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The relationship between gang membership and inmate recidivism

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During the 1990s, a dramatic increase was seen in both the number of known gang members in communities throughout the U.S. and the proportion of prison inmates identified as being gang members. National Youth Gang Center surveys of law enforcement agencies revealed that by 2000 there were nearly 800,000 active gang members in jurisdictions across the U.S. (Egley & Arjunan, 2002).

Roughly one-quarter of adult inmates released from prison in Illinois during 2000 were identified as gang members. This translates to nearly 11,000 adult gang-involved releasees per year in the state.

The proportion of adult prison inmates estimated to be gang members also increased during the 1990s (Knox, 2000). Roughly one-quarter of adult inmates released from prison in Illinois during 2000 were identified as gang members. This translates to nearly 11,000 adult gang-involved releasees per year in the state.

Given the substantial increase in prison populations seen in the U.S. during the 1990s, and the fact that most inmates are eventually released, the impact former inmates

who are also gang-involved can have on communities and public safety is a concern for criminal justice practitioners and policy makers. In a survey of local police departments in the U.S., the majority of police administrators reported gang members who returned to the community from prison "had a negative impact on youth gang problems," and many of these law enforcement officials specifically pointed to increased problems related to drug-trafficking and violence (Egley & Arjunan, 2002).

The Authority, with the support of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), National Youth Gang Center (NYGC), Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), and the Illinois State Police (ISP), performed analyses

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Methodology

Measuring gang member recidivism

There are a number of ways recidivism can be gauged, ranging from self-reported information from former inmates to official criminal justice system contacts, such as rearrest, reconviction, or reincarceration. However, due to the enormous costs associated with obtaining self-reported information from large numbers of inmates, and the reliability of that information, only rearrest and reincarceration transactions were used to measure recidivism.

Data Sources

IDOC provided the research team with data on every adult released from prison in Illinois during November 2000 (2,534 inmates). This information included demographic characteristics, marital and educational status, history of drug use, conviction offense, institutional data, and whether the inmate was considered to be an active gang member.

Just more than 26 percent of inmates in the sample were considered by IDOC gang specialists to be current/active gang members. ISP provided the research team with detailed

information regarding each inmate's criminal history, including arrests prior to and after their period of incarceration. From these data, information regarding the extent and nature of each inmate's prior criminal history was obtained, as well as details regarding any arrests between their release date in November 2000 and January 2003, or an average of 700 days following their release from prison, including the frequency of any rearrests and the specific date of and crime for which the releasee was arrested. IDOC records also were examined to determine whether the releasee had been reincarcerated following their release, due to a new arrest or a technical violation of mandatory supervised release/parole, such as missed appointments, positive drug test, or failure to comply with treatment.

This *Research Bulletin* provides detailed analyses of recidivism among adult gang members released from prison in Illinois. In performing the research, a number of statistical methods were employed to determine the degree to which the results were statistically significant. The details of these statistical tests are included in a technical report produced as part of this project. *For a copy of the report, call (312) 793-8550.*

