against witnesses in their schools or neighborhoods. Most were verbal threats, but one youth shared a particularly disturbing story of a neighbor being physically roughed up by a gang member:

A guy was trying to rape a girl. He [the witness] went to tell a cop. The guy pulled out a gun and pistol-whipped him. His eyes were completely red; you couldn't see any white. They threatened to kill him and his family.

Reporting Crime

When asked whom they would most likely tell if they witnessed or were the victim of a crime, most youth responded that they would tell a parent or other family member. A few of the youth also indicated that their parents might discourage them from talking to police because of fears for their safety. Some youth, on the other hand, said that they would like to tell a parent if they were victimized, but wouldn't, to protect their parents from worry. The strong relationships with their families reported by the youth echo the survey finding that youth are most likely to rely on family and friends for support after a crime, and indicate the importance of efforts to reach not only youth, but their parents, with programs to encourage crime reporting.

When asked about their willingness to report gang crimes to authorities, almost universally, youth who reported positive relationships with law enforcement officers said that they would report crime to the officers they knew. The same was true for school officials. In response to one question, youth identified the adults in their schools who were most trusted by the students, and in a subsequent question about whether they would report crime to anyone in their school, they almost always named those same adults as people they would confide in after witnessing or experiencing a crime. For example:

*Q: Would you report any crime or gang activity to someone in your school?
A: Yeah, definitely. To the dean of students. She's real easy to talk to. She can keep things confidential. We've had regular issues before—she'll keep it confidential. She would talk to the person you're reporting about, get the discipline committee, do whatever they need to do.*

When asked whether they would report a crime to any of the police officers they know, and why or why not, youth typically gave responses like these:

Yes. To the officers at the school I would. I trust them. They really get to know the kids in our school. They know everything that goes on in the gangs. They're like one of us, but they know their place.

Yeah. They listen. I know they wouldn't do anything to put me in jeopardy. I trust them. I know them.

Youth gave nuanced responses to questions about why they would or would not report a crime. Only a few gave absolute answers, either affirming they would always report a crime or never report one. Often, the answer was, "it depends." Answers tended to vary according to many factors. In addition to the adult relationships described above, factors included the seriousness of the crime, the likelihood that the offender would know it was they who had reported, the likelihood that someone else would report, and their sense of a moral obligation to report certain kinds of crimes.

Some youth said they would report if an injured victim urgently needed help:

It really depends on the level of danger they're in. If it's life threatening, I would go to the police. Otherwise, I'd go to somebody I really trust.

If I'm the only person there, I'd have to report it, because that's that person's life.

[I]f someone was seriously hurt, then I'd report it, so the person can get help.

For several youth, the seriousness of the crime and the weight on their conscience would compel them to report in certain situations:

I would report serious crimes like murder or robbery. I wouldn't report the other ones because they're no big deal, like getting beat up.

If the crime were really bad, I would report it, because I'd have a bad conscience.

If I saw a rape, I would report it. It depends on the severity. I wouldn't go to court just because somebody got punched. . . . I would only report a crime like witnessing an old woman being attacked. Gang-on-gang violence—let them sort each other out.

For many of the youth, their decision to report would depend on the perceived likelihood of retaliation:

I would only report it if I had something stolen. . . . I'd get in trouble if I reported a violent crime. Gangs would be mad at me.

If it's somebody getting beat up, I probably would. If it's someone getting shot or stabbed, then I wouldn't, because they could come after me and do the same thing to me.

I wouldn't want to put myself in a situation where somebody wants to get back at me. If someone's breaking into someone's car, and there's a lot of people seeing it, I'm not going to be the one to call.

A few of the youth conditioned reporting on the relevance of the crime to them. If they felt it was “none of their business,” then they wouldn't bother:

If it made me feel unsafe, yes [I would report], but if it happened a couple of miles down the road, I wouldn't.

If something was to happen to me [I would report it]. If I just witnessed it, then it's none of my business.

Relationships with Law Enforcement

Youths' comments about police, in addition to their views on reporting crime, provide perhaps some of the most useful data from this study. Their responses revealed a complex mixture of respect, disdain, trust, and indifference, sometimes in relation to the very same officers. The interview specifically asked for the youths' views about neighborhood officers and school resource officers (SROs). Seventy-four percent of the youth reported seeing some officers regularly in their neighborhood, and 64% of the youth reported having

officers assigned to their school. In survey responses, youth reported slightly more trust in SROs than neighborhood officers, but in the interviews the difference in the youths' perceptions of these two types of police officers was much more marked.

A few of the teens felt indifferent toward their SROs or thought the SROs didn't know the students very well, but by and large the teens praised the SROs for being friendly, approachable, and trustworthy, as well as for making students feel safer and more secure in school. For example:

All the officers interact with all the kids, and the kids interact with them. Everybody likes them. They're cool.

In school most of the officers know [the students]; they're cool with the students. That's how you build a relationship with the students, so if something happens, someone can tell you what happens.

Most middle school kids trust no one. No teachers. I only trusted the officer. I had the best relationship with him than anyone else in the school. He really understood me.

When we asked the students about any officers they saw regularly in their neighborhoods, their responses were far more negative. Some youth reported that they rarely saw police in their neighborhood (and these youth generally expressed a desire for a stronger police presence), while others reported that police often cruised by but rarely got out of their cars. Those officers who did interact with youth in the neighborhood were often described as harassing the youth, acting superior, and saying disrespectful things to the youth and their families. For example:

The officers we see every day are assholes. People don't respect them; they are jerks. They abuse their authority. . . . I sit on my porch all day and watch the officers walking up and down the street giving people dirty looks, going about everything the wrong way.

It's the way the police talk to us. They talk to us like they own us. I tell them they have to respect me, I don't care who you are. If you talk to them about something, they ask, "Were you involved? How do you know them?"

The police have got to chill and not harass the good kids. That's why people don't trust the police.

Despite their often quite negative views of the officers patrolling their neighborhoods, the youth almost universally felt that more police presence would result in safer neighborhoods (and, by the same token, several youth said that their neighborhoods or schools were safe because there were a lot of police around). One 15-year-old girl gave this striking illustration of the seeming contradiction between youths' negative views of neighborhood patrol officers and their desire for more patrols to increase safety:

The way they harass people—there could be kids outside and they just come out the car and throw the kids on the car and on the floor. That makes people scared to talk to them. It's good the way they keep on coming through, though, checking on the neighborhood.

Interestingly, several of the youth had police officers as neighbors, and they all reported positive relationships with these officers and a willingness to report crime to them, although they were not the officers responsible for patrolling the neighborhood.

Many of the youth expressed awareness that not all officers were rude or disrespectful, but explained that because some are, it's hard to know which officers to trust. The rude, disrespectful officers give all police a bad name. Several of the youth expressed empathy for the police and an understanding of the difficulty of their job, while declaring that a few bad cops make life harder for all cops by causing general distrust in the neighborhoods. For example:

It's kind of hard for police. When a police officer is a jerk to someone, people take it out on every other police officer. We won't go on their side, 'cause they're not on our side.

People don't trust the police. . . . It's just the history of police that people don't trust them. . . . A lot of officers are good but a lot are bad cops, too.

Some people are afraid of the police. Some people think there are dirty cops and good cops, but you can't tell which is which. They should talk, interact more, maybe cook-outs, stuff like that.

These beliefs about “good cops” and “dirty cops” were partly at the root of youths’ desire for police to reach out to the community and build relationships: in this way they would know which officers they could trust with information about crimes. The youth expressed a strong desire for the police to develop positive relationships with members of the community—by attending community events, offering assistance, and getting to know youth and their families before needing them to report or testify about crimes.

Another significant aspect of the teens’ regard for police officers was their belief that police are fully capable of solving the gang problem. While not universal, it was very common for youth to answer in the affirmative to the question, “Do you think the police can handle the gang problem?” When asked why, they gave the following responses (among others), without expressing any awareness (at least in response to this question) that the police would need cooperation from the community or from crime witnesses to take care of the problem:

Because they're authority figures.

Every time a gang is hanging out at the corner, they run if they see the cops.

When fights happen, they come and break it up. Police equals being handcuffed, locked up, going to prison. I don't think anyone wants to go to prison.

Some youth gave a qualified “yes” in response to the question about whether police could handle the gang problem, indicating that they thought the police could do it if they focused their efforts differently. Interestingly, some youth felt that police should pay attention to “small crimes” as possible precursors to more serious offenses, while others

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felt that officers should not waste their time on petty crimes but should focus on “the important stuff.” Examples include:

Concentrate more on the people who have caused more problems. Don't concentrate on a broken window.

Yeah, if they tried harder and focused on it like something serious. This might just be a minor thing but could lead to something even worse. If you don't address the small issues, it can grow into a larger issue.

Some of the youths' answers indicate frustration with the continuing crime and perceived impunity of the gang members in their neighborhoods, while, again, demonstrating a lack of knowledge of the central role that witness testimony plays in convicting criminals and keeping them locked up.

Put them all in jail.

Violence can be solved. They know who did the crimes—lock them up. Keep them in there. If you know they're going to get out and shoot somebody else, why let them out? Or do [an] ankle bracelet or something.

They know what the problem is, they just cuff 'em up and arrest them. But then they get arrested and come right back out and find out who the snitch is.

