

Gang Activity and Perceptions of Safety in Robeson County

Honors Project

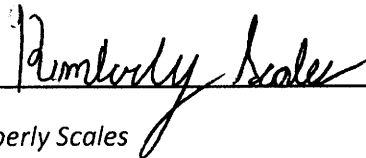
**In fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Esther G. Maynor Honors College
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By

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Exercise and Sports Science

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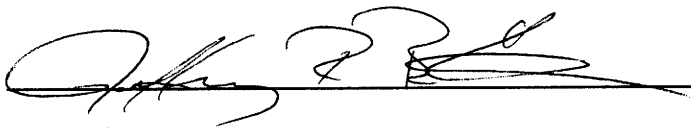


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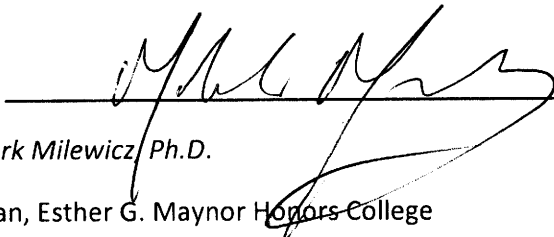


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ABSTRACT

GANG ACTIVITY AND PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY IN ROBESON COUNTY

By

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Gang Activity is considered a public health and safety issue in America today. Gang activity involves violent criminal acts of all kinds including theft, murder, assault, human trafficking and the sale of illicit drugs. In Robeson County, many citizens do not know the severity of the crimes being committed by gangs or the amount of gangs located throughout the county. For this study, extensive research on the location of gangs in Robeson County and the various crimes performed by these gangs within the last five years was conducted and distributed to 17 participants in the form of a survey intervention. Before viewing the intervention data, each participant's current knowledge of gangs, crime and individual safety perceptions were collected. After viewing the intervention data, participants

were given the same survey and changes in answers were recorded. The hypothesis was that participants would feel less safe, more knowledgeable about gangs and more fearful of crimes being committed in their community following the intervention. The results supported the hypothesis that participants would feel less safe in their community and more knowledgeable about gang activity following the intervention. However, participants did not record an increase in fear of crimes being committed in their community following the intervention. Although more research must be conducted in order to obtain a sample size more representative of Robeson County, the results found in this study show that an increased knowledge of gang activity in the community directly effects community safety perceptions.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Gangs and gang related activity are prevalent threats to health and safety in America today. According to the North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety (NCDCCPS, 2010) a gang is defined as "any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, which engages in a pattern of criminal activity." There are many different types of gangs located throughout all areas of the United States, and gangs enlist members of all ages, races and genders. Gangs are often involved in chronic drug use and distribution, which can also lead to crimes of burglary, assault, sexual assault, theft and gun violence (Sheley, Zhang, Brody, & Wright, 1995). While the magnitude of these crimes varies for different gangs, these illicit activities still pose a threat to the health and safety of citizens that live near or around an area in which a gang resides. Innocent victims as well as other gang members may be targeted for burglary, assault and other illicit gang activity. Gang activity also poses a threat to youth, because gangs often recruit school aged youth to become members of their gang for protection or other social reasons (National Gang Center, n.d.). Youths who join gangs are forced to fight, rape or commit a crime in order to their complete initiations (National Crime Prevention Council, n.d.). Because of the severity of the violence committed by gangs, gang related activity can pose a serious threat to the health and safety of a community.

According to the NCDCCPS (2010), there are 891 reported gangs in North Carolina alone, five of which reside in the Robeson County area. This information is based solely on reported gang offenses. However, many gangs are not reported, thereby diluting the prevalence of gangs and the severities of the crimes those gangs commit (NCDCCPS, 2010).

Detective Jose Hernandez, the former Robeson County Gang Investigator, has cataloged the activities of more than 70 gangs located throughout various parts of Robeson County over the last five years (J. Hernandez, personal communication, May 21, 2014). Four of the most notorious gangs in the area have committed nearly 500 crimes over the past five years, including numerous acts of robbery, assault and firearm possession (J. Hernandez, personal communication, May 21, 2014). While these numbers are remarkable enough, it is important to note that these numbers only reflect reported gangs and their criminal activity over the last five years.

In providing this information, Detective Hernandez (personal communication, September 2, 2014) warned:

Be mindful that the information is based on known and validated gang members at the time and it is based on crimes that they have been charged with and it represents a very conservative number. You could easily double or even triple the numbers of crimes attributed to gangs. The information is based on the criminal history of gang members that I had to meticulously go over one by one so not to repeat the same charges for the same crime.

According to Detective Hernandez, 78 gang members have been charged with murder since 2008 (as cited in Barnes, 2013). In 2012 and 2013, there were at least two gang related murders including the murder of an innocent teenaged boy and the murder of a Lumberton police officer (Brown, 2013). Many government officials tie the gang problem in Robeson County to the socioeconomic issues of the county including poverty, single parent families, lack of government resources to fight off crime and a lack of safe activities for children to participate in (Barnes, 2013). Robeson County is also ranked as the sixth most violent county in the country (Krouse,

2012). A very recent example of the crime in Robeson County occurred on October 22nd 2014, when an armed home robbery took place in Lumberton. The home robbery, which was initiated by three young adult males, resulted in the death of one of the assailants and several injuries to both parties (Willets, 2014). The two surviving assailants were repeat offenders of various crimes (Willets, 2014).