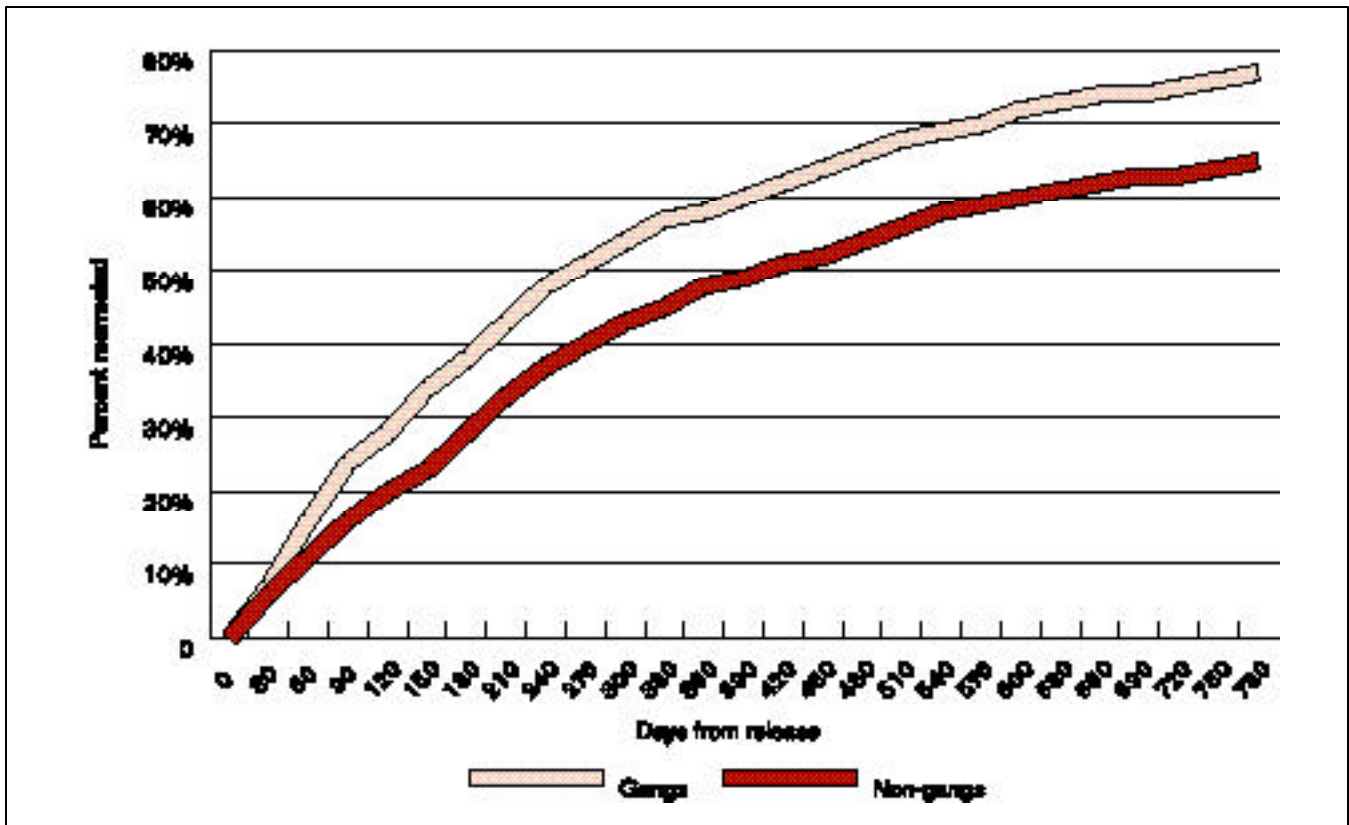
to examine the rates and patterns of rearrest and reincarceration among gang members released from Illinois prisons. To place gang member recidivism into a larger context, gang members also were compared to non-gang members in terms of the extent and nature of their recidivism. This *Research Bulletin* provides an overview of the findings from this project and offers recommendations for criminal justice practitioners and policy makers.

Prior research on gang member recidivism

A review of prior research regarding the relationship between gang membership and recidivism reveals that the limited body of research has focused either on juvenile releasees from prison in a few states, including Arkansas (Benda and Tollett, 1999a; Tollett and Benda, 1999b; Benda et al., 2001), California (Lattimore et al., 1995; Linster et al., 1996) and Arizona (Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections Research and Develop-

ment, National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2002) or adult probation populations in Illinois (Adams & Olson, 2002; Adams, 2003; Dooley, 2003). An examination of about 250 juveniles (10-17 years old) released from the Arkansas Division of Youth Services found gang members were twice as likely to be reincarcerated within a year (Benda and Tollett, 1999; Tollett and Benda, 1999; Benda et al., 2001). Similarly, a study of nearly 2,000 19 year-old males released from the California Youth Authority during the early 1980s found that institutional gang activity was associated with higher frequencies of post-release rearrests (Linster et al., 1996), although a prior examination of the same data revealed gang activity had no relationship to recidivism for *violent crimes* (Lattimore et al., 1995). More than 3,600 juveniles released from the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections were tracked in a study, which determined that juveniles involved in gangs were more likely to be returned to

Figure 1
Percent rearrested since release from prison



prison (Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections Research and Development and the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2002).

Thus, while there has been some research examining the gang/recidivism relationship among juveniles released from prison, studies have been limited to a few states, and in some instances, only recommitment to prison was used as the measure of recidivism.

Published studies examining adult gang member recidivism also are few and far between. But based on a sample of adult probationers in Illinois, gang members were found to be twice as likely as non-gang members to get rearrested while on *probation* (Olson & Adams, 2002; Adams, 2003). The *post-probation* discharge recidivism rates of gang members were not any different from the non-gang members after other factors were statistically controlled, however (Dooley, 2003).

The current research attempts to increase the level of understanding regarding the dynamics of gang member recidivism by using a large sample of adult prison

releasees from Illinois, and examining both recommitment to prison as well as rearrests. Studying the recidivism of gang members released from prison in Illinois offers a unique perspective. First, the phenomenon of prison gangs in Illinois evolved during the early 1970s (Jacobs, 1977). Second, criminal justice practitioners have tried a number of innovative strategies to address the problems associated with gang members in prison, while attempting to coordinate information sharing to monitor gang members released from prison in the state.