Youths' Ideas for Making It Safer to Report Crime

At the end of the interview, we posed two questions to all of the youth. First, “If you were in charge of your school, what would you change to make it safer for students to report crime in school?” And second, “If you were in charge of the police, what would you change to make it safer for youth to report crime to the police?” Their answers, while perhaps not recommending any previously untried solutions, are illuminating for their consistency and strongly expressed feelings about what adults should be doing to keep them, their friends, and their families safer. The interview responses also closely correspond to youths' responses to a similar survey question: “What kinds of help would encourage teens to come forward?” Note that, because the interview questions began, “If you were in charge . . . ,” many of the answers are given in first person with the youth assuming the role of the school principal or the chief of police.

Making Reporting in School Safer. The youth felt strongly that confidentiality and the possibility of making anonymous reports to school officials would make reporting crime in school safer:

I would make sure that the kids' names are anonymous.

Let everyone know that everything is confidential. If they don't want to let people see themselves walking into my office, I would put little boxes around and check them, then call you into my office.

Keep it confidential. If you don't keep it confidential, then a lot of people will get hurt.

Many of the youth favored initiating or increasing traditional methods of school security or discipline to ensure the safety of youth who witness crimes at school. Their ideas included greater use of security cameras, police officers, and school uniforms, along with locker searches, metal detectors, and harsh punishments—including expulsion—for gang members.

Some youth took a more sympathetic approach to their gang-involved schoolmates and advocated programs and opportunities to help them stay out of gangs and to make the school safer:

I'd have people come in that were gang-related, but then ended up in jail, to talk to the kids that gangs are bad and to talk to somebody about it.

I think they should open a group for kids in gangs, kids that have trouble at home, kids that go through domestic violence, and stuff. There should be a lot of activities, like clubs. That way, more people would be open to talk about problems.

I would talk about their future and how living around gangs or violence affects them, and how reporting it would make it safer. Make it a fun event, like a skit, to show that it's OK to report.

Many of the youth felt it would be safer to report crime in school if trusted adults were available for students to talk to and school officials developed individual relationships with students:

Have guidance counselors attend to all the kids one-on-one so the kids can talk to them.

I would tell them you can come talk to me about any problem. Talk to any adult in school or come to me, and we'll do something about it.

I would get to know each and every student. If they were to come into the office for being bad, I would let them speak.

Making Reporting to Police Safer. The interviews, overall, indicated that there are more barriers to youth reporting crime to the police than to school officials. However, there was no shortage of ideas from the youth about how to make it safer for them to talk to police officers. In fact, the youth seemed very much to want to be able to talk to police officers about the crime in their neighborhoods, and they were earnest about proposing improvements in the relationship between police and the community that would increase crime reporting and decrease the impact of violence in their neighborhoods.

Some youth felt that an increased police presence and effort, or easier access to police, could make reporting safer:

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If I were in charge, I would try to eliminate the need to report. It would mean more cops on the streets who would be able to see what's going on.

Have those blue emergency phones.

I'd have more police patrolling a lot of places.

Some youth felt that incentives would help, both for witnesses and for police who do a good job:

Nothing would make it safe to talk to the police. But some people would do it for money, like a reward for information.

Maybe a bit of added incentives for police officers, like awards or compliments for good work.

As with reporting to school officials, youth felt that if people received reliable assurances of confidentiality, or had avenues for anonymous reporting, they would be more likely to report crime to the police:

The police should not reveal the identity of the witnesses, which is what they do now.

Make sure that people do know that the police will keep it confidential and it won't get back around. . . . I think sometimes people feel like calling the police won't do anything. If there was a certain number, like an anonymous line to report stuff, that could help.

Some of the police are dirty and they don't care. The police tell the criminals who is snitching on them. They don't care. I would have zero tolerance for breaking confidentiality. I would make sure that the police are trained and know the repercussions of their actions. They should make the expectations bigger and the training longer.

The youth also felt that being able to testify anonymously, or with restrictions on who could be in the courtroom, would increase witness safety:³⁶

I don't like it how courtrooms are open to the public during trials.

Complete anonymity for the witness. If he needs to testify, then the testimony would be by phone or something like that.

If you could testify without other people being able to watch, it would make it safer.

A few youth advocated specifically for police to protect witnesses who come forward:

I would make sure that the person that committed the crime won't do anything to the guy that told. When they're patrolling, keep an eye on the person.

You can stay in the police department until they get the person who did it.

By far the youths' most frequent suggestions for making it safer to report crime to the police had to do with police building relationships with youth and the community and having a respectful attitude toward people:

³⁶ Balancing witness protection with a defendant's constitutional right to confront the witnesses against him is something the courts have been wrestling with for some time. See two U.S. Supreme Court decisions: *Crawford v. Washington* and the consolidated cases of *Davis v. Washington* and *Hammon v. Indiana*.

I'd tell my officers not to be so mean all the time. They don't make you feel comfortable to tell them stuff. They yell, most people get intimidated and don't want to talk to them. Address the situation. You don't have to yell or have a power trip. Treat everybody equal and fair.

Lower their egos a little bit. You're not making the community safer but acting like you're higher than the people. Talk to the community, get to know them.

I would make the police go out more and instead of scaring people make them introduce themselves to people, go sit with them, socialize more. Don't project that image that you're an asshole.

With a question focused on increasing the safety level of reporting crime, it is perhaps surprising that the most consistent responses were not about witness protection or detaining or monitoring gang members, but rather about relationships between police and the community. One possible explanation for this emphasis is that the youth are aware that no one can guarantee their safety; they simply want to feel that someone respects them and cares about their safety. With such a relationship in place, they seem ready to take the risk of reporting crime to the police.

Preventing and Dealing with Gang Crime

Two-thirds of the subjects made at least one statement indicating a sense of hopelessness about the possibility of solving the gang problem or making it safe to report crime. For example, “There is no safe place,” and “Gang crime is always going to be here. You can't get rid of it.” Despite such gloomy remarks, many of the youth did have ideas for how to tackle the problem of gang crime in their neighborhoods and schools. The most common suggestion was for communities to provide youth with alternatives to joining gangs—including educational, economic, and social opportunities. Some talked about the importance of working with youths' families to prevent gang involvement or help prevent retaliation against witnesses by the families of offenders:

Open their options. Help them realize there are things you can do for money other than crime. . . . It's all about education and talking to people about their options. Peers should educate each other.

Have more events, give the kids more opportunity. We have two choices, you either play basketball or you join a gang. . . . More opportunities, scholarships. Educational opportunities are important.

I'd try to make a program for the thrown-out kids to help them. Just put them where they could get their GED. I think the people who are in the gangs are not “all there.” I would work with them and see what's missing. It could be family issues.

Discussion

The youth we interviewed, by and large, were not involved in gangs but lived in communities and attended schools with a significant gang presence. Their comments show the impact of gang violence and community-wide intimidation on entire neighborhoods and student bodies. In addition to dealing with typical teen concerns, such as friends, dating, academics, and sports, these youth must also contend with the constant worry of making enemies with the wrong people. The main themes that emerged in the face-to-face interviews with the youth related to their views on gangs and safety, their relationships with police, and their decision-making about reporting crime.

Gangs and Safety. It was clear from the interviews that the youth want to feel safe in their schools and neighborhoods and that often, school authorities, the police, and their neighbors are failing them in that regard. As the survey results also showed, the youth distinguished between the presence of gang members in a given location and gang activity in that place, with the latter being seen as more of a problem. Gang presence in the neighborhood almost always equated with problems, while the presence of gang members did not always make for problems in school, because at least some of the school security and discipline measures were working. When there were problems of gang activity in the schools, the youth decried the sense of insecurity this created for all students.

Relationships were a central theme related to safety in both the school and neighborhood contexts. Youth who reported trusting relationships with adults, particularly authority figures, felt safer. Relationships with peers were also related to a sense of safety, and it was very important for the youth to feel that they were not “enemies” with gang members or other criminal offenders. While knowing gang members (or perhaps more accurately, being known by them) felt protective for the youth (as long as they did not anger the gang members), the youth also felt resentment toward the gang members they knew. In both the school and neighborhood context, the youth felt some loyalty toward gang members as part of the community but also anger at them for making the community unsafe. By the same token, the youth expressed a desire to see gang members and others who commit crimes both held accountable and provided with other options or opportunities to improve themselves.

Relationships with Police. Relationships with police officers emerged as perhaps the single most important factor in youths’ sense of safety and willingness to report crime. On the one hand, the youth have great faith in the ability of the police to handle crime, and almost always felt safer or said that they would feel safer with more police around. On the other hand, many of the youth felt very strongly that police were disrespectful toward them and their communities and should do more to build relationships with the people who might eventually serve as witnesses in criminal cases. Youth suggested many ways they could be made to feel safer reporting crime; however, they showed little awareness of the

importance of the role of witnesses and community members in fighting crime and seemed to think that the police could do it on their own if they really wanted to.

Reporting Crime. One fact that became abundantly clear from the interviews was that the community norm against “snitching” is pervasive and powerful. Even more often than fear of retaliation, the idea of being viewed as a snitch was a huge deterrent to reporting crime for the youth. (This finding mirrors the results of the survey.) Of course, the two are related as specific instances of assaults against witnesses reinforce what has become a refrain to these youth: “snitches get stitches.” But even in the absence of fear or a threat, youth do not want to be labeled and rejected by their neighbors or peers for snitching. There were, however, certain circumstances—according to the youth—that could warrant breeching this community standard. These exceptions included the need to obtain help for a crime victim whose life was in danger and the appropriateness of cooperating with authorities when crimes were committed against their own family members or themselves.