Robeson County citizens are concerned with gang violence in their community. According to the 2011 Robeson County Community Health Assessment, gangs and violence ranked fifth in the biggest safety concerns for Robeson County citizens (Robeson County Health Department, 2011). Many Robeson County parents have dealt with the loss of a child due to gang violence and are working on ways to fight back. Julia Kennedy, a single mother who raised five children, lost one of her sons through gang violence (Barnes, 2013). Kennedy is currently working on creating a nonprofit organization to keep youth boys out of the gang lifestyle (Barnes, 2013).

Despite the efforts of gang detectives and parents of slain gang children to improve government resources to combat it, gang involvement and violence is growing worse in Robeson County (Barnes, 2013). Many citizens are unaware of the extent at which gangs and gang related violence are occurring in their community. It is important for them to be aware of the magnitude and frequency at which gang related crimes are being committed. Awareness of current illicit gang activity may motivate the citizens of Robeson County to report gang sightings, keep youth occupied and off the streets where gang activity and recruitment occur, and increase the overall state of safety and well-being for Robeson County citizens. The purpose of this research study was to present the citizens of Robeson County with information of gang activity within the

county in order to determine the extent to which the knowledge gained from that information affected the citizens' perceived safety and well-being.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

Gangs and gang related activity are presenting relevant threats to the public health and safety of North Carolina citizens. One of the North Carolina counties that has been impacted by gang activity the most is Robeson County. Robeson County is a small, racially diverse, rural county located in south eastern North Carolina. According to the 2013 US census bureau, Robeson County only consists of 134,841 citizens compared to the state's total population of nearly ten million citizens (United States Census Bureau, 2013). Despite having a small population size compared to the state, Robeson County is one of the most violent, crime-ridden counties in North Carolina (Hixenbaugh, n.d.). Additionally, Robeson County was also ranked as one of the most violent counties in America (Krouse, 2012). In 2012, Robeson County was ranked as the sixth most violent county in the state, with 9117 criminal acts being reported in 2012 (Robusto, 2014). Many of these criminal acts include robbery, assault, burglary, rape and crimes against property. In addition to these crimes, as many as 18 murders have been reported in Robeson County in 2014 alone (Robusto, 2014).

With such alarming numbers, government and police officials in Robeson County are attempting to discover why the magnitude of crime in the area is so high. One problem that the county has been struggling with for many years is gangs and gang related activity. Only five gangs were reported by the North Carolina General Assembly in 2010 (NCDCCPS, 2010). However, former Robeson County gang investigator Detective Jose Hernandez, stated that there are well over 70 gangs located throughout various parts of the county (J. Hernandez, personal

communication, May 21, 2014). The crimes committed by these gangs consist of hundreds of acts of robbery, assault, rape, vandalism, and murder, many of which go unreported and therefore, undocumented by the city. (J. Hernandez, personal communication, September 2, 2014). While gang activity is not the sole cause of such high levels of crime in Robeson County, it is certainly a contributing factor, and Robeson County Citizens are aware of the threats that gang activity poses to the community. According to the 2011 Robeson Community Health Assessment, gang and gang violence was ranked as the 5th biggest safety concern by the citizens of Robeson County (Robeson County Health Department, 2011).

The crimes committed by these gangs not only pose a threat to public safety but also a threat to the health status of the citizens and youth of Robeson County. Historically gang violence has been considered as a public safety issue. However, national health centers such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control have also declared gang activity to be a public health issue because of the negative impact that gang violence is having on youth and the community (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2001).

The Definition of a Gang

Throughout time, the definition of a gang has been debated and altered. The first reported definition of gang activity was in 1927, by Fredrick Thrasher (Bjerregaard, 2002). Fredrick Thrasher's definition consisted of the organizational and social structure of a typical gang but did not mention the criminal activity associated with the gang (2002). Since then, the definition of a "gang" has evolved to include the groups' involvement in criminal activity, yet the definition of gang and gang membership differs among researchers. Some definitions focus more on the organizational structure of the gang while others focus on the magnitude of the crimes committed

by these gangs (2002). It is important to establish a proper balance of both gang organization and the crimes committed by these gangs in order to construct an effective definition for the word "gang"(2002). How the word "gang" is defined within a community will affect the public's perception of the severity of the gang related activity in their area (2002). Government officials' willingness to initiate policies and reforms against gang violence is also impacted by how well the definition of a "gang" describes the severity of the crimes being committed. (2002).

In establishing a proper definition for the term "gang", it is also important that the gang researcher is able to differentiate between a group of similar people and an actual organized gang. Beth Bjerregaard (2002) collected data on youth and their personal definitions of gang and gang involvement. Information from the study found that substantial involvement in delinquent behavior was found to be one of the key factors that differentiated an organized gang from a group of guys "hanging out" (2002). Participation in delinquent activities such as robbery, vandalism and gang fighting was reported to be much higher in those who identified themselves as gang members than those who did not (2002). Respondents who reported being members of a gang also reported an increased possession of firearms and had group characteristics that were similar to that of an organized street gang, such as names, leaders, symbols and geographical territories (2002).