In 1996, IDOC created a gang-free prison at the Taylorville Correctional Center. An evaluation conducted after the creation of the facility found a decrease in disciplinary reports filed, good-time revocation, and inmate grievances (Levy-McCanna, 1999). In addition, the Illinois Attorney General's Office, through its Gang Crime Prevention Center, has engaged in research designed to provide local law enforcement agencies with information detailing the prevalence of gang membership among prison releasees, and police officers' perceptions of gang member involvement in local criminal activity. Also, to address the high rate of

Table 1
Recidivism rates and patterns following prison release

	Gang member	Non-gang member	All releasees
Percent rearrested in 750 days*	75%	63%	66%
Average number of days from release to first arrest*	229	249	243
Average number of times rearrested*	2.3	1.8	1.9
Percent rearrested for a violent crime**	26%	21%	22%
Percent rearrested for a drug violation*	40%	29%	32%
Percent rearrested three or more times**	45%	38%	40%

*All cases included: Gang member N=661, non-gang member N=1,873, Total N=2,534.

**Only those with at least one rearrest included: Gang member N=498, Non-gang member N=1,186, Total N=1,684.

recidivism among gang members released from IDOC who move back to Chicago, IDOC and the Chicago Police Department implemented Operation Windy City in 2000, to focus police and parole resources on monitoring gang members released from prison within some specific, high-crime geographic areas of Chicago.

The extent and nature of rearrests among gang members

This study examined the rearrest of gang members in a number of different ways, including whether they were rearrested, the amount of time that passed before being rearrested, the number of rearrests, and the types of crimes involved. Gang members were more likely than non-gang members to get rearrested, were rearrested more quickly following release from prison, were rearrested more frequently, and were more likely to be arrested for violent and drug offenses than non-gang members.

In terms of the overall prevalence of rearrest, by the end of the two-year follow-up period, 75 percent of the gang members were rearrested for a new offense,

while 63 percent of the non-gang members were rearrested (Figure 1). Gang members also tended to get rearrested sooner after release than the non-gang members. Within one year of release, 60 percent of gang members and 49 percent of non-gang members had been rearrested. Further, among those gang members rearrested, the average number of days from release to rearrest was 229 days, with an average of 249 days for the non-gang members.

Differences also were seen between the two groups of released inmates when the numbers of rearrests during the follow-up period were examined. For example, among all gang members, the average number of rearrests within the two years following release from prison was 2.3, with an average of 1.8 among the non-gang members. Among those inmates rearrested, 45 percent of the gang members had three or more arrests following release from prison. Of non-gang members, 38 percent had three or more arrests following release from prison (Table 1).

Another way to consider recidivism is through an analysis of the types of crimes the rearrests involved. Arrests can be categorized as those involving drug-law violations, such as drug possession or sale/delivery, crimes of violence, property offenses, or other crimes. When rearrests were examined by offense type it was found that gang members were more likely than non-gang members to have at least one new arrest for a drug crime (40 percent and 29 percent, respectively), and were also more likely to have at least one new arrest for a crime of violence.

In addition to examining gang members as a group, other patterns were identified by comparing recidivism rates among specific sub-populations. For example, one can characterize gang members and non-gang members in terms of their age: ranging from relatively young prison releasees to relatively older ones. Overall rearrest rates among adults between 17 and 24 years of age at release are fairly similar between the gang- and non-gang-involved prison releasees (Figure 2). Specifically, 80 percent of the 17-24 year-old gang members were rearrested following release, as were 74 percent of the non-gang members in this age group. Similarly, among those between 32 and 39 years of age, gang and non-gang involved releasees had similar recidivism rates of 68 and 64 percent, respectively.

However, when gang and non-gang member releasees between the ages of 25 and 31 were compared it was found that the gang members tended to have a higher recidivism rate (77 percent) than the 62 percent rate experienced by the non-gang members between 25 and 31. Similarly, among the oldest cohort of prison releasees, gang members over 39 years of age had a recidivism rate of 82 percent, compared to a 59 percent rearrest rate among the non-gang members.

A different way to summarize the pattern found was that the *age-crime curve*, which has been consistently seen in research examining criminal behavior as showing a drop off in recidivism as offenders get older, is much more evident among non-gang members

where older age was clearly associated with reduced recidivism rates.

In terms of rearrests for drug law violations, it appears that gang membership influenced the recidivism of 25-31-year-old prison releasees more than for other age cohorts. On the other hand, when rearrests specifically for violent crimes were considered, gang membership increased the likelihood of rearrest for releasees under the age of 25, but appeared to have no statistically

significant association with rearrest for a violent crime among the older age groups.*

Further, when rearrest rates and patterns of specific sub-groups of gang and non-gang member releasees were compared, even larger rearrest rate differences were seen. Gang members in their mid-20s and early-30s and those in the oldest age group examined tended to have higher overall recidivism rates than their non-gang counterparts. On the other hand, when rearrests for violent or drug crimes were examined, it appeared to be the youngest gang members that had higher recidivism rates than their non-gang counterparts – under 25 years of

