

## **Disproportionate Gang Crime and Violence in the West Zone of Greenville (Pitt County) North Carolina**

by

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### ***Abstract***

*Although a popularly held view is that gangs are saturated in every major city in the United States, and is therefore, an urban problem, the reality is that gangs are commonly found in many rural areas. While small town gang violence and crime is not experienced at the same magnitude as crimes committed by urban gangs, they are no less dangerous since they pose a threat to the social fabric of small town communities. In fact, this investigation reveals that gangs in the West Zone of Greenville (Pitt County) North Carolina, engage in a disproportionate amount of crime and violence compared to the general population. While the tendency is to dismiss rural gangs owing to a lack of large numbers and the perception of them eventually fizzling away, we caution against such an approach.*

### **Introduction**

Recent statistics show that the American gang problem has not abated. In fact, experts report that since 2012, an estimated 30,700 gangs and 850,000 gang members can be found throughout the United States. These same experts also reveal that since 2011, the number of gangs, the size of their membership, and the number of gang-related homicides have also increased by 20 percent for the same period (Egley, Howell, & Harris, 2014). While most people in the lay public identify gangs as being an urban problem, experts are acutely aware that gangs can also be found in rural or nonmetropolitan communities across the country (Dukes and Stein, 2003). Before discussing the problem of gangs in rural areas, it is important to examine how gangs are defined. Jankowski (1991) provides that gangs range from a loose connection of organized youths to highly complex organizations, including identifiable leadership, division of labor, rules, rituals, and possessions. Knox (1993) contends that gangs are groups that benefit from members' continued criminality. Miller (1980) defines gangs as law-violating youths made up of several youths who engage in illegal activities with the cooperation and support of their companions. Yablonsky (1966)

disagrees and argues that some gangs are “near groups.” He argues that gangs are not always cohesive with known membership and an accountable leadership. Instead, some gangs have shifting and unstable memberships and leadership, diffused definitions, and lack agreement on norms. However, they manage to retain a small number of committed members. Thrasher (1927) defines gangs as groups that maintain cohesiveness via the group process, assigned roles, and developed status within the organization. An important contemporary question is whether these definitions of urban gangs apply to gangs found in rural areas.

Despite the image presented by *Hollywood* that gangs only exist in urban cities and ghettos, the reality is that gangs may be a national, rather than, a big city problem. In fact, early research from the late 1920s (by law enforcement and scholars) to present has documented that urban gangs are expanding beyond large cities into small towns and rural areas (see Lentz, 1956; Thrasher, 1927; Weisheit and Wells, 2001; Fagan, 1999; Maxson, 1998; Hagedorn, 1999; Klein, 1995; Short, 1998). Despite this, some scholars argue that it has been exceedingly difficult to empirically establish that gangs are found in rural areas. For example, Wells and Weisheit (2001) and Wilson (2008) contend that the criminological literature is replete with studies of gangs in urban areas, but it has ignored or neglected examining gangs in rural areas. These sentiments were also expressed by Howell (1998) when he provided that with a few exceptions, the focus on gang research and policy has been on what occurs in urban settings while gang research in rural settings received scant attention. More specifically, in the few cases where research examined gangs in small towns, it faced criticisms, such as it was anecdotal and impressionistic, and not quantitative. Moreover, it has been limited to a few cases that are rendered atypical owing to a lack of a large population of people (see Wells and Weisheit, 2001). However, these studies are helpful since most gang research that involves community surveys of gang problems are conducted in areas with large populations, but they are not as helpful in explaining gang activities in small town or rural areas. Therefore, this paper addresses a growing, but neglected area of criminological research. It is divided into four parts. Part One offers a review of the pertinent literature. Part Two provides theoretical explanations of gang activity. Part Three covers the methodology and findings of this investigation. Part Four presents a discussion. In the final analysis, we argue that what is occurring in Greenville, North Carolina with regard to its rural gangs, may defy the national average and prove to be the exception rather than the rule.