For this review of literature, the North Carolina General Assembly's definition will be used to define a street gang: The North Carolina General Assembly defines a street gang as, "any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, which engages in a pattern of criminal activity" (NCDCCPS, 2010). This definition recognizes the typical size and organizational structure of a gang and publicizes a pattern of criminal activity that is consistent with the acts of an organized gang. This definition also alerts

the public about the potential danger and severity of the gang activity in order to influence the public's perception of the severity of gang activity and trigger action by policy makers.

(Bjerregaard, 2002).

Gang Involvement Demographics

In America, there are over 33,000 street gangs and there are well over a million gang members in total (The Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2011). These numbers, however, only reflect gangs that have been reported. The crimes for which those gangs have been reported include robbery, drug and gun trafficking, fraud, extortion, and prostitution rings (2011).

According to the FBI's 2011 National Gang Threat Assessment (NGTA), major cities and suburban areas experience the most gang violence, while local neighborhood gangs tend to pose the most significant threat to the safety and health of citizens in smaller communities. The FBI's 2011 NGTA also found that gangs are responsible for an average of 48% of the violent crimes in larger communities and 90% in other smaller communities (2011). Gangs and gang activity was also found to be scattered throughout America but was found to be more prevalent in western and southern states (2011). The number of gangs are also steadily increasing and branching out beyond American borders (2011).

People of all races are involved in gangs and gang activity. However, minorities, specifically Blacks and Hispanics, are more likely to join a gang than Whites (National Gang Center, 2011). A 1996 study reported that minority youth were about 86% of the total gang population (as cited in Bell & Lim, 2005). Factors such as racism and socio-economic status play a role in this phenomenon. For example, in post-World War II Los Angeles, many different cultures moved to South Central to take advantage of a prospering economy (2005). However, racial tension and intolerance during this time caused many minorities to feel economically and

socially isolated, which facilitated minority youth gang participation for a sense of belonging and unity in economically challenged housing areas (2005). According to Rob White (2009), some gangs allow multiple races to join their gang, if willing, while others do not allow other races to join their gangs.

Both males and females can become members of gangs. Historically, it has been believed that female participation in gangs was very low; however, recent studies show that the prevalence of female gang members is higher than previously assumed by law enforcement authorities (Esbensen, Piper Deschenes & Winfree, 1999). Further, Esbensen et al. (1999) found that out of a poll of 623 students who met the criteria to be considered a gang member, approximately 62% were male and 38% female (1999). While the number of males nearly doubles that of females, 38% is still considered to be a higher number of females involved in a gang sample than previously believed (1999). Female gang members may also participate in more delinquent crimes than previously assumed. Historically, female gang members were only seen as being sexual objects to the gang or useful in facilitating rivalries among gang members (1999). Today, it is clear that females are also partaking in various delinquent activities. It was also reported that female gang members commit the same patterns of crimes as male gang members, just at a lower frequency (1999). Finally, it was noted that female gang members are also more likely to leave the gang at a certain age than are male gang members, which may affect female and male gang member distribution in gang sample sizes (1999).

Gang Structure

The organizational structure of a gang is often stable, strategic and sometimes even highly sophisticated (FBI, 2011). There is normally an initiation process and a set of rules to follow once becoming a gang member (Bell & Jim, 2005). Certain clothes and symbols are also

associated with gang involvement in order to identify which gang one is involved in (2005).

Gangs also delegate certain geographical boundaries or "territories" within the community where only members of their gang may "hang out" or sell drugs and other paraphernalia (White, 2009).

Many gangs require an established leader and a hierarchy, to be followed and respected (Bell & Jim, 2005).

The FBI's 2011 NGTA have found alarming evidence of increased sophistication in gang organization and structure. Some gangs have become smaller extensions of well-known global gangs (FBI, 2011). Gang members are also encouraging fellow members to become employed in law enforcement and government agencies in order to spy on laws that are being made against gangs and criminal activities (2011). Gangs have developed better access to more sophisticated guns and weaponry by infiltrating the military and attacking police officers and facilities where ammunition, body armour and other weaponry is plentiful (2011). Gangs are also developing ways to make more money including through alien smuggling into the country and prostitution and drug trafficking rings that extend beyond American borders (2011). Gang members who have been imprisoned rely on cell-phone smuggling and corruption of law correctional staff as alternative modes of communication. (2011). Gangs are also becoming discrete by abandoning traditional symbols, signs, tattoos and other visual identifiable characteristics (2011).

Gang Recruitment

Gang sophistication in America is causing an increase in gang recruitment. (FBI, 2011). According to the FBI 2011 NGTA, gangs often recruit teenage youth for several reasons. One reason why youth are being targeted by gang recruiters is their susceptibility to being pressured into a gang due to the benefits they perceive they will receive by joining (2011). These perceived benefits may include increased social status, respect, a sense of belonging, protection

and increased revenue (National Crime Prevention Council, n.d.). Another reason youth have become targets for gang recruitment is because youth will typically receive shorter jail sentences for crimes committed than would an adult that committed the same crime (FBI, 2011). Youths are also being targeted into gangs due to increased incarceration of older members. Teenagers are also recruited into gangs by family members who are already gang members (White, 2009). Targeted youth are often recruited at local grade school facilities and low-income neighborhoods (National Crime Prevention Council, n.d.). However, most gang members, whether male or female decided to join a gang by choice, not by force, despite aggressive recruitment tactics (n.d.).

