



The Gangs of Miami-Dade County: Using Research and Practice to Develop An Anti-Gang Strategy

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Introduction

Since 1991 about 256 gangs established themselves in Miami Dade County. Many of those gangs have come and gone, but currently over 70 of those gangs remain active. Over 2,300 gang members engage in a variety of criminal activities, including narcotics trafficking, robberies, burglaries, shootings, homicides, assaults, and auto theft. Some are located in South Dade (Homestead, Naranja, and Cutler Ridge), while others have emerged in North Miami Beach and Miami Gardens and still others are in Doral and Sweetwater. These numbers, compiled by the Miami Dade County Police Department's Street Gang Unit provide us with a glimpse of the problems faced by the county and the state as they try to cope with curbing the violence generated by these gangs.

The purpose of this paper is threefold: 1) to show the current state of knowledge about gangs in Miami-Dade, 2) to describe what is needed to enhance that knowledge, and 3) provide 'best practices' for dealing with existing and emerging gangs.

In keeping with national trends, this paper is based on the premise that intelligence-led policing is vital to understanding and dealing with gangs. Intelligence-led policing means that quality data and evidence-based research are fundamental to identifying and in solving problems. Second it means that information sharing is critical, both internally and externally, and must become policy rather than informal practice.

Background

Like other cities and counties in the United States, Miami-Dade County has witnessed an upsurge in gang activity over the last five years. Today almost every large city and county in the United States reports a gang problem. According to Katz and Webb (2006), almost every city with a population over 250,000 and 87 percent of cities with 100,000 to 249,999 reported having an active youth gang problem. During the last 20 years these gangs have become more and more violent. Prior to and during the 1970s researchers reported that the most prevalent offenses by gang members involved loitering, theft, truancy, and disturbing the peace (Spergel, 1995). By the 1980s and 1990s, however gangs began fighting each other with firearms, and injuries and homicides began to rise. In Chicago, for example, from 1987 to 1994 gang-related

homicides increased from 51 to 240. In Los Angeles County from 1984 to 1995 gang-related homicides quadrupled from 212 to 807 (Katz and Webb, 2006).

Gang members appear to be responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime. Research in the 1980s showed that while gang members represented only six per cent of youths 10 to 19 years old in New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles, they represented 11 percent of all arrests in those cities, 40 percent of all arrests for serious crimes, and almost 25 percent of the arrests for juvenile homicides. In the 1990s, Katz et al (2000) showed that gang members were significantly more likely to have engaged in serious delinquency and were significantly more criminally active than a delinquent comparison group. The researchers found that gang members were about twice as likely to have been arrested for a violent, weapon, drug, or status offense and they were arrested for these offenses about four times as often as the delinquent youths who were not gang members. In response to the gang problem, communities turn to special gang units in police agencies, vertical prosecutions in district attorney offices, and prevention programs aimed at at-risk youth.

Miami-Dade County Police and the 40 other law enforcement agencies reduced the crime rate dramatically from 1990 to 2010. Over the last five years crime has been relatively stable, but a 40 percent increase in homicides occurred from 2005 (n=171) to 2006 (n=240). Homicides with a firearm accounted for the increase – 184 persons were killed with a firearm in 2006 versus 118 in 2005. While the number of forcible sex offenses stayed relatively the same from 2005 (1,581) to 2006 (1,582), a five percent increase in forcible rapes with a firearm occurred. By many accounts Miami-based gangs appear to be involved in the drug trade, acting as dealers of marijuana, crack cocaine, and heroin. Homicides, drive-by shootings, home invasions, carjackings and other violent acts are also attributable to these gangs.

Current Knowledge about the Gangs of Miami-Dade

What do we know about the gangs in Miami-Dade? Overall, we know that there are over 70 active gangs in the county, up from 60 in 1997 and 35 in 1985. The MDPD Street Gang Unit has started to maintain information about these gangs and is currently accumulating data that will be useful for strategic purposes.

Figure 1 provides a list of the active gangs in the county. Gang name, the law enforcement agency involved, the district of the gang, estimated number of gang members, active status, and other additional information are included in the list. Figure 1 shows that the Savage City Gangsters are among the oldest gangs still operating in the County. Among the larger gangs (over 100 members) are the Imperial Gangsters, MS-13, Savage City Gangsters, NHP Bloods, Real Nigga Posse, Take No Shit, West Side Boys, and Young Latin Organization. Some of the smaller gangs (10-20 members) include 12 Street, Bird Road Boys, 152 Avenue Boys, Folk Nation, International Posse, and Young Folk Boys.