The 39 youth we interviewed provide an important voice for the communities affected by gang violence and the witnesses to gang crime who are often too afraid to come forward. Their comments reflect a desire for safety and security, as well as for caring and respectful relationships with adults in authority. Research in the youth development field has identified both safety and supportive relationships with adults as essential elements for the positive development of young people into responsible and healthy adults.³⁷ Perhaps, in the end, to assume their civic duties (including reporting crime and testifying in court), youth in high-crime urban areas require no more than any other youth—a sense that adults care about what they say and are looking out for their safety.

37 Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer Appleton Gootman, eds., *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2002), 86-118.

The Views of Police and Prosecutors

To gain perspective on the criminal justice context of the issues explored in the youth surveys and interviews, we sought to interview heads of police gang units, prosecutors who handled gang crimes, and victim advocates, in the same cities where we surveyed and interviewed the youth. In all, we completed seven of these interviews: five with police officers, one with a prosecutor, and one with a victim advocate. Interview topics included the local gang context, role of police gang units, the nature of the problem of intimidation, how to encourage teens to come forward, and how to assist those who do.

The Gang Context

Police gang unit leaders told us their cities had a wide variety of gangs. Some, like the Crips, Bloods, Deuce Boys, Soldiers, and Vice Lords are multi-ethnic. Others are largely confined to particular ethnic groups. Hispanic gangs included the Latin Kings, Nieta, and La Familia. Asian gangs included the Asian Boys, Tiger Society, and Tiny Rascals. Black gangs included the Black Birds and GBV Outlaws. Police respondents attributed an array of crimes to gangs, from gambling to drug dealing to violent crimes such as assault, robbery, and homicide. One officer implicated an Asian gang in a series of home invasions committed to capitalize on the practice of Cambodian immigrants who keep significant sums of cash in their homes. Another officer went out of his way to note that, while gang members in his city were responsible for many crimes, only a small minority (he estimated 10%) of gang members committed those crimes. He argued that the vast majority of kids who belonged to gangs did not commit violent acts.

The Work of Gang Units

Our interviews suggested that gang unit members play two very different roles in their work. One role is to closely monitor gang members, making sure they know that police have their eye on them. In their efforts to control and suppress gang crime, officers investigate crimes, work closely with probation officers to watch for violations of conditions of probation, and pay home visits to enforce evening curfews. They deploy at



gang “hot spots” to establish a presence, talk to kids to gather intelligence, and collect names for gang databases. They talk with parents of young “wanna-be’s” (early adolescents who associate with gangs and may be on the verge of joining) to enlist their help in monitoring and controlling their children’s behavior. On the other hand, gang unit members also work to establish rapport with teens through frequent public speaking engagements at schools and in the community, sponsoring sports and other recreational activities to cultivate relationships and keep kids off the street. One police department even went so far as to offer 25 jobs to gang members on the condition that they also participate in police-sponsored recreational activities. Gang unit officers said these dual roles often conflict: it becomes difficult to gain the trust of teens in the community when they are also seen as the “enforcers.”

The Problem of Intimidation

All respondents agreed that the failure of victims and other key witnesses to cooperate is the most significant obstacle to prosecution of crimes committed by gang members. In many cases, witnesses are afraid to speak at all. One officer investigated a shooting at an after-hours party involving rival gang members. None of the 35 guests admitted to having seen the shooting or events leading up to it. Other officers related stories of court cases lost when witnesses who had initially talked to the police became intimidated. One teen reported a friend and gang member breaking into a store and stealing guns. However, the teen changed his mind about testifying at trial when a friend of the defendant made a threatening call to his grandmother. In another case in which a three-year-old child was shot in gang crossfire, one of the gang members was willing to testify against his associates and testified at a preliminary hearing. But he failed to come to court for trial after posters were put up in the neighborhood with the word “snitch” under the witness’s picture. (Nonetheless, the case had a successful resolution when police brought the witness in by force and the defendant pled guilty, even though it was by no means certain that the witness would have testified had the case gone to trial.)

Respondents were divided about how seriously threats should be taken. One officer, for example, said he could not recall any acts of retaliation against witnesses. Other officers reported that beatings and non-lethal shootings had occurred against witnesses in their jurisdictions. One officer even reported that the girlfriend of a gang member was murdered because she was in the process of cooperating with authorities.

We asked respondents how they reassured youths and their families who want to come forward to report crimes committed by gang members but fear that they will be harmed if they do so. Several officers said that they attempt to instill a sense of moral obligation in potential witnesses and that they reassure the witnesses that the police and district attorney’s office will take steps to protect them. Some police said that they

sometimes try to maintain the anonymity of witnesses who come forward. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that once a case is filed in court, there is not much they can do to protect teens' identities. Detectives may advise witnesses to avoid gang members and give witnesses their cell phone numbers so they can contact them if they do experience problems. But other officials acknowledged that there's "not a lot" they can do. Police departments are not able to provide a cop on the doorstep 24 hours a day for witnesses who fear retaliation. By and large, according to our interview subjects, witnesses in gang cases are not eligible for judicial restraining orders.

According to the officials we interviewed, the nature of the disposition process exacerbates the problems of intimidated witnesses. Several officials acknowledged that the time it takes to dispose of serious felony cases in Massachusetts is lengthy, frequently lasting more than a year. In one case, a "fishing expedition"³⁸ by three members of the Asian Boys gang resulted in the shooting of a rival gang member. Two of the boys in the car identified the shooter to authorities. But the shooter went free when the two witnesses recanted at trial *three years* later.

The criminal justice process also exacerbates the problem of reluctant witnesses by repeatedly summoning witnesses to court and then dismissing them before they have a chance to testify. Defense attorneys often state that they are ready for trial but then ask for a last-minute postponement after witnesses have already been called into court. Like most other states, Massachusetts uses an on-call system for witnesses that spares them being summoned to court until it is clear on the day of trial that all parties are ready to proceed. But many times, witnesses to crimes committed by gang members are other gang members, and prosecutors are not confident enough in their reliability to place them on call.

Responses to Intimidation

Given the tendency for intimidated witnesses to recant, especially in light of repeated wasted appearances in court and the length of time that witnesses are exposed to danger, we would have expected that criminal justice officials would check on witnesses at regular intervals. Surprisingly, however, we found no clear responsibility among police gang unit members, prosecutors, or victim advocates to maintain regular contact with witnesses. Several of the people we interviewed suggested that their organization did not keep tabs on witnesses but thought that others might. In the end, it seems that the responsibility falls most heavily on victim advocates. However, the victim advocate we spoke with said that her unit left it up to witnesses to contact them if they ran into problems. She maintained that teen witnesses wanted to be left alone because they didn't trust the prosecutor's staff and did not want to be seen in their company.

The victim/witness advocate we spoke with suggested that many witnesses would not need special protective measures, but those who had received serious threats or had

38 A "fishing expedition" is a deliberate incursion into a rival gang's territory for the purpose of starting a fight.

already experienced some form of actual retaliation would receive special attention from criminal justice officials. In these cases, witnesses may be escorted to court by police officers on days they are called to testify. In very serious cases, authorities will relocate witnesses. Relocation, of course, is a big step because it disrupts school for teens and their family's life as well. Sometimes, teens will be moved from one school to another while remaining in their homes. But, in other cases, authorities judge that only changing residences will provide a reasonable level of safety.

In one case, prosecutors relocated two female shooting victims after they were threatened in their homes. In another, a woman tried to avoid testifying by ignoring a subpoena. She was brought in by force, and the defendant pled before the case proceeded to trial. After the conviction, she was beaten by associates of the defendant and subsequently relocated.

The jurisdictions we examined varied widely in the frequency with which they relocated witnesses. At best, it is an option used a few times a year. Only one of the officials we spoke with recalled specifically using the new state-funded relocation program.

Several respondents said that their jurisdiction sometimes used specific legal maneuvers to deal with problems of intimidation. The most common response of this type is to charge defendants who make threats or perpetrate violence against witnesses with witness tampering. One respondent said that such charges were filed in as many as 30 gang cases per year. But, in the other jurisdictions, respondents told us that this option was used infrequently, at most in a handful of cases each year. In fact, one respondent said that his jurisdiction had charged witness tampering only in domestic cases, never in a gang case.

If gang members who are already on probation make threats, police may work with probation officers to request that the conditions of probation be tightened to include no contact with the witness. Or they may seek revocation of probation. One respondent mentioned that officials might seek to have bail revoked, but no one else mentioned that their jurisdiction uses this response.

The most innovative legal response we encountered was in a case where the police were not able to locate a critical witness on the day of the trial. The prosecutor argued successfully that, since the police had made a diligent effort to find the witness, the judge should allow the witness's testimony at the preliminary hearing to stand in lieu of his testimony at trial. Among the respondents we spoke with, we encountered the use of this strategy in just one case. The prosecutor acknowledged that this strategy could be used more widely but that, if it were, the defense bar might counter by waiving their clients' rights to a preliminary hearing so that witnesses' testimony would not be on record.

Discussion

Intimidation in cases involving gang members is a serious problem that does not offer easy solutions. Nonetheless, while the problem is formidable, our interviews with criminal justice officials did suggest ways that it could be mitigated.

