



## Jurisprudence Section – 2011

### **E43 Understanding Asian Youth Gangs From Graffiti to Gang Enhancement Laws**

*Cliff Akiyama, MA, MPH\*, PCOM, Department of Forensic Medicine, 4170 City Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19131/1694*

After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to recognize and interpret various tattoos and graffiti associated with Asian gangs.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by helping them understand, while keeping themselves safe from gangs, especially Asian gangs.

Every single day we often hear of someone who has fallen victim to gang violence. 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. With the population of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans (API) continuing to rise in the United States, so do their needs. Unfortunately, not all Asian Americans are as uniformly educated, acculturated, and financially stable, as the myth of the “model minority” would have us suggest. Although adults from many nationality groups between Asian and Pacific Islanders have adapted well to life in the United States, serious problems have emerged among Asian American youth. In particular, youth gang violence in the

Asian and Pacific Islander community has dramatically increased in the last few years by nearly 35% nationwide according to the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. In Los Angeles County, California alone, there are currently 165 Asian youth gangs, with a total gang membership of over 6,000. In neighboring Orange County, California, gang involvement has reached an all time high with over 70 documented gangs and a membership of over 2,000. Demographics show gang member (male and female) age average of 15 with a range of 8-22 years. Even more disturbing is the increase of Asian females involved in gang activity. In Orange County, where the Asian gang population makes up 12%, there are 150 Asian female gang members, up 70% from last year. Other surrounding counties in California, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Fairfax County, Virginia, and Portland, Oregon have seen similar trends in the rise of Asian youth gangs.

The purpose of this paper is to present timely data on API youth gangs; offer strategies on how to recognize and interpret various tattoos and graffiti associated with these gangs, which could assist the medical examiner/coroner and death investigator in the positive identification of the decedent out in the field and/or in the autopsy room. This paper will also discuss some of the recent gang enhancement laws that California and Virginia have in place to help tackle this deadly problem.

#### **Youth Gangs, Asian American, Gang Prevention**