The MDPD Street Gang Unit is collecting more information about these active gangs. Street gang detectives are determining the number of gang members, number of associate, primary meeting locations, number of chapters, initiation requirements, physical identifiers (tattoos, colors, etc), the gang leader, types of gang activity, areas of operation weapons, allies and rivals, ethnicity, and status of investigation.

Gang Structure and Gang Processes

Two of the most important facets of gangs and gang behavior are the gang's structure and the group processes that take place within the gang.

The structure of a gang is useful to know because it allows police to find weaknesses in the gang and exploit them. Researchers who study gangs indicate that gang leadership is "ephemeral, turnover is often high, and cohesiveness only moderate." Gangs may talk about codes of conduct but find that they are easily avoided or broken. Overall, researchers claim that many street gangs are more a loose collection of cliques or networks than a single, coherent whole. In the majority of gangs, median individual membership lasts only about a year (Klein and Maxson, 2006: 164).

Five Street Gang Types:

In order to understand gang structures, researchers asked national experts – usually law enforcement officers -- to assist in categorizing gangs. Klein and Maxson used two surveys of national experts – Phase I from 59 cities (out of 792) and Phase II from a sample of 201 experts reporting on 2,860 gangs from 250 cities. They found the following prototypes:

Traditional Gang. In existence for more than 20 years; they keep regenerating themselves. They have clear subgroups, usually separated by age – O.G.s (Original Gangsters), Seniors, Juniors, Midgets... At times the cliques are separated by neighborhood rather than age. Wide range of ages among members. Usually very large gangs – 100+ members. They are territorial in that they identify strongly with their turf, 'hood, or barrio.

The Neotraditional Gang. Resembles the traditional gang, but has not been in existence as long – probably 10 years or so. Medium size – 50-100 members... Developed subgroups or cliques based on age or area, but sometimes not. Very territorial, claiming turf and defending it.

The Compressed Gang. Small – up to 50 members and has not formed subgroups. Age range is probably narrow – 10 or fewer years between the younger and older members... Relatively new group – in existence less than 10 years and maybe for only a few years. Some are territorial, some are not.

The Collective Gang. Looks like the compressed form, but bigger and with a wider age range. About 100+ members. It has not developed subgroups and may or may not be a

territorial gang. Probably in existence for 10-15 years. Shapeless mass of adolescent and young adult members.

The Specialty Gang. Unlike the abovementioned gangs where numerous crimes are committed, the Specialty gang is narrowly focused on a few offenses – the group is characterized by its specialty. Small numbers – 50 or fewer without any subgroups in most cases. Less than 10 year history. Has developed a well-defined territory.

Gang/Group Processes

Understanding how gang members interact and work together is of paramount importance, according to some scholars. Klein and Maxson indicate that the most important aspect of the gang process is commitment. Commitment to the gang and levels of gang cohesiveness correlate directly with levels of gang crime and with gang response to efforts at gang control. Greater cohesion leads to greater crime involvement and greater resistance to gang control.

This leads to an examination of who is the most committed gang member. Usually the “core members” have more of a stake in the gang than fringe members. Core members were more active in formal gang activities. They had 70% more arrests than fringe members. They were more violent, and their delinquent careers started earlier and lasted longer.

Klein and Maxson showed that 12 variables labeled the “deficient-aggressive” factor (listed in order of the factor loadings) differentiated core from fringe members:

- Lower school performance
- Lower judged intelligence
- Lower impulse control
- More likely to get others in trouble
- Higher recorded delinquency
- More often truant
- Lower desire for rehabilitation
- More psycho- or sociopathic
- Needs more help
- More dependent on group
- Fewer outside interests
- More willing to fight

Boys scoring higher in this factor were significantly more likely to be core rather than fringe members.

A second factor, “group involvement” is more definitional of core membership:

- More often participates in spontaneous activities
- More clique involvement

- Greater total contributions to the group
- Greater desire to lead
- More acceptance by the core members

The bottom line is this: Fringe members face less need for gang affiliation to compensate for individual problems or to satisfy peer group connections. Therefore, individual interventions with fringe members will be more effective.

What are the policy implications? Basically, this means that police and other organizations should ‘divide and conquer’ – that is, eliminate cohesiveness – do not give the gang a reason to work together – eliminate all formal gatherings – meetings, outings, sports activities – use alternative activities – individual tutoring, individual counseling, individual mentoring and job seeking.

