

Arizona Criminal Justice Commission



Arizona Youth Survey 2008 Youth Gang Involvement Fact Sheet

Our mission is to sustain and enhance the coordination, cohesiveness, productivity and effectiveness of the criminal justice system in Arizona

February 2009

The 2008 Arizona Youth Survey (AYS) collected information from 54,734 students in 8th, 10th, and 12th grade from all 15 counties in Arizona. Among the information collected in the 2008 AYS were responses to questions about youth involvement in gangs.

The 2008 AYS data revealed that approximately 3.6 percent of youth self-reported current gang affiliation. The purpose of this fact sheet is to describe the demographic characteristics of self-reported gang members and illustrate the relationship between self-reported gang involvement, other anti-social behavior, and school safety issues.

According to the 2008 AYS, slightly more than three out of every 100 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students in Arizona schools are gang involved. Although this is a small percentage, considering that there were more than 267,000 youth enrolled in 8th, 10th, and 12th grade in Arizona during the 2007-2008 school year the number of self-reported youth gang members remains a significant challenge for schools and the justice system.

Gang Involvement and Gender

Table 1: Self Reported Gang Involvement by Gender

Males	4.7%
Females	2.6%

Although most official data on gangs and gang members reveal large differences in the rate that males and females join gangs, self-reported data reveals smaller differences. Data from the 2008 AYS reveals that more than one-third of self-reported youth gang members are female. Additionally, although male gang involvement rates are higher than females, (4.7 and 2.6 percent, respectively) data on gang involvement by gender reveal higher rates of female participation in gangs than are suggested by official data (Table 1).

Gang Involvement and Race / Ethnicity

When looking at gang involvement by race and ethnicity (Table 2), Black youth had the largest gang involvement rate (7.5%), followed by Native Americans (6.2%), and Alaskan Natives (5.5%). At the other end of the spectrum, Asian (1.5%) and White (1.7%) youth had the lowest rates of gang involvement.

Table 2: Self-reported Gang Involvement by Race and Ethnicity

Asian	1.5%
Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	4.3%
Native American	6.2%
Alaskan Native	5.5%
Black	7.5%
White	1.7%
Hispanic	5.2%

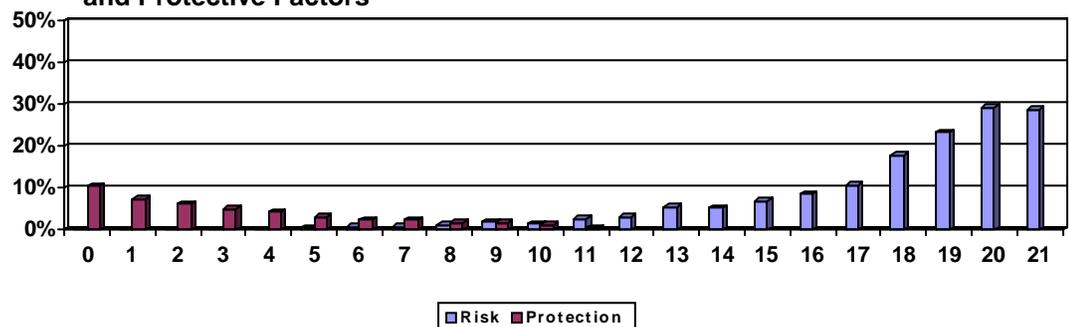
Reasons for Joining a Gang

Previous research has revealed several reasons why youth join gangs. According to the 2008 AYS, the primary reason why Arizona youth join gangs was for friendship, followed by protection (Table 3). One-third of youth who reported belonging to a gang reported joining because of friendship and approximately one out of five reported joining for protection.