Promoting Trust. One theme that came up in several of the interviews with police and prosecutors echoed the findings from the teen surveys and interviews—that is the need to promote greater trust in authorities by teens. Several of the police gang unit heads mentioned youth programs that their unit sponsored, partly in the hope of improving relationships with teens. These programs are certainly a good idea. But it may be optimistic to think that the same officers who are responsible for enforcement can also win the hearts and minds of gang members and their neighbors and schoolmates. It may be helpful to think about a serious effort to increase confidence and reporting to school resource officers or community relations officers who do not have the same image problem with teens that gang unit members may have.

Witness Management. Managing witnesses proactively in gang cases is critical, given the high rate of recanting and absconding among this population, the serious acts of retaliation that have occurred, the lengthy time to case disposition, and burdensome appearance requirements. Yet, respondents consistently viewed agencies other than their own as responsible for keeping track of witnesses. Local criminal justice communities should come together to set guidelines for keeping track of witnesses and assigning responsibility for doing so.

Protecting Anonymity. Several respondents noted the importance of anonymity for teens willing to provide information on gang crimes. Tip lines in which callers are not required to provide names are one vehicle that could overcome teens' fear of coming forward (as also was indicated by a few of the youth we interviewed). One respondent also mentioned keeping witnesses' names out of police reports as an important way to safeguard their identities (an idea also raised by the youth). She noted a recent Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court decision that affirmed a judicial protective order barring a defense attorney from sharing witness information with his client for the security of the witnesses, and she said that this practice should be more widespread.³⁹

Active Prosecution. Finally, prosecutors could use more energetic legal maneuvering to protect witnesses. Our interviews suggested that, for the most part, few defendants in gang-related cases who make threats are charged with witness tampering. By using this tool more often, and by requesting revocation of probation or parole for defendants under supervision who make threats against witnesses, prosecutors could send an important message to gangs that threatening witnesses has consequences. Another option is asking that special conditions be imposed on the defendant as a condition of pretrial release or that bail be revoked entirely. Most significantly, prosecutors

³⁹ The case is *Charon Ray vs. Commonwealth*, SJC-09671, decided June 26, 2006.

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could push the court to use witnesses' prior testimony or earlier statements to police in cases where reluctant witnesses could not be located and brought to court. All of these options are commonly used in domestic violence cases, but seem not to have taken hold in gang-related prosecutions.

Prosecutors could also experiment with placing more witnesses in gang cases on standby-alert status for court dates to prevent them from becoming discouraged by wasted trips to court when defense attorneys ask for last-minute continuances. This practice would be challenging because witnesses in gang cases may not be reliable; however, efforts could be made to identify markers (e.g., consistent school attendance or ready means of contact) that indicate high likelihood of responding to alerts. Finally, court officials might see what could be done to reduce the time to case disposition and therefore the time that witnesses are at risk of threats. Felony cases may take a long time to complete for many valid reasons, but numerous courts around the country have shown that court officials can drastically cut time to disposition when they make it a priority.

Key Findings and Recommendations

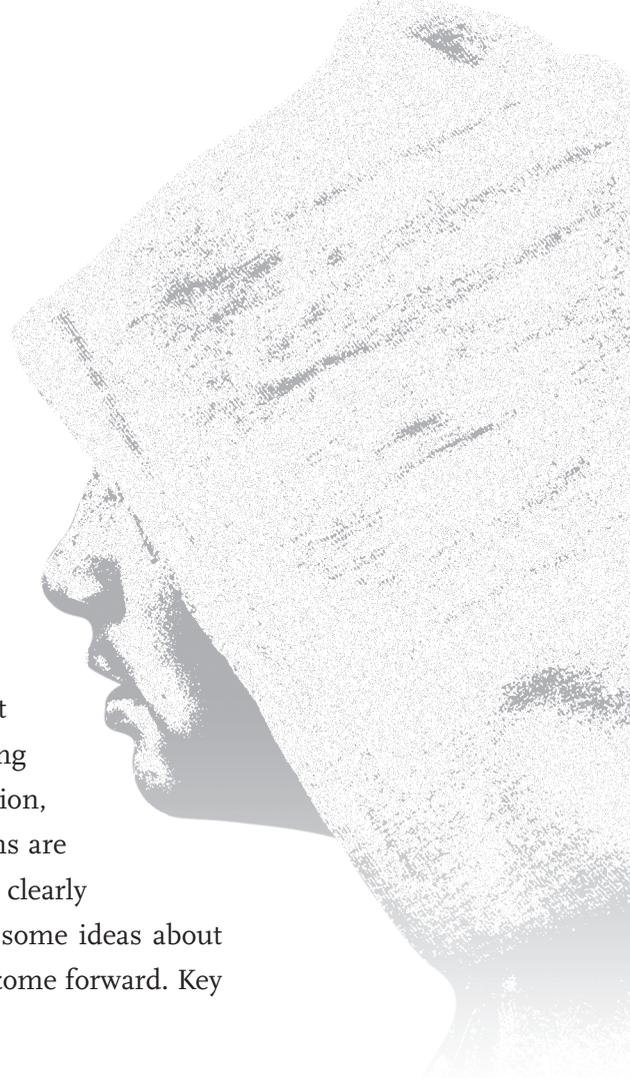
Key Findings

Overall, the findings of the youth surveys and interviews were consistent and did not differ greatly by city or by demographic variables, suggesting that urban youths' experiences with gang crime and witness intimidation, relationships with police officers, and ideas for addressing the problems are similar throughout the state. Public officials who were interviewed clearly recognized the problem and the obstacles to solving it, and provided some ideas about what is and is not currently being done to protect witnesses after they come forward. Key findings include:

1. Both gang membership and gang activity are prevalent in the neighborhoods and public schools of the seven cities studied. Youth perceived differences between the presence of gang members in a given context and problems caused by gangs, but both were prevalent. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents reported gang members being *present* in their neighborhoods, with 57% reporting that gangs are a *problem* in their neighborhoods. Eighty-one percent of the youth said at least some of their schoolmates were in gangs, and 54% said gangs were a problem in school. Interviews indicated that gang-related problems were better controlled (though not absent) in schools, whereas neighborhoods were more subject to control by the gangs.

2. Youth had a high rate of exposure to crimes through direct victimization, witnessing, and peer and family victimization. Of the seven crimes we asked about, the three most commonly experienced by the youth were serious threats (20% experienced, 44% witnessed); beatings (26% experienced, 39% witnessed); and drug activity (16% experienced,⁴⁰ 40% witnessed). Most disturbingly, many youth surveyed had experienced gun violence: 7% had been the victim of a shooting; 18% reported that a friend or family member had been shot at; and 20% had witnessed a shooting. Almost one-half (45%) of the crimes witnessed by the youth were thought to be gang-related.

40 Direct experience with drug crime was defined as "being asked to buy, sell, use, or ditch drugs."



3. Youth are most likely to tell a parent or other family member about experiences with crime. Both surveys and interviews indicated that, by an overwhelming margin, the youth would first turn to a family member—interviewees most often indicated a parent—to talk about victimization or witnessing a crime, and a smaller number would report to school authorities or police. One-half of the surveyed youth who had witnessed or experienced gang-related crime never reported it to anyone.

4. Community norms against “snitching” are strong, but youth were still willing to report crimes under certain circumstances. The most common reasons youth gave for not reporting crime were that it wasn’t their concern or they did not want to be seen as a snitch, while they most often attributed their peers’ non-reporting to fear of being beaten up or killed. Interviews made clear that being labeled a snitch carries a price, not just of potential violence, but of ostracism by neighbors and peers.

Youth also gave reasons they deemed valid for reporting crime and breaking the “no-snitching” code, most notably when an injured victim needed help or when the crime was directed against themselves or their family members. In most cases, if youth felt there was a low likelihood of retaliation (e.g., if the perpetrators had no way of knowing who had reported them), they would be willing to report crime.

5. Vicarious experiences of witness intimidation were far more common than personal experiences, but one in three youth had heard about someone being threatened. Twelve percent of the survey respondents who had reported gang crimes indicated that they had been threatened or harmed for doing so, and none of the interviewees reported such experiences. About one-third of both survey and interview respondents, however, had heard about others in their neighborhood or school being threatened or harmed after witnessing a crime, either because they reported it or to prevent them from reporting it.

6. Relationships between youth and school resource officers were generally positive; relationships with neighborhood police officers were mixed. Most survey respondents who had had contact with police in their school or neighborhood (whether voluntary or involuntary) reported being treated respectfully [65% by school resource officers (SROs) and 61% by neighborhood officers]. Of all survey respondents, 55% reported at least some trust in their neighborhood officers, and 66% of those who had officers assigned to their schools had some or a lot of trust in those officers. Interview subjects’ views on SROs versus neighborhood officers differed significantly, with SROs often being praised and neighborhood officers commonly being accused of harassment. Teens generally expressed great faith in the ability of police to handle crime but little awareness of their own potential role as witnesses in making their neighborhoods safer. Overall, youth expressed a desire for better relations with police officers and a sense of safety when those relationships were strong.

7. Gang unit officers have a difficult dual role in neighborhoods. In interviews, police officers assigned to gang units said they are expected to build relationships with youth while at the same time staying “on the case” of gang members and lending their authority to the strict enforcement of probation and parole conditions. The latter enforcement role generally takes precedence and gives the officers a reputation for being hard or mean, making it difficult for gang officers to build relationships with non-gang-involved youth in the neighborhoods they police.

