



Jurisprudence Section – 2010

E1 Keeping Safe From Youth Gang Violence in Our Communities

Cliff Akiyama, MA, MPH, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, Department of Forensic Medicine, 4170 City Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19131-1694*

After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to explain the organization of youth street gangs, examine the historical evolution of gangs in the United States, distinguish the behavioral differences and similarities between gangs, compare and contrast activities of various gangs, and determine gang implications for medical examiner/coroner, forensic science, and law enforcement personnel.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing current trends and timely data on youth gangs; offer strategies on how to recognize and interpret various tattoos and graffiti associated with different youth gangs, which could assist the medical examiner/coroner, death investigator, and detective in the positive identification of the decedent out in the field and/or in the autopsy room. Most importantly, it is imperative that the medical examiner/coroner, forensic science, and law enforcement communities understand the “signs and symptoms” of various youth gangs in order to keep themselves and those around them safe when investigating the deaths of these gang members.

Youth gangs throughout the United States continue to terrorize the neighborhoods that they claim as their own, causing the citizens in these gang infested neighborhoods to live in constant fear of their lives every single day. As a result of the recent influx of gang violence and gang related homicides in all communities, the safety of those first responders and investigators at the scene are put in jeopardy, leaving the medical examiners/coroners, death investigators, and detectives as possible targets of intramural shootings just because they are at the scene. Throughout the United States gang violence has risen over 20% over the last year. Sadly, every single state has gangs and the problem is getting much worse in areas that would never have thought about gangs a year ago. Gangs are not just an urban problem, but a suburban and rural problem too. There are over 24,500 gangs in the United States with a total gang membership of 750,000. Ninety-four percent are male and six percent are female. The ethnic composition nationwide include: 47% Latino, 31% African-American, 13% Caucasian, 7% Asian, and 2% “mixed race” according to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice. This study identified eight distinct manifestations of youth gang violence and nine ethnic differences and similarities among African American, Latino, and Asian American gangs. A sample of the findings include: distinct cultural differences between African American, Latino, and Asian American gangs; drugs; weaponry; killing over turf/territory; extortion; defacing property/graffiti; women in gangs.

Youth Gangs, Youth Violence, Personnel Safety