### **Part One: A Review of the Pertinent Literature**

In an early comparison of rural and urban gang memberships, Lentz (1956) reported that only 22% of rural boys, and 87% of urban boys were known to be members of delinquent gangs. Arguably, one of the most identifiable studies that evidenced the existence of gangs in small town rural areas was Coghlan’s (1998) study. Because of gang presence in the early 1990s in DeKalb County, Illinois, efforts were made to observe and counteract

their criminal activity. Research revealed that the town experienced drive-by shootings, random acts of violence, and two murders, one of a teenager shot in front of a county courthouse. Coghlan's study presented a rural response to gang violence that was similar and consistent to efforts used in urban areas. Moreover, Coghlan used the same definition of gangs that was implemented in Chicago and Los Angeles. In the end, his study revealed that there were three gang crimes per year. During this time, nearly 400 gang members lived in DeKalb, Illinois. Coghlan's research revealed that many Chicago gang members exited the city to seek a lifestyle change. In response to the increase in gang presence and the corresponding violence that comes with it, the community mobilized its resources with the help of social services agencies, policing, local schools, youth council volunteer groups, and faith-based organizations. The community also solicited help from former gang members. Despite this widespread effort, the results were unknown since there were no follow-ups reported that revealed the effects of this community-wide initiative.

Evans, Fitzgerald, Weigel, & Chvilicek's (1999) research examined factors associated with gang involvement among rural and urban teenagers. Their data were collected from a self-report survey of 2,183 students ranging from the seventh through twelfth grades in Nevada. The findings from their study revealed that there were no significant differences in gang membership or pressure to join a gang among urban and rural samples. More specifically, they found that urban teenagers were significantly more likely to report that they had friends who were threatened by gangs than their rural counterparts. They also reported that urban gang members expressed more concerns about being safe in their community, as well as at school. Research conducted by Weisheit and Donnermeyer (2000) reveals that rural gangs are more commonly found in areas adjacent to larger cities, and even gangs that are found in remote rural areas often have ties to gangs in larger communities (also see Donnermeyer, 1994; Wells and Weisheit, 1998).

In their investigation, Weisheit and Wells (2001) used data collected from four sources that included: local police agency's response to three waves (1996 to 1998) of the NYGS, county-level economic and demographic data, a rural-urban classification and county-level measure of primary economic activity, and county-level data on access to interstate highways. These researchers also relied on four general frameworks about rural gang development that included ecological, economic deprivation, population composition, and diffusion. In the end, they found that the most common and consistent indicator of where gangs were found in rural areas were those reflecting social stability and the composition of the population. More specifically, they reported that gangs were more likely to be found in areas that experienced economic growth. They also noted modest evidence that supported the notion that gangs were expanding into rural areas. In fact, among the police agencies reporting in 1997, only 41 percent reported the presence of at least one youth gang at the time of the interview. The study revealed that rural gangs were few in number, short-lived, and were self-identified by either: youth(s), the presence of graffiti or tattoos, an association with others thought to be gang-affiliated, or those wearing gang paraphernalia.

In another study, Weisheit and Wells (2001) suggested that the emergence of gangs

in rural areas has not been well-documented. In their investigation, they used telephone interviews with 216 nonmetropolitan police agencies that had reported gang-related activities in their area. The interviews focused on how the respondents defined gangs and their activities, gang-related problems, and how they responded to gangs. The research revealed that there was a perception that gangs in rural areas were short-lived and composed of youths who disproportionately engaged in minor acts of delinquency. However, in some cases, they engaged in serious violence. Similarly, Green (2005) reported that in a small Texas town, college students and police reported the presence of gang activity. The research revealed that in this rural community, though isolated, gang crimes are committed by youth and it tends to be violent.

A report from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's *National Gang Intelligence Center* (NGIC, 2011) revealed that urban gang members may leave the city in search of small towns, or rural areas for reasons that could range from wanting to avoid capture to expanding their drug markets. Despite this assertion, research conducted by Weisheit, Falcone, & Wells (1999); Weisheit and Wells (2004) suggest that urban gang members relocate to rural areas not to expand their economic enterprise or advance the interest of the gang, but rather, their relocation efforts are for social reasons primarily, but criminal enterprises may emerge after their arrival.

The *National Youth Gang Survey* (NYGS) that has collected gang data since 1996 reveals that gang activity has declined slightly over the last four consecutive years, and since 2012, it has been at its lowest point in nearly ten years. More specifically, the survey indicates that the decline from 2011 to 2012 is almost solely based on declines of gang activity in smaller cities that have experienced a 10 percent decline since 2010 (Egley et al., 2014). Moreover, the NYGS reveals that gang behavior primarily remains concentrated in urban areas and has not expanded outwardly into nonmetropolitan areas. Despite this finding, gang-related homicides increased nationally, partly due to increased reporting by police agencies.