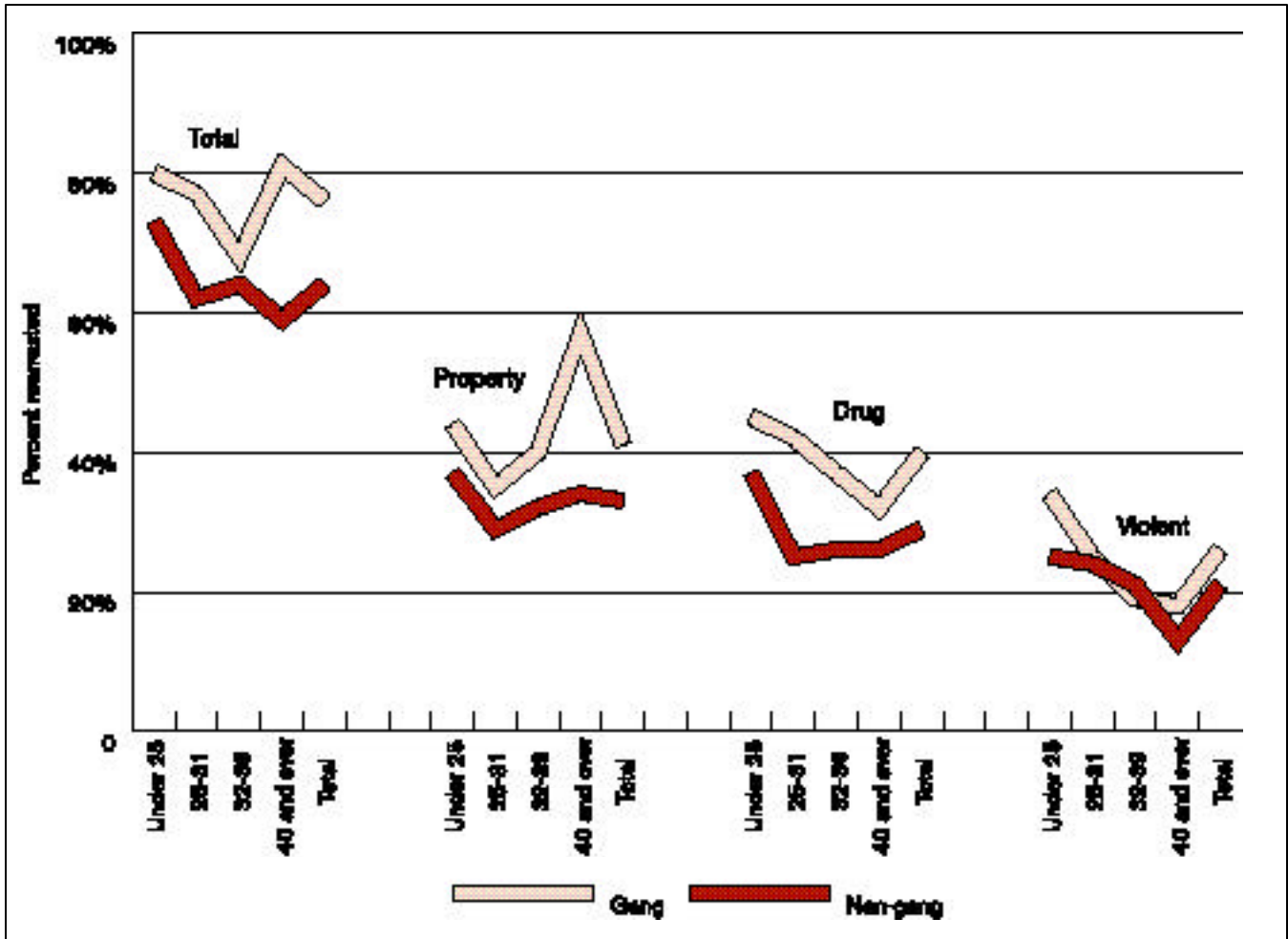
age in the case of violent crimes, and the 25-31-year-old cohort when it came to rearrests for drug offenses.

Reincarceration of gang members

Another way to measure gang recidivism is by examining the extent and nature of recommitments to prison, and how gang members compare to non-gang members in this regard. In general, there are two ways that released inmates can be returned to prison in Illinois: 1) they can be rearrested for a new crime, and subsequently returned to prison either as a parole violator

*While these patterns offer compelling evidence that the gang-recidivism relationship may be mitigated or aggravated by age, it must be noted that some of these results, while being statistically significant, are based on relatively small sample sizes. Specifically, the under 25 gang member N=198, while the under 25 non-gang member N=463, the 25-31 gang member N=226, the 25-31 non-gang member N=436, the 32-39 gang member N=169, the 32-39 non-gang member N=491, the 40 and older gang member N=68, and the 40 and older non-gang member N=483.