Gang recruitment initiation, differs between young boys and girls. For some boys, initiation into the gang sometimes requires that the boy fight other members of the gang (National Crime Prevention Council, n.d.). Other initiations include committing a certain crime against a rival gang, police officer or even an innocent by standard (National Crime Prevention Council, n.d.). Young females are often forced to fight other female gang members in order to be initiated (n.d.). Females may also be initiated into a gang by being raped by other gang members or being forced to commit certain crimes, similar to boy gangs, (n.d.).

Why Youth Are Joining Gangs

Many teenage boys and girls go through the dangerous initiation process because they believe that the benefits of being in a gang will outweigh the dangers of being initiated or not being affiliated with a gang at all (National Crime Prevention Council, 2011). Numerous studies have attempted to discover why gangs are seen as an attractive choice for youth. One study conducted by Chanequa Walker-Barnes and Craig Mason discovered reasons why young girls decided to join gangs (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001). Another study conducted by Jewelle

Gibbs discovered ten different reasons why young men decide to join gangs (Gibbs, 2000). The reasons founded in both studies have been combined and summarized in the following paragraphs.

According to both Gibbs and Walker-Barnes study, one reason why gang membership is a popular choice among youth is the sense of group identity and family that comes with joining a gang. Both female and male gang members in both studies reported the increased sense of belonging and identity gained through gang involvement was an important factor in joining a gang. Participants in Walker-Barnes and Mason's study stated that loneliness and desire for female friendships was a strong risk factor for female gang involvement (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001, 315). In Gibbs study, former gang members reported that their original families were often dysfunctional and that closer bonds were formed with their former gang members than with their real family, which gave them comfort (Gibbs, 2011, 83). Participants in Gibbs study, also stated racial isolation played a role in their decision to join a gang in order to gain identity in a society where they were otherwise seen as invisible or treated as an outsider (2001, 83).

Youth are also attracted to gang membership because of the increase in social status and social activity associated with gang participation. (Gibbs, 2001, 84). Among female gang members, Walker-Barnes found that over half of the respondents believe that gang activity gives them a chance to experience something exciting that they would not otherwise do if they were not in a gang (Walker Barnes & Mason, 2001, 315). Walker-Barnes and Mason also found that peer pressure played a role in whether or not female gang members would resist joining a gang (2001, 313). Females were more likely to join a gang if their friend was a gang member (2001, 313). Some of the female participants also believed that joining a gang would earn them respect

from their peers and instill fear among others (2001, 324). According to Gibbs, male gang members stated that they had more activities to do in a gang because they could go to outside parties and "chill" with their gang members in an environment that they are not likely to be arrested in (Gibbs, 2001, 85). Male gang members in this study also stated that being in a gang enhanced their social status and earned them respect, fear and attention (Gibbs, 2001, 84).

Male and female gang members also reported that a desire for social structure and support as being an important factor in choosing to join a gang. Walker-Barnes and Mason's female respondents stated that they were more likely to join a gang if they had discord among their family, or if their parents were not good role models for them (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001, 320). Female respondents also felt that abuse in the home was a risk factor for joining a gang (2001, 323). Male respondents in Gibbs study stated that increased social structure and support was an attractive feature in a gang (Gibbs, 2001, 85). Gang members with discord in their families were more likely to see a gang as being functional and more organized and therefore a more desirable way to escape the turmoil at home and become a member of more organized and structured family (2001, 85).

Female and male gang members are often offered protection against others through gang membership. In Walker-Barnes and Mason's study, 70% of the female respondents agreed that joining a gang offers increased security from being killed during a fight. One female response describes the individual perceived severity of fights in her neighborhood area and why she feels being in a gang is necessary for protection and possibly even survival reasons: "Rules of the neighborhood. Like where I stay at, if you get in a fight you gone die. So if you get in a fight, you gone join a gang so you'll have people to back you up" (Walker Barnes & Mason, 2001, 317). In Gibbs study, male respondents reported similar results found similar results in that

joining a gang prevents one from being attacked due to walking in another gangs "territory" (Gibbs, 2001, 86).

Finally, both female and male respondents stated that poverty and neighborhood surroundings played an important role in their motivations to join a gang. According to Walker-Barnes and Mason's study, 76% of the female respondents agreed that poverty was a risk factor for joining a gang (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001, 315). One female respondent stated that seeing gang members with name brand clothing could possibly entice a young female who desires to be fashionable but has limited financial means (2001, 315). Women who have been exposed to frequent criminal activity in their neighborhood was believed to be a risk factor for women joining a gang in order to model the criminal activity they have seen all of their lives. (2001, 319). Adolescents who have witnessed violence tend to have a stronger tendency to use violence as well (Kelly, 2010, 67). In Gibbs study, poverty played a big role in male desires to join a gang. In fact, gang and gang members commit criminal activities such as robbery, theft and vandalism primarily to generate income for themselves (NCDCCPS, 2010). For young men, being in a gang promises economic sufficiency in a world where legitimate forms of income are not promised or are insufficient to meet their needs or desires (Gibbs, 2001, 87). Similar to female respondents, male respondents agreed that neighborhood surroundings and pre-exposure to violence influenced their decision to join a gang (Gibbs, 2001, 87).