Matz and Mowatt's (2014) investigation discusses that rural gang research has been a neglected area of criminological research. Therefore, their work addresses the distinctions, as well as the similarities, between urban and rural gangs. They suggest that law enforcement agencies in rural areas should determine whether the presence of gangs in these areas are large enough to pose a significant threat before they engage in large scale interventions (Also see research by OJJDP, 2010). However, if a threat is found, law enforcement agencies should seek the help of other agencies such as community- and faith-based organizations, private businesses, and others devoted to assisting in community safety. They argue that these groups have been successfully used in urban areas and can help to achieve success in rural areas.

### **Part Two: Theoretical Explanations for Gang Activity**

While there are several reasons teenagers and young adults have for seeking gang membership that could range from (based on gender differences) the need for status, need

of money, need of a support group, need to belong, need of a surrogate family, need of protection, and others (Chesney-Lind, 1995; Moore, 1998; Dukes and Stein, 2003), we believe that the primary reasons are status and monetary incentives. For this reason, two structural theories may better explain gangs and their criminal behavior. More specifically, we examined the Structured Action Theory by James Messerschmidt and the General Strain Theory by Robert Agnew. We selected these theories because Messerschmidt's theory offers macro, or structural, explanatory scope (it also provides for why gangs may function differently in urban and rural areas), and Agnew's theory specifically addresses crime on the micro level. However, before presenting each theoretical argument, a discussion of structural explanation is required to provide context.

Structural theories posit that because society is structured with unequal distributions of power, wealth, and status, those who are found in the same class or united by similar economic markets or situations may respond in similar fashion. These conditions create the circumstances and the available resources under which some people may engage in crime (Agnew, 1992; Barkan, 2012), through either legitimate means, or in this case, gang affiliation. More specifically, social structures account for patterned behaviors found within the social order. They typically include class structures, divisions of labor, status sets, role sets, interrelationships among the environment, population segments, and associations that structure social relations. Where gang behavior is concerned, they can be characterized by poverty, lack of legitimate opportunities, integration and cohesion, and other factors, such as poor living conditions. These may cause residents living under such conditions to seek illegitimate avenues to acquire social status, monies, and a better standard of living (see Messner and Rosenfeld, 2007; Agnew, 1992; Siegel, 2006; Gibson, Zhao, Lovrich, & Gaffney, 2002) even if it means harming others.

### ***Structured Action Theory***

James Messerschmidt's Structured Action Theory conceptualizes the gendered nature of crime in western industrialized societies. He argues that the social settings where people find themselves account for different constructions of masculinities and femininities that can serve as a resource for doing crime. Messerschmidt believes crime is a masculine enterprise since men are disproportionately found among all arrest statistics and self-report studies. He also notes that masculinities and femininities can be understood as fluid, relational, and structured constructs. Within these settings, people construct social relations and social structures that direct and place constraints on their behavior. Messerschmidt argues that to understand crime, one must know how gender, crime, and class relations exist together rather than separately.

Structured action helps to contextualize how people "do" gender, race, class, and crime. With regard to "doing" gender, race, class, and crime, each is given meaning and expression in specific social relations. For example, the social situation in which people find themselves may require that they perform a different type of gender, race, class, or even crime. Stated differently, through social practices in specific settings, people "do" (as a

practice) gender, race, and class. As such, gender, race, and class can vary by social situations and circumstances. Messerschmidt argues that they are accomplished systematically, and/or not imposed on people, or settled beforehand, and are never static or finished products. Rather, “people construct gender, race, and class in specific social situations” (p. 5). As such, the social structure where one finds himself or herself helps to determine how gender, race, and class are displayed. This explains the type of criminal behavior that is found in different social settings (Messerschmidt, 1997).

To the extent that people “do” gender, race, and class differently is determined by the social structural constraints they encounter. People can use innovation to influence the structures where they engage in social relations or have membership. Moreover, where people are positioned, in the social structure in general, and their social relations in particular, determines the specific forms of gender, race, and class that are available to them. For example, poor people do gender, race, and class differently than their middle- and upper-class counterparts. They also construct masculinity and femininity differently (this could mean that some forms may run oppositional to others, but they are still masculine and feminine; the social setting may demand that they be accomplished differently). More to the point, robbery, drive-by shootings, drug sales, murder, and other forms of violence are considered masculine (and even an oppositional form of femininity for female gang members) behavior by poor lower class people who are constrained by its limitations, yet masculinity and oppositional femininity are conferred upon offenders and gang members (alike) if they successfully commit these offenses.