Figure 2
Age- and offense-specific rearrest rates



or re-sentenced to prison by the court, or 2) they can technically violate the conditions of their release for reasons such as testing positive for illegal drugs, violating curfews, or missing appointments with treatment providers or parole agents.

Given the fact that gang members were more likely to get rearrested for a new crime following their release than non-gang members, gang members were also more likely to return to prison following their release. Specifically, 55 percent of the gang members were readmitted to the Illinois Department of Corrections within the two-year follow-up period, compared to 46 percent of the non-gang members. Most of those returning to prison, regardless of gang status, were reincarcerated because of a new crime. Only 12 percent of gang members released from prison were returned to prison during the follow-up period for a technical violation of their parole, which was statistically similar to the 14 percent of the non-gang mem-

bers returning to prison for technical violations. Gang/non-gang difference can be seen across the types of technical violations a releasee encountered. Of those cited for a violation of the term of parole, gang members were more likely than non-gang members to receive a violation for a more serious offense of either an arrest (52 percent versus 42 percent, respectively) or being absent without leave (37 percent versus 35 percent, respectively).

Why do gang members have higher recidivism rates?

There are two factors that may explain why gang members released from prison have higher recidivism rates than non-gang members. First, gang members may be more likely than non-gang members to return to their criminal behavior and therefore get rearrested after being released from prison. Second, gang members have more of the risk factors associated with higher recidivism rates.

While research specifically examining the relationship between gang affiliation and recidivism primarily has been focused on juveniles and is nearly non-existent when it comes to adults, considerable research has been conducted on the relationship between other factors and recidivism. Over the past 20 years, numerous studies have found certain characteristics to be highly correlated with recidivism, including: age, gender, race, the extent and nature of an individual's criminal history, prison behaviors, substance abuse, and the type of environment the inmate went to live in following their release from prison (Beck & Shipley, 1987; Langin & Levin, 1992). Prior research has consistently found that young male inmates with extensive criminal histories including drug and property offenses are the most likely group to get rearrested. In addition, inmates who violate rules while incarcerated are more likely to fail following release from prison than those who did not violate prison rules (ICJIA 1985, 1986a, 1986b). Further, emerging research has found that the characteristics of the neighborhood inmates return to may also have an influence over whether or not they get rearrested following their release from prison.

To better understand the differences in recidivism rates between gang and non-gang members released from prison in Illinois, the two groups of inmates were compared across these different risk factors. From these comparisons, it was determined that gang members released from prison did differ from their non-gang counterparts across most of the factors identified in previous research to predict recidivism.

Among the adult prison releasees in the Illinois sample, gang members were more likely than non-gang members to be younger, male, minority (non-white), single/never married, and have lower levels of educational achievement (Figure 3). The average age of gang members when released from IDOC was 29.4 years. Non-gang members were released at an average age of nearly 33 years. The median age of gang members was 28 years, meaning one-half of all gang members were under this age, whereas the median age of the non-gang members was 32 years.

In addition to an age difference, gang members were also more likely than non-gang members to be from a minority population. Nearly 88 percent of the gang members were non-white, compared to just less than

70 percent of the non-gang members. Also, while the majority of both gang and non-gang members had not completed high school or obtained a GED, the rate of educational deficiency was higher among the gang members. Two-thirds of the gang members and just more than half of the non-gang members had not completed high school or received a GED.