8. Teens had hope and practical suggestions for making crime reporting safer. The teens’ most common suggestions for making it safer to report crime were building better relationships between police and the community, providing confidentiality to witnesses and/or anonymous crime reporting, protecting witnesses after they report, and providing better options (economic, social, and educational) to youth to prevent them from joining gangs in the first place.

9. Nobody is keeping track of witnesses. According to the seven public officials we interviewed, felony case dispositions can take years in Massachusetts, and no single entity within the criminal justice system seems to have responsibility for maintaining contact with witnesses over the period from report to trial, when witnesses are most vulnerable to intimidation and most likely to drop out of the process.

10. Tools are available to criminal justice officials to reduce or mitigate threats, but they are seldom used. The prosecutor and the victim advocate we interviewed noted that remedies are available to head off or reduce the effects of intimidation. These tools include charging defendants with witness tampering, revoking bail when threats are made, expediting cases, and capturing witness testimony early at pretrial hearings or depositions in case witnesses later are unavailable or unwilling to cooperate. However, our interview subjects said these tools are seldom used.

Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate at least six areas where local criminal justice authorities can focus to improve the participation in the criminal justice process of young witnesses to gang crimes.

1. Increase efforts to build trust between the police and youth and their parents in high-crime neighborhoods. Based on the youths’ strongly expressed desire for better relationships with the police, we recommend increased investment in school resource officers and basic community policing techniques (such as building relationships between

“beat cops” and neighborhood residents) to build the trust that is required for witnesses to come forward and voluntarily share with police any information they have about crimes.

2. Increase the safety of reporting crime by providing anonymity or confidentiality whenever possible. Well-advertised anonymous tip lines, as well as measures to protect the confidentiality of witnesses’ identities as long as possible (such as interviewing witnesses inside a safe location rather than on the street and not including witnesses’ names on police reports), might help to ease the fear of being labeled a “snitch” (by offenders or by their neighbors) that so many of the youth expressed. These fears, whether or not they are related to an actual threat of harm, are real and prevent a good deal of potential reporting to and cooperation with police at the investigation stage of criminal cases.

3. Mount social marketing campaigns to counter community norms against “snitching.” Gang members and other criminal offenders have run very successful marketing campaigns to discourage witnesses from reporting crime and testifying in court—including mass distribution of “stop snitching” T-shirts and videos. Such campaigns are reinforced with the occasional assault or even murder of a witness. Yet the youth surveys and interviews indicated that even in the absence of actual violence against witnesses, the community norm against “snitching” is itself quite powerful. To counter this norm, communities should work with youth and families to come up with a positive (and believable) message about the role youth can play in making their communities safer, including reporting crime to the police. Communities should then enlist spokespeople who are credible to youth—hip-hop artists and DJs, trusted youth workers and faith leaders, and youth themselves—to deliver the message through various media. Such a campaign will succeed only if its message is believable (because authorities are genuinely trying to make reporting safer), crafted by the “experts” (youth are involved), and delivered by trusted messengers (not the “same old” adults who are always trying to get youth to “do right”).

4. Reach out to parents and offer them a positive role in making their communities safer. Because of the reported importance of family ties and the frequent role of parents as gatekeepers between their children and the police, we recommend including parents and other family members in efforts to reach out to teens to encourage them to report crime and testify about it. For parents to be convinced that cooperating with the criminal justice system will not expose their children to undue harm, criminal justice officials must demonstrate good faith by taking measures to reduce the likelihood of intimidation while also making clear to families the link between the lack of witness testimony and the continued presence of violent gang members in their neighborhoods.

5. Keep in touch with witnesses once they're "in the system." Local criminal justice officials must find ways to keep tabs on important witnesses as cases proceed toward resolution. Officials making such contact must at all times consider the witnesses' safety and take precautions to minimize their exposure to risks that could arise from the contact itself (for example, neighborhood gossip about why a police officer or prosecutor showed up on someone's doorstep). While ensuring that their communications do not expose witnesses to such risks, prosecutors, victim advocates, or police officers—whomever the local community deems the most appropriate ongoing contact for witnesses—must keep an open line of communication with witnesses to try to keep them invested in the process and address any intimidation or other barriers to their participation at trial.

6. Make more aggressive use of currently available legal tools to protect witnesses. This and previous research indicate that officials can more effectively (and widely) use existing tools,⁴¹ such as witness tampering charges, pre-trial hearings and depositions to capture witness testimony, revocation of bail or probation when there's a threat or occurrence of intimidation, and efforts to speed up case dispositions to minimize the time that witnesses are exposed to intimidation. Through legislative mandates and/or new funding streams, states can influence local criminal justice authorities to collaborate more and to shift their priorities and strategies to more strongly emphasize witness safety and protection in gang-related cases. Such changes should produce a "win-win," with case closures and convictions increasing along with witness security.

Conclusion

Witness intimidation remains a significant problem that seriously undermines the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. The Witness Security Program, the initial—and still primary—response of the federal government, was developed to address serious witness intimidation, including the murder of witnesses, in organized crime cases. In more recent decades, state and local courts have become aware of and begun responding to the pervasive witness intimidation common in domestic violence cases. But few jurisdictions have developed a comprehensive response to the more recent phenomenon of witness intimidation of primarily teen and young adult witnesses by street gangs.

Massachusetts is perhaps in a unique position to model that response, having passed in 2006 comprehensive legislation that not only increases penalties for witness tampering and criminalizes some of the methods used by gangs to locate and intimidate witnesses (e.g., circulating grand jury transcripts), but also establishes and funds a statewide witness protection program overseen by a board chaired at the executive level of state government. Such a state-level commitment to the protection of witnesses can provide the backbone for even more comprehensive local efforts to increase both crime reporting and witness cooperation in the judicial process.

⁴¹ See, for example, Peter Finn and Kerry Murphy Healey, "Preventing Gang and Drug-related Witness Intimidation," (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1996) and Elizabeth Connick and Robert C. Davis, "Examining the Problem of Witness Intimidation," *Judicature* 66 (1983): 439-47.

The recommendations in this report, taken together, offer hope for reducing the prevalence of intimidation and its effects on the administration of justice. These ideas are not necessarily new, and most have been tried to some extent in various jurisdictions. What heretofore has been lacking, however, is a comprehensive and consistent approach to the problem. Police, prosecutors, victim advocates, judges, and probation officers all have roles to play, but no one organization is clearly responsible for doing something about the problem. We believe that a coordinated approach, involving all components of the criminal justice system working toward the same end, is needed and that such an effort needs to have defined leadership.

One way to create this kind of coordinated approach and leadership is through a demonstration program in which state funds would be used to create a coordinator position that could work with local criminal justice agencies to develop policies and practices and to encourage their consistent application. Such an effort could work with the police and school officials and key community leaders to develop programs to build trust, change youth norms about “snitching,” and ensure confidentiality of reports. It could work with police, prosecutors, and victim advocates to ensure regular check-ins with witnesses whose cases were pending. Finally, it could work with prosecutors and judges to speed case dispositions, prevent unnecessarily divulging witness names, aggressively revoke bail and/or charge defendants with witness tampering when warranted, and use pretrial hearings to capture and preserve witness testimony in case witnesses become unavailable later on.

The demonstration could develop and monitor outcome measures such as reporting rates, proportion of witnesses who recant or abscond, prosecutions for witness tampering, conviction rates, and witness satisfaction with the criminal justice process. Lessons from a successful demonstration could be distilled and disseminated to other jurisdictions in Massachusetts and across the country.

Whatever efforts communities undertake to counteract gang-related witness intimidation, criminal justice officials should remember that youth—particularly non-gang-involved youth—and their parents may be an untapped community resource ready and willing to help design and implement sensible and effective responses to the crimes occurring in their neighborhoods.

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Survey Parental Consent Form

[DATE]

Dear Parent:

The Boys & Girls Club of [insert name] is partnering with the National Center for Victims of Crime on a study to learn more about how teens in Massachusetts communities experience gang crime and witness intimidation. Seven Boys & Girls Clubs across the state are participating in the project. This letter is to inform you about the project and what to do if you do not want your child to participate.

What Is This All About?

This is a research study to learn more about how young people experience gang crime in their community; what keeps youth witnesses from reporting crime; and the kinds of programs that could encourage youth to report crime to police, school authorities, or other adults. We plan to gather this information from teens who participate in Club activities in two ways:

- A computer-based, anonymous survey to learn how much and what kind of gang activity and witness intimidation is going on in the seven participating communities; and
- Private interviews with a few teens in each Club to get a better understanding of their experiences with gangs and the challenges involved in working to end gang-related crime. (You will receive more information about the interviews if your child wants to be one of the participants.)

The computer surveys and interviews will ask only about general knowledge of gangs and intimidation. Your child will NOT be asked to name specific individuals or to provide details of any incidents he or she has experienced or witnessed. A copy of the survey questions is available for you to view at your child's Club.

Does My Child Have to Participate?

Your child is not required to participate; participation is completely voluntary. Youth who participate in the computer survey will receive a \$10 incentive payment, even if they do not answer all of the questions or decide to end their participation before finishing the survey. If your child does not participate, it will in no way affect his or her ability to participate in programs at the Boys & Girls Club.