It is important to note that the same conditions, such as poverty and social disorganization that attract people to gangs are found in both social settings: urban and rural areas. Consequently, they serve as resources for gang formation and crime (Covey, Menard, & Franzese, 1997; Harris, 1994; Weisheit et al., 1999). Alternatively, wealthy offenders may feel masculine or feminine if they are able to successfully manipulate the stock market or engage in another elite crime without detection. Both offenders, by virtue of their position in the social structure, are “doing” different types of gender, race, and class. Messerschmidt contends that gender, race, and class must be viewed as structured action. Similarly, other scholars have used masculinity explanations to address youth organizations, such as gangs in other societies (Mager, 1998).

### ***Robert Agnew’s General Strain Theory***

Robert Agnew’s General Strain Theory explains the individual effects of strain. Essentially, Agnew moved the Mertonian Strain Theory from the macro-level to the micro-level. Agnew explained why individuals, regardless of their social class, may experience stress or strain that could invariably lead to deviant or criminal behavior. He offers a more complete view of criminal activity that examines all segments of society, rather than restricting his analysis of crime to the lower-class (Agnew, 1992; see also Siegel, 2006). Agnew posits that criminality is a manifestation of negative affective states that are caused by strain. These states typically include anger, frustration, disappointment, depression, and

fear that develop as a result of destructive relationships. He asserts that there are four types of negative affective states that include: (1) the failure to achieve positively-valued goals; (2) disjunctions of expectations and achievements; (3) removal of positively-valued stimuli; and (4) presentation of negative stimuli (Agnew, 1992).

First, where the failure to achieve positively-valued goals is concerned, this occurs when there is a desire to achieve cultural goals, but the structural means are not in place to realize one's aspirations. This typology is most consistent with the Mertonian Theory of Strain. Second, the disjunction of expectations and achievement can be experienced by anyone regardless of social status or material wealth. This discussion borders on relative deprivation compared to others. This can be experienced by people from every segment of society. As a consequence of perceiving that others are doing better socially or financially, some may lash out or acquire things illegitimately. Third, the removal of positively-valued stimuli creates strain after something valued is removed, taken, or lost. Consequently, one could commit crimes to retain or maintain a standard of living. Criminality may occur as a result of the individual's effort to prevent a desired stimulus from being removed. Finally, the presentation of negative stimuli creates strain when a person is introduced to noxious stimuli. This occurs when people experience victimization, punishment, abuse, failure, or any behavior believed to be an affront to their dignity (Agnew, 1992). Because all of the negative affective states are not needed to explain gang criminality, we will restrict our analysis to the failure to achieve positively-valued goals and presentation of negative stimuli. For example, because people in the lower-class experience poverty, social disorganization, helplessness, and vulnerability, gang membership often provides access to illegal monetary opportunities, status, as well as protection.

### **Part Three: Methodology**

This study began in September 2014 and ended in May 2015 in Greenville, North Carolina. Census data from 2010 revealed that there were 168, 148 people living in Pitt County, North Carolina. As of 2014, the population increased to 175,354 residents. However, as of 2013, there were 89,130 residents in Greenville. This study used several methods, such as a face-to-face interview with officers from the gang unit, telephone and email surveys, along with official crime statistics collected by the Supervisor of the Gang Unit (i.e., *Joint Crime Suppression Team, Special Operations Division*) with the Greenville Police Department, and an interview with an employee of the Housing Division of the Community Development Program in Greenville, North Carolina. Research experts argue that the purpose of using survey data is to measure behavior, attitudes, beliefs, or orientation of subjects under investigation (Hagan, 2014; Lanier and Briggs, 2014; Kraska and Neuman, 2012). Official data are typically collected by agencies, such as the police, courts, and corrections. They provide trends and patterns associated with behaviors and arrest. They also give demographic characteristics of arrestees (Maxfield and Babbie, 2011;

Bachman and Schutt, 2008). In this investigation, our use of official data was twofold. First, police data focused primarily on the timeframe of 2011, 2012, and 2013, respectively. Second, demographic and employment information were collected using census tract data from 2007 to 2013. Consequently, data were collected using these methods for several periods. The instruments used were composed of unstructured questions. Unstructured questions allow the respondent to provide details and more accurate data since the method enables the person being surveyed to provide his or her own responses or answers. Unstructured interviews require using an open-ended format.