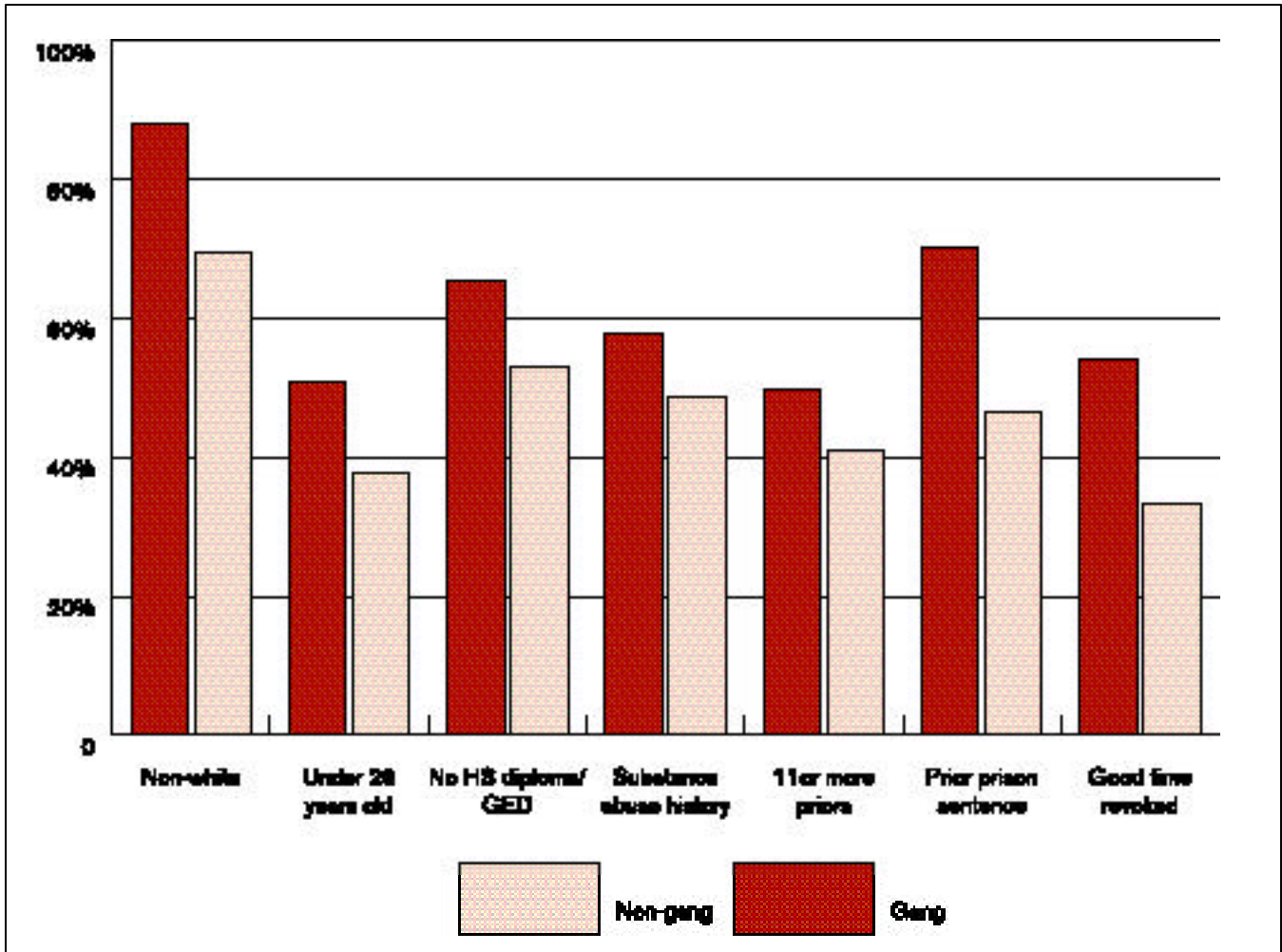
When the extent and nature of criminal history, substance abuse, and institutional behaviors were compared, gang members again appeared to have more of the characteristics associated with future recidivism. Despite their younger age, gang members actually had slightly more extensive criminal histories.

In addition, when prior arrest charges were classified it was found that gang members had been arrested, on average, more often than non-gang members for drug-law violations (3.6 and 2.9 prior charges, respectively). Overall, 81 percent of gang members and 71 percent of the non-gang members had one or more prior arrests for a drug-law violation. Similarly, 73 percent of the gang members and 68 percent of the non-gang members had at least one prior arrest for a violent crime. While these differences were slight, they were statistically significant. When prior prison terms were compared, 70 percent of the gang members and 46 percent of non-gang members had prior prison stays. Gang members were also more likely to be identified as having a history of substance abuse.

A number of differences were seen when gang and non-gang members were compared on characteristics of their current sentence, such as conviction offense, offense class, length of time served, and whether or not the inmates violated prison rules resulting in lost good conduct credits. First, gang members were slightly more likely than non-gang members to be serving a sentence for a more serious felony offense class: 55 percent of the gang members were serving a sentence for either a Class X, 1, or 2 offense, compared to 48 percent of the non-gang members (felony offenses under Illinois law can range from Class M/X offenses-the most serious, to Class 4 offenses, the least serious felony offense).

In terms of the type of crime the current prison sentence involved, the single largest offense category for both gang and non-gang members was drug-law violations, with 44 percent of the gang members and 41

Figure 3
Gang and non-gang prison releasee characteristics



percent of the non-gang members serving time for this crime. Gang members were also slightly more likely than non-gang members to be serving their current sentence for a violent crime (27 and 20 percent, respectively). Further, gang members were more likely than non-gang members to have lost good-conduct credit during their most recent period of incarceration, with 54 percent of the gang members and 33 percent of the non-gang members losing some time. As a result of being sentenced to prison for higher level felony offenses, coupled with the more extensive criminal histories and loss of good conduct credit, gang members tended to be sentenced to prison, and therefore served a longer period of incarceration: an average of 1.6 years of time served for the gang members versus 1.2 years for the non-gang members.

Finally, more differences were found when comparisons were made between gang and non-gang members

in terms of where they returned following their release from prison. When considering the general jurisdiction to which the inmates returned, the majority of both gang and non-gang members went back to neighborhoods in Cook County/Chicago, although the concentration tended to be higher among the gang members. For example, 74 percent of the gang members returned to Cook County/Chicago as opposed to 56 percent of the non-gang members.