Gang Activities

Youth are considered part of a gang after going through the gangs' initiation process. As stated earlier, gangs are involved in criminal acts as a means of making quick money. Some gangs may even make up to a million dollars a month from a combination of crimes (National Drug Intelligence Center, 2005). Many of these crimes can be highly sophisticated and

complicated. Some of the most common crimes committed by gangs is the selling of drugs, human trafficking and prostitution, robbery and theft, violence against others, and the use of firearms.

Gangs are involved in the selling of a wide variety of illegal drugs including ecstasy, marijuana, crack cocaine and methamphetamine (National Drug Intelligence Center, 2005). Gangs are also considered the primary source for drug distribution on the streets (2005). According to the FBI 2011 NGTA, law enforcement agencies reported that 69% of drug distribution reported gang involvement (FBI, 2011). The selling and distribution of drugs among gangs in the same area may lead to disputes in regards to territories and where a certain gang is allowed to sell drugs which may also lead to violence and murder within the community (2011).

Gang members also frequently use drugs and alcohol for recreational purposes. A 2010 found that youth involved in gangs used drugs and alcohol, and engaged in drug and alcohol related fights at a higher rate than youth that did not belong to a gang (Swahn, Bossarte, West, & Topalli, 2010, 354). This study also found that gang members began drinking alcohol at an earlier age compared to those who were not involved in gangs (Swahn et al., 2010, 357). Gang members are often found to use substances at a higher rate even after leaving the gang than those who had never joined a gang. This chronic use of drugs exhibited by gang members results in an increase in violence, an increased rate of disease and other psychological issues among youth and the community, which can be considered a public health issue (Hoffman, 2014, 35).

Human trafficking, prostitution and rape are common crimes committed by gang members. Human trafficking and prostitution is used as another source of gang revenue. In fact, prostitution was found to be the second largest source of income for gangs located in San Diego, California. (FBI, 2011). Young women and children are often targeted by gang members because

of their vulnerability. Some are lured while others are forced into prostitution. Gangs often use violence and psychological abuse in order to control these young women and children (FBI 2011).

According to the FBI (2011):

In November 2010, federal law enforcement officials indicated that "29 members of a Somalian gang in Minneapolis for operating an interstate sex trafficking ring that sold and transported underage African-American and Somalian females from Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Columbus, Ohio, and Nashville, Tennessee, for prostitution, according to FBI and ICE reporting.

The NGTA also reported that prostitution was the second largest source of income for San Diego gangs in California. The women and children that are forced into this type of behavior suffer from extreme emotional and physical abuse and severe sexual exploitation, which is a major public health and safety issue.

Robbery and theft is often used as a means to obtain quick money for the gang. Homes and cars around the neighborhood where the gang resides are often burglarized (Sheley, Zhang, Brody, Wright, 1995). Some are even left damaged and car parts are often stolen from cars and sold on the streets (Sheley et al., 1995). Stores may also be robbed. Many times, these robberies also involve a firearm in order to intimidate the victim of the robbery (Sheley et al., 1995). This can ultimately lead to violence or death of a fellow gang member or innocent by standard. According to the NGTA, gang members are acquiring firearms through a variety of means including, "illegal purchases; straw purchases through surrogates or middle-men; thefts from individuals, vehicles, residences and commercial establishments; theft from law enforcement and

military officials, from gang members with connections to military sources of supply, and from other gangs" (FBI, 2011). The use of firearms among different gangs also facilitate violence among rival gangs which may lead to the slaying of another gang member or a drive-by-shooting

Recently in Robeson County, a violent burglary occurred in which one was left dead and three injured (Willets, 2014). Three young armed burglars broke into an older man's home and attempted to steal money from his safe and sexually assault his granddaughter (2014). The burglary turned violent, resulting in one of the burglars being killed and two others injured (2014). The victims were injured; however, they survived the attack. The two remaining burglars were jailed and are currently awaiting trial (2014). It is unknown whether the three criminals belonged to a gang (2014). However, the type of crime committed and the violence used is typical of a gang related crime (2014). Both of the surviving criminals were repeat offenders and both had broken probation by participating in the crime (2014).

Violence and animosity against rival gangs is also a common gang trait. Conflict between two different gangs often arises when the individual gangs' geographical location or "territory" is invaded or disrespected by another gang (White, 2009). These conflicts can result in violence and even murder. Racial tensions between gangs also arise because gang members of a similar race tend to stick up for one another out of racial loyalty, even if they are the ones responsible for the wrongdoing (White, 2009, 52). This type of racial loyalty has caused violent tension between gangs of different races that reside in the same area in America. One example of this issue was reported by two youth gangs in the popular non-fiction work titled *The Freedom Writers Diary* (1999). Names of the writers were not given in order protect the young writers identities, however, one Hispanic female gang member witnessed the murder of a Cambodian male gang member by the hands of a fellow gang member. When asked to be a witness against

her fellow gang member at his trial she had reservations about telling the jury the truth of what happened because she desired to protect her gang member. (The Freedom Writers, & Gruwell, 1999, 64). Her desire to protect her own gang member caused conflict between the Hispanic and Cambodian gangs in the Los Angeles area, which often turned into violent fights between the two gangs (1999). Conflicts of this nature happen often between gangs of different races and may lead to more violent criminal behavior such as fights and murder between different gangs as well as emotional distress to youth who are involved in these conflicts (1999).