At the center of the gang is “Crime and Group Identity” – these are mutual reinforcers of the gang itself. As a group becomes more gang-like, with an increasing orientation to illegality or to intergroup rivalries, it recognizes this in itself. The gang reaches its tipping point when it is no longer just a play group, a team, a peer group, or a rowdy crowd – it becomes a street gang.

This is linked to an “oppositional culture” that develops in the gang. This oppositional culture sets itself up against society’s institutions – the police, schools, discriminatory employers, etc. – such that each rejection of the gang reinforces its cohesiveness and dependence upon itself.

Policing Gangs: What Works?

A wide variety of gang enforcement strategies have been implemented and tested, but we will focus on three: 1) deterrence focused lever-pulling, 2) targeted/saturation patrols, and 3) problem-oriented policing/prosecution.

Lever-pulling

A common gang enforcement strategy made popular by Boston’s Project Ceasefire involved “deterrence focused lever-pulling” (Kennedy, Braga, Piehl, & Waring, 2001). This strategy reflected a collaborative problem-oriented approach that focused on traditional gangs and their behavior. The approach in Boston relied on a series of meetings with the target audience. At these meetings a deterrence-based message was communicated by law enforcement, prosecutors, and community leaders. Gang members were made aware that all available “levers” in the criminal justice system would be applied or pulled towards their activities, thereby increasing the risk associated with continued gang activity. Coupled with the “lever-pulling” meetings were aggressive street enforcement of gang activity, the use of federal indictments, and the availability of social services to encourage gang desistance. This approach has been replicated in Indianapolis (McGarrell, Chermak, Wilson, & Corsaro, 2006), Los Angeles (Tita, Riley,

& Greenwood, 2003), Minneapolis (Kennedy & Braga, 1998), and Rochester (Delaney, 2005).

The evaluations of lever-pulling strategies have highlighted a number of key elements that have become best practice benchmarks. First, there was a strong commitment to the evaluation of both the process and the outcomes associated with these interventions. Second, the strategy relied on a collaborative problem-solving process. This strategy highlighted the importance of social opportunities like employment and education that may help promote gang desistance. Some have referred to this as the “carrot” to balance the enforcement “stick” within the deterrence lever-pulling (Tita et al., 2003).

Targeted/Saturation patrols

Another category of enforcement is saturated or targeted patrols. This strategy, sometimes referred to as “crackdowns,” recognizes that gang activity and violence are typically focused in a few known “hot spots.” Research has demonstrated some early success at applying aggressive targeted patrols at drug hot spots (Weisburd & Green, 1995) and gun crime hot spots (Sherman & Rogan, 1995). More recently, similar tactics have been used to target gang hot spots in Dallas (Fritsch, Caeti, and Taylor, 1999).

What were the lessons learned from saturated patrols? First, much like the evaluations of lever-pulling strategies, the best efforts have relied on strong empirical assessments. Second, police used intelligence gathering and strategic planning for the intervention. Because saturated patrols are based on the assumption that gang violence is concentrated around hot spots, a necessary first step is the collection and analysis of data to support that assumption and guide the efficient allocation of police resources. The final identified best practice is taken from the anti-gang intervention in Dallas. The results from this study suggest that the coupling of targeted patrols with aggressive curfew and truancy enforcement may produce greater benefits than any individual component.

Problem-oriented policing

Many jurisdictions have experimented with problem-oriented approaches to gang enforcement. These approaches include problem-oriented policing (Goldstein, 1990), problem-oriented community prosecution (Boland, 1998), and combinations of the two. The lever-pulling and targeted patrol strategies described above contain important problem-solving elements.

The problem solving approach emphasizes understanding the local context and nature of the gang problem. Second, problem-oriented approaches require constant monitoring of the problem once some response has been formulated and applied. This constant feedback and willingness to modify strategies makes this approach consistent with the ideals of action research. Finally, problem-oriented approaches rely on the development of collaborative partnerships between criminal justice agencies, government

social service providers, faith-based and community organizations, and community residents. One example of problem-oriented approaches is the formation of the Indianapolis Violence Reduction Partnership (IVRP) which consisted of local, state, and federal law enforcement/prosecution, and a number of research institutions that relied on computer-aided crime analysis (McGarrell et al., 2006).