On the other hand, a higher proportion of the non-gang members returned to other urban areas of the state, such as the suburban counties adjacent to Cook County or the downstate metropolitan areas. Relatively few inmates — 5 percent of the gang members and 11 percent of the non-gang members — returned to what would be considered rural counties in the state. Although there were some slight differences in

the socio-economic makeup of the communities where the gang and non-gang members released from prison returned, the majority of inmates, regardless of their gang affiliation, returned to areas with highly concentrated social and economic disadvantage, residential instability, and income inequality.

Although few studies have examined the differences between gang and non-gang adult prison inmates in as much detail as presented here, some of these differences have been noted in research conducted in other states. Research examining adult prison inmates in Nebraska found gang members were more likely to be younger, minority, unmarried, and lacking a high school education than their non-gang counterparts (Krienert and Fleisher, 2001). Furthermore, gang members were more likely to have an arrest for an assault or robbery and an earlier first arrest. Despite their younger age, gang and non-gang members had a similar number of prior felony convictions. Additionally, research done by the Federal Bureau of Prisons found that gang members were more likely to violate prison rules (Gaes et al., 2001).

Also studied was the degree to which the higher recidivism rate among gang members is due specifically to gang membership or the other risk factors, such as being younger, having less educational achievement, and having more extensive criminal histories. In the analyses that follow, the independent influence of the following factors on post-release rearrest were examined: gang membership, age, gender, education level, race, marital status, prior drug abuse, location of release to, prior incarcerations in IDOC, prior arrests, loss of good conduct credit while incarcerated, amount of time served in IDOC, and conviction offense class.

Certain community conditions and the extent to which other risk factors are translated into subsequent criminal behavior are also thought to increase the overall likelihood of recidivism (Gottfredson and Taylor, 1986; Travis, Solomon, and Waul, 2001). Recent studies indicate that people who reside in densely populated communities characterized by concentrated social and economic disadvantage, residential instability, and income inequality are significantly more likely to offend, in part because such areas exhibit lower levels of collective efficacy (Sampson, Raudenbush,

and Earls, 1997; Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush, 2001). Although less well understood, the literature also suggests that these areas are characterized by relatively low levels of social support (e.g., Silver, 2000), which is a critical resource for the successful reintegration of persons released from prison (Maruna, 2001), especially those with heightened risk factors for recidivism (e.g., gang members). Although there is a lot of research available on the individual attributes that increase recidivism risk (for reviews, see Gendreau, Little, and Goggin, 1996; Baumer, 1997), few studies have considered the role of community factors.

Isolating the effect of gang membership on recidivism

A number of factors were found to have an independent influence on whether or not a prison releasee was rearrested during the follow-up period. Gang membership did appear to have an effect on post-discharge rearrests after statistically controlling for the influence of the other variables, although the magnitude of the effect was not as large as has been seen in prior research of juvenile offenders. Specifically, when taking into account the various inmate characteristics described above, and the characteristics of the neighborhood to which the inmate returned, gang members as a whole were 22 percent more likely than non-gang members to get rearrested following release from prison. Thus, gang membership appears to exert a slight effect on rearrest regardless of the other releasee characteristics or the community to which an inmate is released.

When gang membership was combined with age, gang members within the 25-31 age-cohort had considerably higher recidivism rates than did the non-gang members in that age group. After statistically controlling for all of the other factors, 25-31 year-old gang members were nearly twice as likely to get rearrested than the non-gang members in that same age range.

A similar pattern and level of gang effect was also seen among those inmates in the 40 and over group. Gang members who were 40 or older were twice as likely as the non-gang members in that age group to get rearrested after other factors were statistically controlled. The analyses also found that the 25-31 year old gang members were significantly more likely than the non-gang members in that age group to get rearrested for drug offenses after other factors were statistically

controlled, as were the gang members under 25 years of age when only rearrests for violent crimes were considered.

There were also a number of other factors that had an even larger independent effect on recidivism, all of which were characteristics that gang members were more likely than non-gang members to have. For example, releasee age had an inverse relationship to recidivism: being older decreased the odds of rearrest following release from prison after the other factors were statistically controlled. Similarly, not having a high school education increased the likelihood of rearrest by almost 50 percent when compared to having a high-school diploma/GED after controlling for the effects of other characteristics. Again, gang members were more likely to have this risk factor.

Prior arrests appeared to be one of the most influential factors associated with post-prison release recidivism. For each additional prior arrest an inmate had, the odds of rearrest increased 4 percent. When the nature of the current charge (that for which the inmate had served their sentence) was examined, it was determined that those released after serving a sentence for Class 3 or 4 felonies and non-violent charges were 40 to 120 percent more likely to get rearrested than those serving violent, higher-level felony offenses. Finally, those inmates with good conduct time revoked while incarcerated were 40 percent more likely to be rearrested than those who did not lose any good conduct credit after statistically controlling for other factors.