### ***Measures***

The first instrument used was designed with a sixfold purpose. It was created to measure: (1) the nature and extent of gang crime from 2011, 2012, and 2013, respectively; (2) types of crimes committed by gangs; (3) demographic features of gang members; (4) types (name) of gang affiliation; (5) neighborhoods where gang crimes were committed; and (6) whether gang membership was on the rise in Greenville, North Carolina. Moreover, there were seven items used in the survey. They include questions such as: (1) What are the demographics on gang members with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, education, and county of residence? (2) Did gang members commit crimes, such as murder, rape, robbery, assault, breaking and entering, thefts, drug sales, and others? (3) What gang affiliation exists in Greenville, North Carolina and Pitt County? (4) Which neighborhoods in Greenville and Pitt County experience gang crime? (5) What is the number of homicides that were committed in Pitt County during these three years? (6) Do you know the number of homicides that were gang-related for each of those years? (7) Which areas in Greenville have the largest gang presence (in terms of residence)?

The second instrument was created to measure specific demographic characteristics, as well as the economic status of the residents living in West Greenville for a period of six years that span from 2007 to 2013. More specifically, we measured (1) the areas or tracts that comprised West Greenville, (2) racial and ethnic composition of the residents living in the targeted areas, (3) median household income, and (4) the unemployment rate for residents living in these tracts.

### ***Sample***

Samples are often used in research to approximate the population from which they are drawn. In social scientific research, experts argue that probability samples, especially those that are based on randomization, are the most desirable. However, they are not required to engage in the research process (Hagan, 2014; Maxfield and Babbie, 2011; Lanier and Briggs, 2014, and Champion, 1993). In some investigations, researchers may employ the use of nonprobability sampling techniques that are determined by their needs, professional judgments, and access to subjects that may fit the research question. In this investigation, we relied on the purposive sampling technique. This sampling strategy represents a selection of an appropriate sample based on the researcher's skill, judgment, needs, or expert opinion

(see Hagan, 2014, p116). While these samples can be used for research studies, they lack the generalizability and inferential power of studies that rely on probability samples. Nevertheless, nonprobability samples are accurate about the individual investigation they are used for, but do not allow researchers to infer or make general statements that go beyond their respective study.

In this investigation, a face-to-face interview, and telephone and email surveys were conducted with the Supervisor of the Gang Unit in the Greenville Police Department, and an employee with the Housing Division of the Community Development Program. After survey data were collected, we also examined official crime statistics collected by the gang unit, and several newspaper articles to corroborate the gang crime data. This technique was used to ensure that validity was not compromised. Experts argue that using multiple sources to measure the same subject matter is the best way to ensure the accuracy of survey data (Hagan, 2014; Lanier and Briggs, 2014; Maxfield and Babbie, 2011; and Champion, 1993).

## Findings

This research revealed several significant findings. With respect to our question regarding the types of crime that gangs were committing, we learned that gangs had committed murder, rape, robbery, assaults, breaking and entering, plus narcotics violations, random shootings, home invasions, larcenies, and damage to property. In fact, we were informed that approximately 75% of all homicides (an overestimation) in some form or another were gang-related with the majority of them being drug deals that went bad between gang members and others. Moreover, a high percentage, perhaps as much as 75% of all violent crime, including aggravated assaults, robberies, and home invasions were also gang-related. However, we were informed that 10 to 20% of property crimes, such as larceny and injury to property were gang-related.

When asked the demographics of gang members with regard to age, race, gender, education, and county of residence, we were informed that the majority of gang members in the city of Greenville were black males between the ages of 13 and 30, and a majority of them had dropped out of school and live in Pitt County. Despite our request for data on gender and education, the information was not provided.

When asked about gang affiliation, or name, we were informed that the gangs that are in Pitt County include: G-Shine Bloods, 59 Brim Bloods, 9-Trey Gangsta Bloods, Valentine Day Bloods, 5<sup>th</sup> Street Mob Bloods, One Eight Trey Bloods, Pretty Tony Bloods, Sex Money Murder Bloods, Pitt Street Boyz Bloods, Dart Gang Bloods, and Jet Life Bloods, Eight Trey Crips, Hoover Crips, Rollin 30's Crips, Rollin 40's Crips, Rollin 60's Crips, Grape Street Crips, and West 5<sup>th</sup> Street Boyz Crips, Folk Nation, Gangster Disciples and Sureno 13.

With regard to the neighborhoods where gang crimes were committed, we were informed that gang members in Greenville commit most of their crimes in West Greenville at Kerney Park, Hopkins Park, Pitt Street, Kristin Drive, Sunset Avenue, and Peed Drive. West Greenville is comprised of three census tracts in low income areas designated as sections 7.01, 7.02, and 1 (downtown). It is widely known for being a “hot” spot for crime, as well as one of the poorest sections in the city. Its racial and ethnic composition is African-American (85%), white (11.5%), and Latino (3.5%).