Gang Activity as a Public Health and Safety Issue

The reason why gang activity is being considered a public health and a public safety issue today is due to the violent nature of the criminal activities that are being committed by gangs. Drug use, prostitution, robbery and theft have negative psychological effects on not only the gang members themselves but also the citizens of the community. A study done on the exposure to community violence and social support found that youth who witnessed community violence displayed increased problem behaviors such as aggression, withdrawal and hyper activity (Kelly, 2010). Parents and community members may also feel anxiety and emotional distress due fear of losing their child to gang violence or the potential of gangs in their area doing harm to them or their property. Many of these crimes also lead to violence. The increased use of violence is affecting today's youth, which is evident by the rise of youth violence, including the number of youth who are beginning to bring and use firearms on school grounds (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2011). Gang activity is also being considered a public health issue because of the correlation between violent behavior and homicide. Homicide is the second leading cause of death in America. Additionally, 82.8% of youth aged 10-24 who were homicide victims were killed by a firearm (Center for Disease Control, 2010). Fighting is also increasing

in schools (2010). Eliminating gangs and gang violence will help decrease the growing violence rate of young adults as well as improve the psychological health of youth and the community (Hill, Levermore, Twaite, & Jones, 1996).

Getting Out of a Gang

. While some gangs do not allow members to leave, others have threatened members wishing to leave a gang with death and have carried that threat out (Young & Gonzalez, 2013). However, many gangs allow their members to leave with no consequences (National Crime Prevention Council, n.d.). According to the National Crime Prevention Council (n.d.), getting out of a gang is possible. Former gang members have shared a number of reasons for wanting to leave a gang, including fear of personal injury, imprisonment, or death; anticipation of sibling, involvement; and the birth of a child (National Crime prevention Council, n.d.). Many former gang members have been treated and given intervention for various problems such as anger management, post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse (Young & Gonzalez, 2013). Former gang members are encouraged to reach out to gang interventionist in order to treat these problems and start their lives on a path without gang activity (2013). Some former gang members are forced to relocate in order to avoid retaliation from their old gangs while others are able to stay in where they live (2013). However, gang members that are able to stay must beware of former rival gang members and marked territories as they no longer have the protection they once received from being in a gang (2013).

Preventing Gang Activity in the Community

Preventing gang activity from occurring is one way to combat growing gang numbers and assist with protecting the safety of the community. However this task must be initiated by the entire community.

According to Sherree Wood and Jane Huffman (1999),

[But police organizations are not the only institutions which should be involved in preventing gang activity and violence. Governmental agencies, businesses and employers, schools, community groups, religious institutions, health care institutions, the family, social service agencies, and volunteer agencies may also provide assistance to gang members and their families in the community. All should be working in a coalition to prevent youth participation in gangs and other alternative organizations, and to assist them in leaving once they are members.] (19).

Preventing gang activity is more effective when done in a variety of ways. A community bond stronger than the bond that current gangs have is necessary for preventing gang involvement in youth. Positive role models is also listed as a source of combating gang violence (Wood & Huffman, 1999).

Throughout the last two decades, several gang prevention programs have been implemented that employ the entire community in their efforts. One program titled Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T), which aims to prevent gangs and delinquency was invented in 1991. (Esbenson et al., 2011). At first, the program yielded very little results so the curriculum was revised (Esbenson et al., 2011).

A summary of the revised program states:

[The revised program's two main goals are to help youths (a) avoid gang membership, violence, and criminal activity; and (b) develop a positive relationship with law enforcement. The revised curriculum (see Appendix) consists of 13 lessons aimed at teaching youths the life skills (e.g., communication and refusal skills, conflict resolution, and anger management techniques) thought necessary to prevent involvement in gang behavior and delinquency] (Esbenson et al., 56).

The program is taught in middle schools in the U.S and various other parts of the world.

A second evaluation of the revised G.R.E.A.T program generated favorable outcomes that were consistent with the two main program goals. Students exposed to the G.R.E.A.T program were more likely to have positive attitudes towards police, negative attitudes towards gangs, better refusal skills and were better able to withstand peer pressure as opposed to students who were not exposed to the G.R.E.A.T program (Esbesnen et al., 2011). Students who were exposed to the G.R.E.A.T program were also 54% less likely to become gang members (2011). While the revised G.R.E.A.T program was found to have a positive effect on participants these effects are only short-term (2011). A long-term evaluation of the G.R.E.A.T as of yet has not been studied (2011). The G.R.E.A.T program is only intended to reduce gang involvement in participants, not the entire the community (2011). However, the G.R.E.A.T program is still an effective program to use to spread gang awareness to youth and how to combat gang involvement pressure.

The Little Village Gang Violence Reduction Project is another program that is combating gangs and gang involvement. The Little Village Gang Violence Reduction Project consists of six strategies to reducing gang violence (Spergel & Grossman, 1997). The six strategies are community mobilization, opportunities provision, social intervention, suppression, organization

change and development, and targeting (1997). Community mobilization involves using local citizens and organizations of high gang level areas (1997). Opportunities provision consist of creating better jobs and activities for at-risk, low income youth to do to occupy their time, alternative schools and family support structures (1997). Social intervention involves reaching out to gang members through counseling, drug treatment programs and job services (1997). Suppression involves surveillance, supervision and communication with other community organizations (1997). Organization change and development involves reducing and preventing gang crime and reaching out too at risk youth (1997). Targeting refers to being able to target at-risk youth and being able to define a gang and gang activity (1997).