Table 3: Reasons for joining a gang

Friendship	33.3%
Protection	19.0%
Make Money	10.2%
Siblings are in a gang	7.2%
Parents are in a gang	1.7%
Other	25.6%

Figure 1: Relationship Between Gang Involvement and Accumulated Risk and Protective Factors



Gang Involvement and Accumulated Risk and Protective Factors

Many of the survey items included in the 2008 AYS form the core set of information used in the risk and protective factor prevention model. This model is based on years of research on the factors that are related to youth involvement in delinquency and substance use. Like the medical model that identifies specific risk and protective factors for specific diseases, researchers at the University of Washington have identified risk and protective factors for delinquency and substance use in four important areas of a youth's life: 1) community; 2) family; 3) school; and 4) within individuals themselves and their peer interactions.

Figure 1 (on previous page) reveals that as risk factors accumulate in youths' lives, the percentage of youth who are gang-involved increases as well. Additionally, the converse is also true—as protective factors accumulate, the percentage of youth who are gang-involved decreases. These, and similar data reported elsewhere from the Arizona Youth Survey illustrate the power of the risk and protective factor prevention model.

Gang Involvement and Lifetime Substance Use

Data from the 2008 AYS also reveals that youth who are involved with gangs are more likely to have used drugs than youth who are not involved with gangs. In fact, when looking at the data for nine different substance types, gang involved youth report much higher prevalence rates for each of the nine substances than youth who are not gang involved. Nearly two-thirds of gang involved youth have used marijuana in their lifetime, more than one third have abused prescription drugs, nearly one-third have used inhalants, and approximately one of five have used cocaine (Table 4).

Table 5: Percentage of Youth Reporting Gang Involvement and Other

	Not Gang Involved	Gang Involved
Carried a Handgun in the Last 12 Months	6.1	38.8
Sold Drugs in the Last 12 Months	6.1	37.2
Stolen a Vehicle in the Last 12 Months	2.4	22.6
Attacked Someone in the Last 12 Months	14.2	53.7
Been Arrested	6.8	39.0

gang involved to have carried a handgun, to have sold drugs, to have stolen a car, and to have attacked someone in the 12 months prior to taking the survey. Gang-involved youth are also more likely to have reported being arrested than non-gang involved youth.

Table 6: Percentage of Youth Reporting Gang Involvement and School Safety Issues

	Gang Involved	Not Gang Involved
Threatened or injured with a weapon on school property	36.7	10.0
In a fight on school property	53.9	15.4
Picked on or bullied on school property	35.0	32.1
Did not go to school because felt unsafe	18.8	8.2
Carried a weapon on school property	31.6	4.8

This fact sheet focused on the demographic characteristics and behaviors of youth gang members in Arizona. It is also worth noting that 1.5 percent of the AYS 2008 sample reported that they were not currently gang involved, but would like to be. These youth are those on whom gang prevention programs might have the greatest impact—those who self-reported to be at great risk, and with great interest in, becoming involved with gangs. The identification of youth who are interested in joining a gang and some of the other data reported in this fact sheet illustrate how AYS data can be used to inform prevention strategies and the impact effective gang prevention strategies can have.

Table 4: Relationship between Gang Involvement and Lifetime Substance Use

	Not Gang Involved	Gang Involved
Alcohol	58.7%	84.9%
Marijuana	26.0%	62.9%
Inhalants	11.9%	29.9%
Hallucinogens	4.0%	13.3%
Cocaine	5.4%	20.7%
Ecstasy	3.7%	16.8%
Heroin	1.6%	7.9%
Methamphetamine	2.0%	9.2%
Prescription Drugs	21.9%	39.5%

Gang Involvement and Anti-Social Behavior

A similar relationship is found when looking at gang involvement and other anti-social behavior (Table 5). Youth who are gang involved are more likely than youth who are not

Gang Involvement and School Safety

Similarly, gang involved youth are more likely than youth not involved in gangs to have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property, been in a fight on school property, and been picked on or bullied on school property. Additionally, gang involved youth are more likely to not go to school because they felt unsafe, and likely as a consequence, were more likely to have carried a weapon on school property (Table 6).

This fact sheet was prepared by:
Phillip Stevenson
 Director, Statistical Analysis Center
 Arizona Criminal Justice Commission
 1110 W. Washington, Suite 230
 Phoenix, Arizona 85007
 (P) 602.364.1157
 (F) 602.364.1175