West Greenville also has the highest unemployment rate in the city. More specifically, statistics from the American Community Survey (2007-2013), and the Community Development Program, Housing Division of Greenville, North Carolina, show that the estimated median household income of four in 2012 was \$20,140. Moreover, while the unemployment rate for the state of North Carolina in 2014 was 6.5%, in Greenville, the rate was 6.3%. However, for residents of West Greenville, the unemployment rates in the three tracts were 14.5%, 16.2%, and 9.3%, respectively. These rates were also well over the national average which was reported at 5.8% for this period (see Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). West Greenville is also characterized by deterioration, dilapidation, and overcrowding. Moreover, in terms of physical layout, many of the houses in the area are in close physical proximity to commercial structures, and because of its crime problem, the area’s level of community morale is in a constant state of deterioration (see *The Center City*, 2003). Indeed, the conditions found in West Greenville are very similar to those that exist in urban areas that invariably are conducive to gang formation and crime.

When asked in the past three years, particularly looking at 2011, 2012, and 2013, respectively, with regard to the homicide rate in Pitt County (Greenville only), we were informed that in 2011, official statistics reveal that seven homicides occurred. In 2012, official statistics show there were six homicides. In 2013, official records reveal there were seven homicides. When asked, the number of these homicides that were gang-related, we were told that in 2011, three of seven, or 43%, were committed by a gang member. In 2012, one of six, or 16%, were perpetrated by a gang member, and in 2013, three of the city’s seven homicides, or 43%, were committed by a gang member.

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Figure 1. About Here

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Figure 1 reports the number of homicides that were committed in the Greenville, Pitt County area from 2011 through 2013. It also provides the distinction between the number perpetrated by people in the general public and by gang members. Surprisingly, it reveals that a disproportionate number of homicides committed in 2011 and 2013 were gang-related. Furthermore, it demonstrates that with regard to the homicide rate for this time frame, no significant reductions have occurred.

When asked, Has there been an increase in gang membership in Pitt County during these three years?, we were told, “Yes”. When asked which area of Greenville has the largest gang presence, we were informed that it was West Greenville, or what is referred to in the local law enforcement community as the West Zone. Gang unit officers also revealed that, “On the low end, we have one gang with 10-12 members. On the high end, they can number in excess of 150. We have around 500 validated, but there are many more not validated.”

#### **Part Four: Discussion**

Many strategies exist that promise to help reduce gangs and their corresponding criminal behavior (see Spergel, 1990; Spergel, and Curry, 1993; Fritch, Caeti, & Taylor, 1999; Stinchcomb, 2002; Spergel, 2007; Johnson and Muhlhausen, 2005; Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor, & Osgood, 2011). Moreover, Spergel and Curry (1993) posit that in order to effectively prevent crime and violence, jurisdictions with gang problems should apply strategies that include suppression (which is most commonly used), social intervention, organizational change and development, community organization, and opportunities. Similarly, McGloin (2005) claims that effective comprehensive gang programs must include elements of prevention, intervention, suppression, and require the cooperation of multiple agencies. Furthermore, researchers argue that juvenile crime in general, and gang behavior in particular, can be controlled through the use of social control regulations. Gaines and Miller (2010) argue that such practices are designed to prevent crime without addressing the root causes of the behavior. For example, these regulations typically include juvenile curfews and parental responsibility statutes. The latter strategy holds parents criminally liable for their children’s behavior (Adams, 2003). As such, parents can be punished with a fine, community service, diversion to counseling programs, or jail time depending on the nature and gravity of their children’s behavior (McDowell, 2006). Another social control regulation that is used includes community-based programs that provide at-risk youth the opportunity to turn away from a criminal lifestyle. According to Gaines and Miller (2010), these programs educate children and counsel parents about the dangers of crime and drugs. These efforts also target parents who abuse their children. Such programs are found in after-school workshops that are designed to prevent youth violence. Again, when implemented properly, they can help reduce juvenile crime and gang behavior.