. The Little Village Gang Violence Reduction Project is successful in many ways. Perceived gang violence was reduced two years after the project was implemented (Spergel & Grossman, 1997, 468). Employment and graduation rates of targeted youth improved throughout the project (1997, 464). Those who participated in the project also showed a reduction in gang crime as opposed to those who did not (1997, 465).

Conclusion

Gangs and gang violence are causing many threats in the U.S to public health and safety. Not only are gang actions typically violent and detrimental to health but they also negatively influence youth in the community. Youth are easily recruited into gangs and are therefore keeping gangs up and running for many generations, increasing the rate of violence within the community. Not only are youth affected by gang violence but also former gang members who wish to turn their lives a round will have a hard time adjusting to life and will struggle through many mental health and safety issues. While gang activity is preventable, it requires a

community effort to combat. Successful combating of gang activity will not only reduce the crime rate but will also improve the quality of life for youth and citizens in the community.

Finding ways to combat gangs will also be useful to the Robeson County Community as well. Gang violence in the area is increasing and innocent victims are being injured as a result of it. Youth in the area are also becoming caught up in the gang lifestyle and without a community effort to fight off gang violence, many youth will likely lose their life due to gangs and gang violence. The public health and safety of Robeson County will improve by a decrease in gang activity. Gang violence is preventable in Robeson County, but it requires cooperation from the entire community.

Chapter 3

Methods and Procedures

Subjects and Setting.

This research study was open to all Robeson County citizens who were at least 18 years and had access to a working computer with an Internet connection. Subjects were also required to have a valid email address in order to be entered into the gift card drawing. Participation in this survey was voluntary and subjects could choose to withdraw from the survey at any time without penalty. Subjects were contacted via email and social media and were prompted to the survey by clicking on the link contained in the email or on the social media.

Survey Design and Procedures:

For this study, a survey instrument with four phases was conducted using Qualtrics Software. The survey consisted of a gang pretest and post-test phase. Both the pretest and post-test surveys were created by combining two neighborhood and safety perception surveys that were previously completed by two different authors. The names of the two surveys used in this research study are "Community Perceptions of Brownsville"(Hynynen, 2011) and "Neighborhood Watch Crime Perception Survey" (Paskoff, 2007). Consent to use these two surveys was obtained by the authors prior to the creation of the pretest and post-test surveys. The gang pretest survey was presented to the subject first. Subjects were asked a series of questions related to their demographics and their perceptions regarding neighborhood safety gangs and gang activity in their communities. After completing the pretest survey, subjects proceeded to the second phase of the survey. The second phase disseminated information of gangs and gang activity data in certain areas of Robeson County over the past five years. The education

intervention of phase two included data on the types and frequency of crimes committed by four of the most dangerous gangs in Robeson County. An article on gang violence in Robeson County was also included in the second part of the survey. After looking over the data and information contained in the second phase the subjects proceeded to the third phase, which was a repeat of the initial survey taken in the first phase, thereby becoming a post-test, by which the research team would be able to ascertain the effect of the intervention materials in the second phase. After completing the third survey, the subject was linked to the final stage of the study, which prompted him/her to enter his/her e-mail address in order to be entered into two gift certificate drawings. The survey takes approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Data Collection

The data collected was Likert scale data, which was ordinal level data. Therefore, hard statistical tests were not appropriate. Instead, simple counts were used to determine the range of responses between the two editions of the tests. Those counts were reported in table form in the results section of this paper.

Hypothesis

Based on the types of crimes committed by gangs in Robeson County and their frequency rates, it can be predicted that the citizens of Robeson County will rate their perceived safety lower on the post-test than the pretest. It can also be predicted that the citizens of Robeson County will become more fearful of certain crimes committed by gangs following the intervention phase of the survey. Finally, the citizens of Robeson County will rate their knowledge of gang activity and gangs in their area higher on the post-test following the intervention phase.

Chapter 4

Results

Seventeen participants completed the pretest and posttest survey. Fourteen of the participants were Caucasian, two were Native American, and one was Black. Twelve of the responses were from women and five were from men. The mean age of the participants' was 38.93 (± 14.23) years. The mean annual income of the participants was \$62,600.

Table 1

The Number of Responses of "8" or Higher Provided for the Question "On a scale of 0-10, with 0 being no problem at all and 10 being a very big problem, please describe how big a problem each of the following crimes is in your community," for Both the Pretest and Post-Test:

Crime	Pre	Post
Theft	11	8
Auto Theft	6	5
Larceny from Home or Person	9	10
Larceny from Vehicle	9	8
Mugging/Robbery	9	10
Assault/Battery	8	7
Rape	6	7
Kidnapping	1	4
Trespassing	11	8
Breaking and Entering	10	11
Drug Use	13	10
The Public Sale of Drugs	10	9
Guns	10	12
Vandalism	8	6
Fraud	7	9

Table 2

The Number of Responses of “8” or Higher Provided for the Question, “On a scale of 0-10, with 0 being no fear and 10 being a great fear, please describe how fearful you are of each of the following crimes in your community,” for Both the Pretest and Post-Test:

Crime	Pre	Post
Theft	11	8
Auto Theft	5	5
Larceny from Home or Person	10	11
Larceny from Vehicle	9	8
Mugging/Robbery	10	9
Assault/Battery	8	7
Rape	8	8
Kidnapping	1	5
Trespassing	8	8
Breaking and Entering	11	10
Drug Use	8	10
The Public Sale of Drugs	7	7
Guns	10	10
Vandalism	4	5
Fraud	4	5

Table 3

Elements of Gang Relations with Correlations < 0.50 When Comparing the Two Survey Editions (Pre- and Post-Test), Relative to the Intervention.