If you do not want your child to participate in the anonymous computer survey, please call [Club contact] at [phone] by May 6. The survey will be available to teens to complete in the Club's computer lab beginning May 8. If we do not hear from you, we will assume that your child has permission to participate in the computer survey.

Will Information Be Private?

Everything your child tells us will be kept private. Your child's name will not be connected to any answers he or she provides on the survey. All information provided will be completely anonymous.

Are There Any Risks or Benefits to Participating?

The survey will be completely anonymous. We do not expect the questions to be upsetting for the youth. The questions will ask teens how they view gang crime in their community, how it affects their lives, and ask for their ideas on how teens can be better supported to report problems to adults. If a teen does find the survey upsetting, he or she will be instructed to see a Club staff person for assistance.

Benefits include an opportunity for young people to share their thoughts and feelings about the important issue of gang crime. They will have a chance to give their opinions about what is not being done about gang crime that should be and how they think the problem should be handled.

What If I Have More Questions?

The National Center for Victims of Crime is the nation's leading resource and advocacy organization working on behalf of individuals, families, and communities harmed by crime. If you have any questions about this project, you can contact Julie Whitman of the National Center at 1-800-394-2255 or [Club contact] of the Boys & Girls Club of [insert name] at [insert phone].

Thank you for taking the time to review this letter. **Again, if you do not want your child to participate in the survey, you must call [Club contact] at [phone] by May 6.**

Sincerely,

[BGC Executive Director]

Youth Consent and Survey Questions

What's This All About?

This is a research study to learn more about how young people experience gang crime in their communities. By filling out this computer survey, you can help adults learn how they can do a better job of keeping you, your family, and your friends safe from gang-related crime.

The survey will take about 15 to 20 minutes to complete. It will include questions about whether you think gang activity is a problem in your community, whether you have ever witnessed or experienced a crime, and your experiences in reporting gang activity to police, a teacher, a parent, or some other adult. **We will not ask you for names or any other details about something you may have experienced or seen.** If you want to see the questions before you decide to participate, the survey is posted in the Club, or you can ask [name].

Do I Have to Do This?

You do not have to participate. If you choose to participate, you may stop the survey at any time and you may leave any of the questions blank. If you do not participate, it will in no way affect your ability to participate in programs at the Boys & Girls Club.

Who's Going to See My Answers?

Only the researchers will see the results of the survey, and your name will not be on it. No one will ever know that any particular answer came from you. All information you provide will be completely anonymous.

If you're worried about someone looking over your shoulder while you take the survey, you can make the screen disappear by clicking the small line at the top right corner of the screen (minimize). If you need help with this, ask your Club's computer supervisor.

What Do I Get for Doing This?

You will receive a payment of \$10 for participating in the study, even if you leave some questions blank. At the end of the survey, you will be asked to print the final page. Take this page to the Computer Lab Supervisor to collect your \$10 payment.

What If I Have More Questions?

If you have any questions about this research project or the survey, you can talk to [Club contact] at the Club or Julie Whitman at the National Center for Victims of Crime (jwhitman@ncvc.org or 1-800-394-2255).

1. If you would like to participate in this study, click on the "yes" button below and follow the directions.

- Yes,** I would like to participate in this study. I have read this page and understand that my participation is completely voluntary.
- No,** I would not like to participate in this study.

Section 1. You and Your Family

This first section asks a few questions about you—your age, grade, and who lives with you.

2. How old are you?

- 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Snitches Get Stitches

3. What grade are you in?

- 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
 GED or other diploma program College Not in School

4. Are you:

- Female Male

5. What do you consider yourself to be? (choose all that apply)

- White, not of Hispanic origin
 Black or African American
 American Indian/Native American, Eskimo or Aleut
 Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
 Asian or Pacific Islander
 Other

6. How many of the following people live in the house where you usually stay?

- Children (under 18) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Parents 0 1 2
Adult relatives (other than parents) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
Adults not related to you by blood 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

7. What is highest level of schooling your father completed?

- Completed grade school or less Completed college
 Some high school Graduate or professional school after college
 Completed high school Do not know
 Some college Does not apply to me

8. What is the highest level of schooling your mother completed?

- Completed grade school or less Completed college
 Some high school Graduate or professional school after college
 Completed high school Do not know
 Some college Does not apply to me

Section 2. Gangs in Your School and Neighborhood

Section 2 asks questions about your experience with gangs and whether you think gangs are a problem in your school and neighborhood.

9. Are any of your friends in a gang?

- Yes No

10. Are any of your family members in a gang?

- Yes No [skip to 12]

11. How many of your family members are in a gang?

- 1 2 3 4 or more

12. Have you ever belonged to a gang?

- No, not interested [skip to 15]
 No, but would like to [skip to 14]
 Yes, in the past
 Yes, belong now
 Yes, but would like to get out

13. How old were you when you first joined a gang?

- 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 or older

14. What is the major reason you joined or would like to join a gang? (You may check up to three answers.)

- Brother, sister, or cousin in a gang
 Parent or other adult relative in a gang
 Protection/safety
 Friendship/popularity
 Wanted to belong to something
 Peer pressure
 Forced or intimidated into joining
 Other

15. How much do each of the following statements describe your neighborhood?

	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Not really</i>	<i>Yes, some</i>	<i>Yes, a lot</i>
Crime and/or drug selling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neighbors help each other out	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lots of empty or abandoned buildings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People work together to solve problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lots of graffiti	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel safe in my neighborhood	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gang activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. How many people belong to a gang in your school?

- A lot Some A few None

17. Are gangs a problem in your school?

- Big problem Small problem Not a problem

18. How many people belong to a gang in your neighborhood?

- A lot Some A few None

19. Are gangs a problem in your neighborhood?

- Big problem Small problem Not a problem

Section 3. Witnessing Gang Crime

This next set of questions asks you to think about crime that you have actually seen in person (NOT on television, in movies, or in video games).

20. Please check any of the following crimes that you have witnessed (you saw it happen to somebody else), and you thought the situation was serious (not kids playing) in the past two years.

- Serious threats
 Beating, punching, or kicking
 Being shot at with a gun
 Being attacked with a weapon (not a gun)
 Buying, selling, using, or ditching drugs
 Rape or sexual assault
 Robbery or attempted robbery
 I have not witnessed any of these crimes in the past two years. *[skip to 25]*

Snitches Get Stitches

21. Do you think any of the crimes you witnessed were committed by gang members?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, I think so
- No, I don't think so
- No, definitely not *[skip to 25]*
- I don't know

22. For crimes you thought were gang-related, did you tell anyone what you saw?

- Yes
- No *[skip to 24]*

23. Who did you tell? (check all that apply) *[skip to 25]*

- Police
- School authorities
- Parent or other family member
- Other adult
- Friend

24. Why didn't you report it? (You may check up to three answers.)

- Didn't feel comfortable telling someone
- Didn't want to get involved/not my problem
- Wasn't sure who to talk to
- Scared or threatened
- I knew the person committing the crime
- Didn't want to be seen as a snitch
- Other

Section 4. Gang Crime Experienced by Your Friends or Family

Now we would like you to think about crime experienced by your friends or family—whether you actually saw it happen or not.

25. Please check any of the following crimes that any of your friends or family has experienced, and you thought the situation was serious (not kids playing) in the past two years.

- Serious threats
- Beating, punching, or kicking
- Being shot at with a gun
- Being attacked with a weapon (not a gun)
- Buying, selling, using, or ditching drugs
- Rape or sexual assault
- Robbery or attempted robbery
- None of these crimes has happened to a friend or family member in the past two years. *[skip to 30]*

26. Do you think any of the crimes were committed by gang members?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, I think so
- No, I don't think so
- No, definitely not *[skip to 30]*
- I don't know

27. For crimes you thought were gang-related, did you tell anyone what happened?

- Yes
- No *[skip to 29]*

28. Who did you tell? (Check all that apply.) *[skip to 30]*

- Police
- School authorities
- Parent or other family member
- Other adult
- Friend

29. Why didn't you report it? (You may check up to three answers.)

- Didn't feel comfortable telling someone
- Didn't want to get involved/not my problem
- Wasn't sure who to talk to
- Scared or threatened
- I knew the person committing the crime
- Didn't want to be seen as a snitch
- Didn't see it happen
- Other

Section 5. Your Experiences with Gang Crime

This section asks you about whether you have ever experienced crime.

30. Please check any of the following crimes that have happened to you in the past two years.

- Serious threats
- Beating, punching, or kicking
- Being shot at with a gun
- Being attacked with a weapon (not a gun)
- Being asked to buy, sell, use, or ditch drugs
- Rape or sexual assault
- Robbery or attempted robbery
- None of these crimes has happened to me in the past two years. *[skip to 35]*

31. Do you think any of the crimes were committed by gang members?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, I think so
- No, I don't think so
- No, definitely not *[skip to 35]*
- I don't know

32. For crimes you thought were gang-related, did you tell anyone what happened?

- Yes No *[skip to 34]*

33. Who did you tell? (Check all that apply.) *[skip to 35]*

- Police School authorities Parent or other family member Other adult Friend

34. Why didn't you report it? (You may check up to three answers.)

- Didn't feel comfortable telling someone
- Wasn't sure who to talk to
- Scared or threatened
- Embarrassed
- Thought I could handle it on my own
- Didn't want to get the person in trouble
- Didn't want to be seen as a snitch
- Other

Section 6. Witness Intimidation

Section 6 asks you a few questions about experiences of being threatened or attacked for reporting a gang crime.