Egley and colleagues (2014) report that the National Youth Gang Survey from 2012 that asked law enforcement agencies about their gang reduction strategies discovered that most agencies overwhelmingly reported using targeted patrol and having a gang unit. While the aforementioned strategies were primary, they were followed by participation in a multiagency gang task force and coordinated probation searchers. Some other reduction strategies that law enforcement agencies reported included: having a mandatory curfew, community-based anti-gang programs, target firearm initiative, gang member call-ins, multiagency re-entry programs, civil gang injunction, and civil gang ordinances. The research also found that these efforts were more likely to have been reported in larger cities (urban areas) rather than small towns. In fact, of the many strategies that were reported to have been used, it was estimated that 86% used targeted patrol, and 75% used gang units, respectively. Those strategies that were used the least included civil gang injunctions and civil ordinances (Egley et al., 2014). More importantly, the most popular and effective gang prevention measures used were targeted patrol, having a gang unit, and participating in a gang task force. In the end, their report suggested that while gang presence is found in nearly every jurisdiction in the nation, the growing concentration of gang criminal activity remains saturated in urban cities with large populations. Moreover, they revealed that in 2011 and 2012, fewer jurisdictions reported an increase in gang activity. They argued that this change can be attributed entirely to the decline in gang prevalence in areas with fewer people or in small towns (Egley et al., 2014).

Gang experts provide that effective responses to gang behavior require the development of a balanced and careful strategy that relies on a collective community response. For example, Howell and Egley (2005) argue that a comprehensive gang prevention approach can be used to help rural communities fight gang problems. Such an effort should consist of several components that include: (1) prevention programs that address diverting youth from developing problematic behaviors, becoming delinquent, and joining gangs; (2) intervention programs designed to rehabilitate delinquents and remove them from gangs; and (3) suppression activities that include law enforcement, prosecutors, and courts that target gang members with the most high-rate offenders (used in Greenville with the Call In List). This collective community response integrates collaboration from law enforcement, prosecutors, social services, corrections officials, juvenile and criminal court officials, and other stakeholders in the community to assess the gang problem and to develop prevention and intervention strategies (also see Howell and Curry, 2009).

In the past four years, the Greenville Police Department (GPD) reported implementing several gang prevention strategies that include: (1) the Call In List; (2) holding parents accountable for their children's absenteeism from school; (3) gang presentations at local schools; and (4) mandatory curfews. First, the Call In List is a collaborative effort between the GPD and other agencies, such as the local Department of Probation and Parole (DPP). Since many gang members are under the jurisdiction of the DPP, it allows police officers to better combat the gang problem by being able to quickly affect warrantless searches of gang members and their places of residence. Moreover, the Call In List was created to target

problematic persons in the community, many of whom have gang affiliations. Other agencies that are part of this team effort include: the local District Attorney's Office, the Winterville Police Department, Ayden Police Department, Farmville Police Department, Bethel Police Department, and the Sheriff's Office in Pitt County, North Carolina. Federal agencies are also a part of this effort. For example, some agencies that assist in the Call In List include: the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, & Explosives, Drug Enforcement Administration, and the U.S. Attorney's Office.

When individuals are placed on the "list", they are required to meet with representatives of these organizations where they are informed of possible punishments they could face from each agency for their criminal behavior. After meeting with agency personnel, they then meet with local clergy members who provide them with self-help information. Another component of the Call In List is that these at-risk individuals meet with representatives from the local community colleges who offer them help. Most at-risk individuals benefit from experiencing being placed on the call list, but some do not.

Second, the GPD combats gang violence and crime by holding the parents of gang members accountable when their school age children are found wandering the city streets when they should be at school. This is referred to as the truancy program where parents are ticketed and forced to pay a citation when their children are absent from school. Third, another effort used by the GPD is to routinely visit all levels of schools in Pitt County, including group houses, to increase everyone's level of awareness regarding gang presence and the crime and violence that they commit. More specifically, the presentation given by the GPD is contingent upon the age of students in the audience. For example, when they visit elementary and junior high schools, police focus on gang awareness and how to avoid being recruited. However, when they visit high school students, they focus on jail, prison, violence, and death. They hope that these efforts will reduce the spread of gangs and prevent the growth in gang membership. Their presentations also target administrators and faculty to help them better recognize whether gangs are present at their respective schools.

Last, the GPD also engages in enforcing mandatory curfews that require juveniles to be indoors at specified times. For example, in Greenville, mandatory curfews are enforced from Monday through Friday beginning at 11 p.m. and on Saturday beginning after 11:59 p.m. However, there are exceptions to this rule that include having a letter from the police chief, or leaving work or a sporting event headed for home.