Thus, the differences in recidivism rates between gang members and non-gang members can be partially explained by the gang affiliation. But, the fact that gang members are younger, less educated, African-American males, with more prior arrests, and a higher tendency to be released back into urban settings than the non-gang members also may explain the increased risk of rearrest. In short, it appears that being a gang member has some potential in predicting recidivism of released adult inmates, but not as much as some of the earlier research on the topic involving juveniles may suggest.

Conclusion

Based on a formal, objective assessment by staff within the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), roughly 24 percent of adults released from prison in Illinois were identified as being gang members. This translated to nearly 11,000 adult inmates being released during 2000 from Illinois prisons with gang ties. The research presented here found that these gang members were significantly more likely to get rearrested following their release from prison than non-gang members, particularly for drug and violent crimes.

In addition, the research found that gang members were more likely to have other risk factors which increase even further their odds of getting rearrested. Gang members were 22 percent more likely to get rearrested than non-gang members when other factors were statistically controlled, and gang members between 25-31, and over 39 years old, were twice as likely as their non-gang counterparts to get rearrested. Further, gang members within specific age sub-groups were more likely to get rearrested than non-gang members for drug and violent offenses, which appears to confirm the perception of law enforcement professionals in the U.S. regarding the impact of returning gang members on community crime problems (Egley & Arjunan, 2002). This pattern may suggest that gang members within specific age cohorts may be more heavily involved in the drug-trade than either non-gang members or gang members in other age groups, while other groups of gang members may be more involved in violent crime than either non-gang members in the same age group or gang members in other age cohorts.

These findings have implications for criminal justice practitioners and policy makers from two perspectives. The first is that increasing the focus of parole and law enforcement on gang members being released from prison appears to be justified due to their higher recidivism rates, but with limited resources this focus could possibly be even more targeted and age-specific.

The research has confirmed that gang members do have higher rates of recidivism than non-gang members, resulting in additional costs associated with rearrests, retrials, and, subsequently, higher rates of reincarceration in IDOC. One possible strategy would be to increase the focus of parole and law enforcement

resources on gang members coming back to the community from prison, or at least increase the degree of communication between corrections officials and local police departments.

The need for increased communication was recognized in the early 1990s, and was actually formalized in a number of national model programs (Parent and Snyder, 1999). Operation Windy City in Chicago involves the coordinated effort of parole and police officers in apprehending gang-involved parole violators released back to Chicago neighborhoods. Further, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and others have long advocated use of the Comprehensive Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression model (Spergel, 1995; Spergel and Curry, 1990, 1993) to develop a continuum of community responses (see Wyrick & Howell, in press). To illustrate, effective prevention programs can help reduce the number of youths who join gangs. Effective intervention in gang careers with treatment/rehabilitation helps remove youths from gangs. Suppression strategies may weaken gangs by removing violent gang leaders from the community.

The National Youth Gang Center has developed an assessment protocol that any community can use to assess its gang problem, which guides its development of a gang prevention, intervention, and suppression continuum of programs and strategies (National Youth Gang Center, 2002a). Resource materials that assist communities in developing an action plan to implement the comprehensive gang model are also available (National Youth Gang Center, 2002b).

The latter point regarding effective intervention, including treatment and rehabilitation, brings rise to the second issue apparent from the current research: the need to increase the access gang members have to rehabilitative programs and services while incarcerated or following their discharge from prison. Given the influence specific risk factors were found to have on recidivism, most of which were more likely among the gang members than non-gang members, it is evident that certain factors, such as educational achievement, substance abuse, and economic opportunity, can potentially be addressed through access to services and programs and reduce recidivism. However, the paradox with trying to provide these to

incarcerated gang members is that these inmates tend to be placed in higher level security institutions due to a combination of their extensive prior criminal history and pattern of violating institutional rules.

Finally, the findings also appear to illustrate the risk of continued gang involvement on an individual's propensity to engage in subsequent criminal behavior. While much of the previous research examining the link between gang affiliation and recidivism focused on juveniles, the findings in the current research revealed that adult gang involvement may have more of an independent effect on recidivism among older prison releasees, although this may vary when drug and violent crime behaviors are considered. Specifically, among those in their mid-20s and early 30s, and those in their 40s and beyond, it appears that gang involvement has a much more substantial, independent influence on recidivism and, therefore, on public safety and the costs of operating the justice system. When recidivism specifically for drug and violent crime was examined, gang members in other age groups appeared to have higher odds of rearrest. Better understanding this dynamic and testing the possible explanations through replication of the current research in different environments, or with larger samples, will increase our understanding of the complex role gang involvement may have on the recidivism of those released from prison.

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