The most successful problem-oriented approaches have been those guided by comprehensive partnerships. Many who have studied the success of Boston's strategy point to the key working relationships formed between criminal justice agencies and community-based partners like the clergy members of the Ten Point Coalition (Winship, 2002). These partnerships help ensure that solutions are not simply based on how police and prosecutors view the problem, but are shaped by the critical input of key community stakeholders that may have greater credibility with neighborhood residents (McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994). Second, a number of problem-oriented approaches have successfully engaged community organizations and neighborhood residents while developing their collective capacity to address the problems of gangs and violence. Driven largely by "social disorganization" (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1998) and "broken windows" (Kelling & Coles, 1996) theories, this approach recognizes that mobilizing residents to act against gangs is of vital importance. In some locations this has been as simple as organizing a way for residents to identify and quickly report gang graffiti to city officials. Problem-oriented approaches to gang enforcement should not ignore the important role that residents can play in this process and should strive to ensure that this collective capacity is further developed. This approach is consistent with Irving Spergel's "community mobilization" dimension found in the comprehensive gang model adopted by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) (Spergel, 1995).

The evidence from prior research should serve as an important guide for the Miami-Dade Police Department, particularly the Street Gang Unit. Gang structures and processes, successful gang intervention/suppression strategies, and the collection and analysis of information and intelligence are among the important areas to consider in an anti-gang strategy.

Next Steps

Guided by information, intelligence, and best practices the MDPD Street Gang Unit should begin to develop a strategy to combat the activities of the 70+ identified gangs within Miami-Dade County. Within this two-page strategy should be: 1) a description of the goals desired; 2) a list of the measures that can be used; and 3) a discussion of the outcomes that are expected.

Understanding the gang structure and the group processes of each gang will enable the unit to find weaknesses and exploit them.

FIGURE 1. Active Gangs in Miami Dade County, October 2008

Gang Name	Agency	Last Active Date	District	Est. # of gang members	Add'l Info
12 Avenue/Money Ave/Blast Ave	NMBPD				
12 Street	MDPD		Homestead	14	Symbol: 3 dot tatoos left side of body
137 Avenue Boys	MDPD	11/2/1995	Kendall/Hammocks		Combo: new members and Internat'l Posse
152 Avenue Boys	MDPD	1/2/2007	Cutler Ridge	10	Graffiti found in park 204 St and SW 152 Ave
167 Street Gang	MDPD	8/22/2006	Miami Gardens NMB		
170 Boys	MDPD	7/17/2007	Miami Gardens		Blk, White Camouflage
18 Street	MDPD	4/29/2008			
21 Jump Street	MDPD	3/5/2007	Opa-Locka MDPD	45	Automatic Firearms
22 Avenue Boys/Players	MDPD	4/7/2008	Northside	25	Areas: 87th-95th St.; 20th-23rd Aves
3rd Court Boys/Third War	MDPD	7/31/1994	Intracoastal	20	graffiti/Vandalism
51 St. Sniper Unit	MDPD				
6 Avenue Boys	MDPD	8/26/1997	Intracoastal NMB	60	handguns
68 Street	MDPD MPD				
Apartment Boys	MDPD				
Behind the Plaza BTP	MDPD	6/2/2008	Miami Gardens	165	
Bird Road Boys	MDPD	Dec-07	Kendall/Doral	11	
Biscayne Zombies/Zombies	MDPD				
Bloods	MDPD	3/26/2008	Northside		
Brown Sub Boyz/ Brownsville	MDPD	2/9/2007	Northside		Area: Brownsville HUD Development and 45th-46th & 23 Ct-24 Ave
Bunche Park Gangsters BPG	MDPD	10/31/2006	Miami Gardens	40	Colors: Blk/White
Chopper City	MDPD				
Country Boys CB	MDPD	8/10/2008	Cutler Ridge		
Crazy Chicano Klick	MDPD	12/11/2007	Cutler Ridge		
Crips	MDPD	5/13/2008			

