



D19 Toward a Better Understanding of Sexual Violence Among Female Youth Gang Members

Cliff Akiyama, MPH, MA, PCOM, Dept of Forensic Medicine, 4170 City Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19131-1694*

After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to identify the signs and symptoms of intimate partner violence in the female youth gang population. They should also be able to recognize some of the barriers to getting help and, most importantly, know where to turn for assistance if they suspect intimate partner violence in the female youth gang population. Moreover, the attendees will be able to analyze some novel prevention/intervention programs that have worked in the community to help stop this problem before it's too late.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by informing them of an extremely hidden topic of sexual violence in the female youth gang population.

Youth gangs throughout the United States continue to rise as well as 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. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the United States Department of Justice, there are over 24,500 gangs in the United States with a total gang membership of 750,000. Often overlooked in gangs is the pervasive bondage of sexual violence among female youth gang members. In Los Angeles County, California, alone, there are currently 9,000 female gang members, while in Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, there are 430 female gang members. Demographics show across both counties a female gang member average age of 15 years with a range of 8-22 years. Over 400 female gang members were interviewed in the streets, jails, and juvenile halls, using a target questionnaire in Los Angeles and Philadelphia. This study found that over 80% of all female youth gang members are "sexed in," as an initiation tactic of getting into a youth gang. Getting "sexed in" the gang means that the prospective female gang member has to have sexual intercourse with all of the male gang members in that particular gang set or clique. Moreover, the study found that 25% of the female gang members interviewed have a history of child sexual abuse. Unfortunately, female gang members are least likely to report rape victimization due to fear of death by the male gang members. The study also found that of the female gang members that are physically and/or sexually abused by the male gang members within the gang, 97% have never utilized any rape or physical abuse services such as a rape crisis center or shelter within their communities, while 60% of the female gang members do not even know about the services available to them. Furthermore, with the technical assistance of Women Organized Against Rape (WOAR), a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, rape crisis center, this study identified 12 distinct barriers to disclosure and service utilization of female youth gang members who experience sexual and physical violence across their lifespan (i.e., immigration issues, racism, depression, anxiety, fear of death, shame, isolation, age, lack of health insurance, lack of child care, lack of affordable housing, lack of independent income, lack of support from the family/community, cultural fluency, and just not knowing the available resources surrounding intimate partner violence).

Youth Gangs, Sexual Violence, Youth Violence