35. Have you ever heard about someone in your school reporting a gang crime and then being threatened or attacked?

- Yes No [skip to 38]

36. How were people threatened? (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened in person | <input type="checkbox"/> Vandalism of their property |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened over the phone | <input type="checkbox"/> Followed or stalked |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened on-line (like in IM or e-mail) | <input type="checkbox"/> Beat up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threatening notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excluded or isolated | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |

37. Where did it happen? (Check all that apply.)

- School/school bus
 Home
 On the street
 In a public place like a mall or movie theater
 A social gathering (like a party or a club)
 Boys & Girls Club or other youth program
 Other
 Don't know

38. Have you ever heard about someone in your neighborhood reporting a gang crime and then being threatened or attacked?

- Yes No [skip to 41]

39. How were people threatened? (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened in person | <input type="checkbox"/> Vandalism of their property |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened over the phone | <input type="checkbox"/> Followed or stalked |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened on-line (like in IM or e-mail) | <input type="checkbox"/> Beat up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threatening notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excluded or isolated | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |

40. Where did it happen? (Check all that apply.)

- School/school bus
 Home
 On the street
 In a public place like a mall or movie theater
 A social gathering (like a party or a club)
 Boys & Girls Club or other youth program
 Other
 Don't know

41. Have you ever experienced threats or violence because you reported a gang crime?

- I've never reported a gang crime [skip to 44]
 Yes No [skip to 44]

42. How were you threatened? (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened in person | <input type="checkbox"/> Vandalism of your property |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened over the phone | <input type="checkbox"/> Followed or stalked |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threatened on-line (like in IM or e-mail) | <input type="checkbox"/> Beat up |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Threatening notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excluded or isolated | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |

43. Where did it happen? (Check all that apply.)

- School/school bus
- Home
- On the street
- In a public place like a mall or movie theater
- A social gathering (like a party or a club)
- Boys & Girls Club or other youth program
- Other

44. How many students in your school would be willing to report gang crime to the police or school authorities?

- All Most Some None

45. How many people in your neighborhood would be willing to report gang crime to the police?

- All Most Some None

46. Why do you think teens may not report gang activity to the police?

47. Why do you think teens may not report gang activity to the school authorities?

Section 7. Contacts with Police

Section 7 asks you to think about your contact with police in your school and neighborhood.

48. Do you have any police officers that work in your school (NOT security guards)?

- Yes No *[skip to 50]*

49. In general, how much do you trust the police officer(s) that work in your school?

- A lot of trust
- Some trust
- Very little trust
- No trust at all

50. In general, how much do you trust the police in your neighborhood?

- A lot of trust
- Some trust
- Very little trust
- No trust at all
- I have not had any interaction with the police in my neighborhood.

51. During the past year, have you had any contact with a police officer in your school?

- Yes No *[skip to 54]* I don't have a police officer in my school *[skip to 54]*

Snitches Get Stitches

52. What were the reasons for the contact with the police officer in your school?

- Reported a crime
- Asked for help or information
- Just to say hi or talk
- No reason or I didn't think there was a reason
- Was there when someone else was questioned or arrested
- Was warned about doing something I shouldn't have been doing
- Was stopped and questioned about a crime
- Was stopped and searched
- Was arrested
- Other _____

53. Do you feel you were treated with respect by the school resource officer?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Never

54. During the past year, have you had any contact with a police officer in your neighborhood?

- Yes
- No [*skip to 57*]

55. What were the reasons for the contact?

- Reported a crime
- Asked for help or information
- Just to say hi or talk
- No reason or I didn't think there was a reason
- Was there when someone else was questioned or arrested
- Was warned about doing something I shouldn't have been doing
- Was stopped and questioned about a crime
- Was stopped and searched
- Was arrested
- Other _____

56. Do you feel you were treated with respect by the police?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Never

Section 8. Your Ideas on Helping Teens

This is the final section of the survey! Here you are asked to think about people, programs, and places that you know exist to help teens feel safe reporting gang crime. We would also like to know your ideas on how to encourage more teens to come forward.

57. After witnessing a crime or being threatened or physically assaulted, which of the following services or people would you use for help? (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend | <input type="checkbox"/> Teen hotline |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth worker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor or nurse | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious leader |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychologist/social worker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guidance counselor | <input type="checkbox"/> Internet chat or information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peer counselor | <input type="checkbox"/> Local Boys & Girls Club |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coach | <input type="checkbox"/> Police |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

58. Which of the following services or people have you ever used for help after witnessing a crime or being threatened or physically assaulted? (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend | <input type="checkbox"/> Teen hotline |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth worker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor or nurse | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious leader |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychologist/social worker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guidance counselor | <input type="checkbox"/> Internet chat or information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peer counselor | <input type="checkbox"/> Local Boys & Girls Club |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coach | <input type="checkbox"/> Police |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

59. Do you know of any people or programs available in your school to help teens feel safe reporting crime to the police or school authorities?

- Yes No *[skip to 61]*

60. Who or what are they?

61. Do you know of any people or programs available in the Boys & Girls Club to help teens feel safe reporting crime to the police or school authorities?

- Yes No *[skip to 63]*

62. Who or what are they?

63. Do you know of any people or programs available in your neighborhood to help teens feel safe reporting crime to the police or school authorities?

- Yes No *[skip to 65]*

64. Who or what are they?

65. What other kinds of help would encourage teens to come forward?

66. Is there anything else you want to say about these issues?

Interview Parental Consent Form

DATE

Dear Parent:

The Boys & Girls Club of [insert name] is partnering with the National Center for Victims of Crime on a study to learn more about how teens in Massachusetts communities experience gang crime and witness intimidation. Seven Boys & Girls Clubs across the state are participating in the project. This letter is to inform you about the project and how you can give permission for your child to participate.

What Is This All About?

This is a research study to learn more about how young people experience gang crime in their community; what keeps youth witnesses from reporting crime; and the kinds of programs that could encourage youth to report crime to police, school authorities, or other adults. **Your child has expressed interest in participating in an individual interview** with the researchers about gangs and the challenges involved in working to end gang-related crime. This interview is NOT for law enforcement purposes; it is for research purposes only. Your child will not be asked to name any individuals involved in crimes.

Does My Child Have to Participate?

Your child is not required to participate; participation is completely voluntary. Youth who participate in the interview will receive a \$20 incentive payment, even if they decide to end their participation before the end of the discussion. Your child is also free to refuse to answer any question. If your child chooses not to participate, it will in no way affect his or her ability to participate in programs at the Boys & Girls Club.

If you feel comfortable having your child participate in the interview, please sign the attached form and have your child return it to the Club by [date]. Your child will not be able to participate in the interview unless he or she has your permission.

Is This Going to Be Taped?

No, we will not be taping the interviews. Instead, one interviewer will ask questions and the other will take notes about what is said. Your child's name will not be included in the notes. We will also ask your child not to name any individuals involved in crimes he or she may know about. If your child does name individuals, we will not write down their names. Your child may ask to see the notes at any time during the interview.

Will the Information Be Private?

Everything your child tells us will be kept private. The information is for research purposes only, and will not be given to anyone other than the research team. We are required by federal law to keep your child's identity strictly confidential, and no court, police, or any other authority can force us to share information that identifies your child.

The law prevents researchers from sharing any information about your child with the authorities or with anyone else. The law does not prevent you or your child from voluntarily giving your own information related to this research project to someone else.

There is only one possible exception to the confidentiality rule. If the researchers learn through the interview about a future crime to be committed, we may need to report this to someone who may be able to prevent that crime from happening.

Are There Any Risks or Benefits to Participating?

The interview will focus on how teens view gang crime and witness intimidation in their community, how it affects their lives, and their ideas on how teens can be better supported to report problems to adults. We do not expect the discussion to be upsetting for the youth; however, if a teen does find the discussion upsetting, someone will be available to talk to him or her, and the youth will also be provided with phone numbers they can call for additional support and information.

Your child will NOT be asked to name specific individuals involved in criminal incidents during the interview. The researchers are not interested in specific people but rather in getting a general picture of youths' experience with gang-related crime and witness intimidation. If a youth does name somebody during the interview, the name will not be written down. The information from the interview is for research purposes only.

There may be a slight risk that a teen will be singled out by other youth for having participated in the interview. To guard against this risk, Boys & Girls Club staff will keep the names of all youth participating in the interviews confidential, and the youth will be able to schedule their interview at a time that is most comfortable to them (for example, when they know that their friends or others will not be at the Club.) Interviews will be conducted in a private location within the Boys & Girls Club.

Benefits include an opportunity for young people to share their thoughts and feelings about the important issue of gang crime. They will have a chance to give their opinions about what is not being done about gang crime that should be and how they think the problem should be handled.

What If I Have More Questions?

The National Center for Victims of Crime is the nation's leading resource and advocacy organization working on behalf of individuals, families, and communities harmed by crime. If you have any questions about this project, you can contact Julie Whitman of the National Center at 1-800-394-2255 or [Club contact] of the Boys & Girls Club of [insert name] at [insert phone].

Thank you for taking the time to review this letter.

Sincerely,
[BGC Executive Director]

Permission to Participate in Individual Interview

Fill out and have your child return this to the Club by [Date].