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Darkside Bloods	MDPD	1/31/2007	Miami Gardens	10	Area:119-151 Streets & 7 Ave to 27 Ave
Deuce Pound	MDPD	8/6/2008	Miami Gardens		
Deuce Seven Boys 27	MDPD	5/12/2008	Miami Gardens/Opa Locka	30	
Dirty South Mexicans MSM	MDPD	4/18/2007	Homestead/Fla City	30	Colors:Blue and White
Eighth Tre Gangster Crips	MDPD				
Folk Nation	MDPD	4/11/2005	Hammocks	12	
Gangster Disciples	MDPD	7/30/2001	Hialeah		Hialeah PD handling
Gear Gang Crips GGC	MDPD	10/3/2006	Cutler Ridge/Cutler Bay PD	20	Graffiti GGC observed in the W. Perrine area
Get Fresh Crew	MDPD	Sep-07	Miami Gardens		
Imperial Gangsters	MDPD	6/20/2008	Leisure City/Homestead/SW Dade	150	Hammocks Trailer Park, 8 St SW 122 Ave, City of Miami
International Posse INP	MDPD	6/14/2008	Cutler Ridge/SW Dade	17	
La Primera INP Chapter 1	MDPD	2/28/2006	Cutler Ridge/SW Dade		
Latin Bad Boys	MDPD	10/7/1997	City of Miami/SW Area	30	32 Street SW 114 Ave.
Latin Force	MDPD	8/8/2007	Hammocks		Information Redline
Latin King Lion Tribe	MDPD	2/23/2006		40	
Latin Kings Dade County Lion Tribe	MDPD	4/8/2008	SW Area/NW Area		
Latin Syndicate	MDPD	7/16/2008	Doral/Kendall/SoMiami/CityofMiami	90	
LC	MDPD	6/16/2008	Cutler Ridge		Information Redline
Leisure City Boys	MDPD	2/15/2006	So. Dade/Homestead	40	
Lincoln Field Crips/Bloods	MDPD	2/25/2007	Northside	30	Lincoln Field Apts.
Mara Salvatrucha/MS-13	MDPD	3/24/2008	SW Area/NW Area	113	
Modello Gang	MDPD	9/19/2000	Cutler Ridge	50	Tattoo: Bee and Honey Comb on chest
Naranja Boyz	MDPD	9/11/2002	Cutler Ridge	50	Naranja Area
Savage City Gangsters	MDPD	12/6/1993	SW Area	100	72 & Flagler, Sweetwater, Bird Road, 152nd Ave SW 296 St

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NETA (prison gang)	MDPD				NETA from Puerto Rico; in correctional facilities in Connecticut and PR
NHP Bloods	MDPD		Cutler Ridge	100	
North Miami Zoe's	MDPD	11/7/2007	Norht Miami		
Norwood Goons	MDPD				
NTG Bloods - Nine Tec Grenades	MDPD	1/15/2007	Cutler Ridge	54	NTG & NHP are both part of the United Blood Nation
Oak Grove Boys/Gangsters	MPDP NMBPD	4/18/2002	Intracoastal, NMB	50	
One Way	MDPD NMBPD	6/12/2006	NMB	50	
Outlaw Bloods	MDPD	12/14/2005	Hammocks		
Real Nigga Posse	MDPD	1/25/2007	Midwest District	100	
Redland Rats	MDPD	11/9/1995	So. Dade/Homestead	21	
Royal County Boys	MDPD	11/7/2006	Miami Lakes	27	
SUR 13	MDPD	4/16/2005	Hammocks		
Scott Lake Thugs	MDPD				
South Bound Thugs	MDPD	8/8/2007	Hammocks	36	
Take No Shit	MDPD	2/9/1998	Doral/Sweetwater	120	8 St. SW 127 Avenue park
Taking Over Your Space (TOYS)	MDPD	6/16/2008	Cutler Ridge	40	6 chapters
Terrorist Boyz	NMBPD NMPD	7/7/2002	Intracoastal	20	
True Ballin Gangsters TBG	MDPNMBPDD				
True Haitian Vultures THV	MDPD	8/10/2008	Cutler Ridge		
United Gangsters	MDPD	2/21/2006	Midwest District		Colors: Blk/orange
Uptown			MDPD/Miami PD/NMB/Miami Shores		
Van E Blanton	MDPD	10/7/2002	NW Area		Operation
Victory Park Zoes	NMBPD	6/26/2006	Intracoastal/NMB	60	
Viste Verdi Crips	MDPD				formerly River City Boys (per Schabbel)

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Washington Park Boys	MDPD	11/2/1995	NMB/North End	50	
Westside Boys	MDPD NMPD	2/27/2007	Intracoastal/Northside/Miami Gardens/Nmiami	250	Area: NW 103 Street & NW 6 Ave., to 159 St. and NW 17 Ave.
Wolf Pack - Crips	MDPD	4/25/2008			Florida City Area
Young Head Busters	MDPD	Jul-08	Intracoastal/NMB/Miami Gardens/City of Miami	5	
Young Latin Organization YLO	MDPD	2/3/2006	Hialeah	225	
Zoe Pound	MDPD	4/30/2008	SW Area NW Area		