This investigation reveals that the GPD approach to addressing the gang problem in Pitt County uses elements or components that have been proven successful in urban and rural areas with similar gang issues. More specifically, the GPD uses many of the elements reported in the research conducted by Howell and Egley (e.g., gang units, efforts to free teenagers from gangs, diversions from problematic behavior, gang task force), as well as components found in the research of Egley et al., (e.g., mandatory curfews, multiagency approaches, coordinated efforts with the department of probation, gang member call in's, and visits to area schools to educate teenagers about gang recruitment and violence associated with gang membership). While these strategies are helpful in reducing gang

membership and violence, they tend to be more effective at allowing police departments to better manage their respective gang problems. However, they fail to address the root causes of why gangs invariably form and sustain themselves in areas such as West Greenville which is characterized by police and city housing and development officials as being economically strained and socially disorganized. Consequently, if genuine efforts are made to eradicate gangs (not solely control them) from these environments, viable prevention programs must include components that address why gangs emerge and are attractive to the residents occupying this area of the city. Therefore, we recommend that gang prevention programs in general, and that the GPD in particular, include an essential component (which is noticeably absent from its approach) that was recommended earlier by Spergel and Curry (1993) when they argued for, among other key factors in gang suppression efforts, that they also include programs that provide opportunities and employment training. Similarly, we agree with the recommendations provided by Matz and Mowatt's (2014) research where they suggest that when the presence of gangs in rural areas have been determined to be threatening that law enforcement should also seek the help of non-law enforcement agencies (punitive measures), such as faith- and community-based organizations, private businesses, and others devoted to community safety. Perhaps strategies that offer both punitive and self-help components may be more effective.

As previously discussed, the high levels of poverty and unemployment found in West Greenville are double and nearly triple the amount reported for the national average. As such, gang membership may hold out the only promise to residents (i.e., disproportionately African-American males between the ages of 13 and 30) an opportunity to earn a living by engaging in the drug trade and other criminal enterprises in which gangs participate. However, along with the attraction and seduction of easy money comes a correspondingly high level of gun violence that often results in premature deaths and debilitating injuries among gang members and innocent community residents who are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. In this investigation, our findings contradict research reported by Egley et al. (2014) where they revealed fewer jurisdictions reported an increase in gang activity owing to a decline in gang activity in small towns since 2010. To the contrary, our study reveals that Greenville experienced an increase in gang involvement in homicides by 43% in 2011, a decrease to 16% in 2012, and another increase by 43% in 2013. Thus, accounting for a disproportionate number of killings compared to those perpetrated by the general population in Pitt County. What accounts for this contradiction or departure from what is being reported at the national level? It could be due to the excessive amounts of poverty and joblessness in West Greenville.

Because poverty and economic strain are so pervasive, many offenders and teenagers may reason that since there are no legitimate job opportunities, they do not have a real choice in the matter and decide that gang membership may be the only option to earn money. This point of view is consistent with the two structural theories presented in this investigation. Agnew's General Strain Theory is strongly supported when one considers the conditions and context under which people in the West Greenville area live. More specifically, because

of a lack of job opportunities that has been constant for a number of years, local residents may not believe their economic situation is likely to change. Moreover, because many in the area also lack adequate job training skills and a decent education, their future job prospects look bleak. This may account for the increase in the number of home invasions and robberies reported in the area. Agnew would also posit that the constant negative experiences, such as losing fellow gang members to incarceration, violence, and death exacerbates the level of hopelessness and despair that serves to deteriorate morale found in West Greenville. Moreover, the noxious experiences of dealing with rival gang members and the relentless “shake-downs” by law enforcement add further strain on residents who come to view illegal gang activities as attractive.

Similarly, Messerschmidt’s theory is also instructive in this regard. Structured Action Theory holds that in social settings where legitimate opportunities are nonexistent, a different type of masculinity may be required of those who live in these areas, especially among offenders in general, but gang members in particular. To protect what they have with respect to turf, reputation, status, or respect, they construct a violent masculinity (if there are female gang members, an oppositional brand of femininity) to negotiate these social settings. In these areas, it is the only form of currency that they have as a resource to “do” crime and gang behavior. Therefore, they engage in extreme brands of masculinity and femininity that allows them to sustain themselves as gang members.

Despite the fact that the strategies used by the GPD (especially mandatory curfews and ticketing parents) have been in effect for four years, there have not been any evaluations of their effectiveness. Nevertheless, the perception by the GPD is that they have been effective in reducing the number of assaults the city is currently experiencing. With that being said, there are two limitations associated with this investigation. First, is its heavy reliance on official crime statistics. As such, there are a number of problems that are associated with these types of data that range from law enforcement bias, to citizen reporting practices, to methodological issues that are well-documented within the criminological literature. Second, this study uses a nonprobability sampling technique. Because of this, our findings cannot be generalized beyond this study. Therefore, we believe that research conducted in the future on Greenville’s gang problem should incorporate a research design that uses a probability sample, as well as go beyond relying on interviews with its own officers to validate GPD’s official crime statistics.

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