Boys & Girls Club of [NAME]

Address

Address

I give permission for my child, _____, to participate in an individual interview on how youth experience gang crime conducted by the National Center for Victims of Crime at the Boys & Girls Club of [name].

X

Parent or guardian signature

Date

Interview Youth Consent Form

The following statement was read to and reviewed with the interviewee and given to them in hard copy to sign at the beginning of the interview. The youth were given one copy to keep, and the researchers kept one signed copy.

What's This All About?

This is a research study to learn more about how young people experience gang crime in their communities. By participating in this interview, you can help adults learn how they can do a better job of keeping you, your family, and your friends safe from gang-related crime. The discussion will last about 30 to 60 minutes. The interviewer will ask about experiences you, your friends, your family, or your neighbors have had with gang-related crime, reporting to police, and witness intimidation, as well as your ideas for making it safer for youth to report gang-related crime. The interview is NOT for police purposes, and we do NOT want you to name anyone involved in crimes you may know about. The information is for research purposes only.

Do I Have to Participate?

You do not have to participate. If you choose to participate, you may end your participation at any time and leave. You do not have to answer every question in the interview—you have the right to “pass” whenever you want. In fact, you can leave right now if you are uncomfortable for any reason. If you choose not to participate, it will in no way affect your ability to participate in programs at the Boys & Girls Club.

Is This Going to Be Taped?

No, we will not be taping this interview. Instead, one interviewer will ask you questions and the other will take notes about what you have said. Your name will not be included in the notes. We also ask you not to name any individuals involved in crimes you know about. If you do name individuals, we will not write down their names. You may ask to see the notes at any time during the interview.

Who Will Know What I Said?

Everything you tell us will be kept private. The information is for research purposes only, and will not be given to anyone other than the research team. Only the researchers will be able to see the notes from this interview, and the notes will not include your name. Your signed consent form will be kept separate from the notes of your interview, so that no one will later be able to connect the answers you gave back to you. You will not be identified by name or description in any report about this research. Instead, information will be written in a general way. No names or identifying details will be included in the research reports. You will receive a copy of the research reports at the end of the project.

We are required by federal law to keep your identity strictly confidential, and no court, police, or any other authority can force us to share information that identifies you.

The law prevents the researchers from sharing any information about you with the authorities or with anyone else. It does not prevent you from voluntarily giving your own information related to this research project to someone else.

There is only one possible exception to the confidentiality rule. If the researchers learn through the interview about a future crime to be committed, we may need to report this to someone who may be able to prevent that crime from happening.

What Do I Get for Doing This?

You will receive a payment of \$20 for participating in the interview, even if you decide to quit before the end.

What If I Have More Questions Later?

If you have any questions about this research project, the survey, or the interview, you can talk to [Club contact] at the Club or Julie Whitman at the National Center for Victims of Crime (jwhitman@ncvc.org or 1-800-394-2255).

[Interviewer script (not in written consent form): Do you have any questions?

We will only do the interview now if you feel safe and comfortable. If there is any reason you are not comfortable doing the interview now (for example, if there is someone outside who you don't want to know that you're speaking with us), we can reschedule, or you can decide not to do it at all. It is up to you. You can also stop the interview at any time if you are uncomfortable.]

If you would like to participate in this interview, check the "yes" box below and sign the form.

- Yes**, I would like to participate in the individual interview. I have read this consent form and understand that my participation is completely voluntary.

- No**, I would not like to participate in the interview.

X

Signature

Date

Youth Interview Questions

A. Warm-up Questions

I'd like to start by asking a few questions about you.

1. Ask one or two of these: What's your favorite sport/favorite recording artist/favorite class? Have you seen any good movies lately?
2. What gender are you?
3. How old are you?
4. What grade are you in?
5. With what race or ethnicity do you identify?
6. How many times a week do you come to the Boys & Girls Club?
7. What kinds of activities do you like to do at the Club?

B. Perceptions of Safety in Neighborhood and School

Next, I would like to talk about how safe you feel in your neighborhood and at school.

1. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?
 - a. If no: What is it about your neighborhood that makes you feel unsafe?
 - b. If yes: What is it about your neighborhood that makes you feel safe?
 - c. All: What would make you feel safer in your neighborhood?
2. Are there gang members in your school? [By gang we mean not only the "big gangs" like the Crips, Bloods, Latin Kings, or MS-13, but any group of youth or young adults that hang out at a specific place, call themselves by a group name, and commit crimes (like selling drugs, assault, robbery, auto theft, rape, or murder). These kinds of smaller gangs sometimes name themselves after their neighborhood, housing development, or ethnic group.]
 - a. If yes: How many—a few, some, a lot?
 - b. How about in your neighborhood?
3. How do gangs in your school or neighborhood affect life for everyone else?
4. Do you feel safe in school?
 - a. If no: What is it about your school that makes you feel unsafe?
 - b. If yes: What is it about your school that makes you feel safe?
 - c. All: What would make you feel safer in your school?

C. Prevalence of Gang Crime and Reporting Crime

This next set of questions asks you to think about gang-related crimes you may have experienced, witnessed, or heard about. I'm also going to ask you a few questions about reporting crimes.

1. Have you ever experienced, witnessed, or heard about a crime committed by one or more gang members in your neighborhood or school? Examples of crimes include: an attack with a weapon like a knife, bat, gun; drug sales; or forced sexual activity.
 - a. What was the crime?
 - b. Did you report it? If yes, who did you report it to? If not, what were your reasons for not reporting it?
2. If you witnessed a crime or were a victim of crime, who would you most likely tell?
 - a. If the answer is friends: Other than your friends, is there an older person you would tell?
 - b. Who would you like to be able to tell?
 - c. What keeps you from telling them now?

Snitches Get Stitches

3. Do you know of anyone in your school or neighborhood who has been threatened or hurt for reporting a crime, or to prevent them from reporting?
 - a. Was it an adult, a teen, or a younger child?
 - b. What was the crime they witnessed or reported?
 - c. Was it gang-related (committed by one or more gang members)?
 - d. How was the person who reported it threatened?
 - e. Do you think other people in the community knew about the threats?

D. Involvement in the Criminal Justice System as a Witness

Now I have a couple questions for you about any involvement you may have had with the criminal justice system as a witness of crime.

1. Have you ever been asked to testify in court or been interviewed by the police about a crime?
 - a. Why were they talking to you? (Were you a witness or victim of the crime, a friend of the accused, etc.?)
 - b. What was the crime?
 - c. Was it gang-related?
 - d. Did you feel safe going to court or talking to the police?
 - e. If not, what made you feel unsafe (or nervous or afraid)?
 - f. Did somebody try to get back at you or threaten you because you reported? If yes, who, when, where, and how?

E. Relationship with Law Enforcement

Next, I'd like to get your opinions on the police officers you have contact with in your neighborhood or at school.

1. Are there officers assigned to your school? Are there officers you see regularly in your neighborhood?
2. How well do the police know the kids at your school and in your neighborhood?
3. How much do the police know about gang issues at your school or in your neighborhood?
4. Think about the officers you know. Would you report any crime or gang activity to them? Why or why not?
5. Do you think police can be effective in addressing the gang problem? Why or why not?

F. School Authorities and Gangs

These next set of questions asks you about adults in your school (like principals or assistant principals, teachers, and security guards) and how they have respond to gang issues in your school.

1. Which adults in your school do the students trust most?
2. Are the adults in your school aware of gang problems in your school?
3. What steps have they taken to get it under control? Has it worked?
4. What else should they do to deal with gang issues?
5. Would you report gang activity to someone in your school?
 - a. If yes, to whom would you report it and why?
 - b. If not, why not?

G. Ideas for Making It Safer to Report

Finally, we want to know what you would change if you were in charge to make it safer for youth to report gang-related crime that happens in school and in the neighborhood.

1. Are there any programs in place now to help youth feel safe to report gang-related crime? Do you think they are helping?
2. If you were in charge, what would you change to make it easier to report crimes to school authorities?
3. If you were in charge, what would you change to make it easier to report crimes to the police?

Appendix F

Logistic Regression Coefficients for Demographic Characteristics

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Black⁺</i>	<i>Latino⁺</i>	<i>Nagelkerke R-square</i>
Gang problems in school	0.90**	1.07	1.51	1.13	0.02
Gang problems in neighborhood	1.06	0.90	1.76	0.84	0.03
Experienced crime vicariously	0.67	1.18***	0.80	1.45**	0.06
Experienced crime personally	1.30	1.11**	0.88	1.03	0.02
Witnessed crime	0.90	1.18***	0.72	1.46*	0.05
Heard threat against schoolmate	1.15	0.99	0.58**	1.49**	0.03
Heard threat against neighbor	1.16	0.95	0.56**	0.88	0.02
Experienced threat against self	1.09	0.86	0.64	0.89	0.02
Neighbors willing to report	1.10	1.14***	1.21	1.23	0.02
Schoolmates willing to report	1.14	1.20***	0.96	0.77	0.04
Contact with neighborhood officer	1.12	0.93	0.88	0.57***	0.02
Contact with SRO	1.34	0.87***	0.88	1.13	0.03
Trust in neighborhood officers	0.97	0.79***	1.66	0.96	0.07
Trust in SROs	0.83	0.78***	0.98	0.84	0.07

*** $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ * $p < .10$

+ Coefficients for black and Latino categories are relative to the omitted Category (whites, Asians, and others)



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