Element	Pearson Correlation	Interpretation
How informed are you about the crimes committed by gangs in your / community?	0.35	Participants felt they were more informed following the intervention.
How informed are you about the location of gangs in your community?	0.38	Participants felt they were more informed following the intervention.
Do you feel that gangs/gang activity is a big problem in your / community?	0.39	Participants felt gang activity was a much bigger problem after the intervention
On a scale of 0-10, with 0 being no problem at all and 10 being a / very big problem, please describe how big a problem each of the following crimes in your community...Auto Theft	0.43	Participants felt that auto theft was less of a problem following the intervention
On a scale of 0-10, with 0 being no problem at all and 10 being a / very big problem, please describe how big a problem each of the following crimes in your community...Vandalism	0.33	Participants felt that vandalism was less of a problem following the intervention

<p>On a scale of 0-10, with 0 being no problem at all and 10 being a / very big problem, please describe how big a problem each of the following crimes in your community...Fraud</p>	<p>0.40</p>	<p>Participants felt that fraud was less of a problem following the intervention</p>
<p>Do you believe gang activity is a big influence on the severity / (number and danger) of the crimes listed in the previous question?</p>	<p>0.33</p>	<p>Participants believed that gangs activity was a greater influence on the severity of the crimes listed in question 12 (theft, vandalism, fraud, etc.), after the intervention.</p>
<p>Do you feel that gang activity in your community has a big impact / on youth and how they choose to behave?</p>	<p>-0.10</p>	<p>Participants believed that gang activity had a bigger activity on how youth choose to behave, after the intervention. Three participants changed their minds (2 felt it was more impactful post-test, while 1 felt it was less impactful post-test).</p>
<p>In the following locations, how safe do you feel?-Traveling around town, in a</p>	<p>0.20</p>	<p>Participants felt much less safe traveling around town in a</p>

vehicle, during the day		vehicle during the day, post-test.
Does your knowledge of gang activity in your community influence / your perceptions of safety in the scenarios listed in question 16?	0.49	Participants felt that knowledge of gang activity had a greater effect on their perceptions of safety post-test.
On a scale of 0-10, with 0 being no fear and 10 being a great fear, / please describe how fearful you are of each of the following crimes in your community...Fraud	0.27	Participants demonstrated that they were less fearful of fraud being committed after the intervention.
Does your knowledge of gang activity in your community influence / your fears of the crimes listed in question 18?	0.46	Participants felt that knowledge of gang activity had a greater influence of their fears as listed in question 18, after the intervention.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The results from Table 1 and Table 2 show that participants did not consider the crimes being committed by gangs to be a bigger problem following the intervention. In fact, many of the participants rated the crimes as being a big problem on the pretest. In Table 3, participants rated auto theft, vandalism and fraud as significantly less of a problem on the post-test than from the pretest. Participants also did not become more fearful of the crimes being committed following the intervention and rated their fear for many of these crimes high in the pretest. These results do not support the hypothesis that the participants of this survey would become significantly more fearful of the crimes being committed by gangs following the intervention phase of the survey. Based on the results of the pretest, Participants were likely already aware of the crimes being committed by gangs and the problems that they pose in their community.

According to Table 1 and Table 2, kidnapping was a growing concern for many of the participants. This is likely due to majority of the participants being older, middle class women who would find kidnapping a greater threat to their safety and the safety of the children in their community. Despite kidnapping being a growing concern and fear from the pre-test to the post-test, the increase is not significant enough to support the hypothesis that the participants would have a significantly heightened fear or knowledge of certain crimes being committed by gangs following the intervention phase of the survey.

According to Table 3, participants felt more informed on gang activity in their community following the intervention. This supports the hypothesis that the intervention brought and increased awareness of gang activity to the participants. The information in table three also

supports the hypothesis that participants in the survey will rate their perceived safety lower on the post-test following the intervention. After completing the intervention phase of the survey, participants felt that gang activity was a much bigger problem and that gang activity had a greater influence on the severity of the different crimes mentioned in the survey. Participants felt less safe traveling around town in a vehicle during the day on the post-test than they did on the pre-test. In Table 3, column 11, knowledge of gang activity had a significantly greater influence on their fears after the intervention. Participants also felt that youth were more affected by gang activity on the post-survey following the intervention

Knowledge of gang activity in the community helps better inform the participants of the severity of the current condition of gangs in their communities. Knowledge of the severity of gang activity promotes a heightened concern in parents, community stakeholders and high-risk populations to seek out opportunities to advocate community outreach programs such as G.R.E.A.T and The Little Village Project that protect youth who are at-risk for gang-recruitment (Wood & Huffman, 1999). Gang knowledge also promotes the protection of populations that are located near gang "territories" or areas with high crime rates because government officials are more likely to initiate gang violence policies and reforms if the public raises enough concern about the severity of gang violence in their community (Bjerregaard, 2002). The increased fear that the participants felt following the post-test also helps them to become more self-aware of their surroundings and to take the necessary precautions to avoid gang violence from being a severe threat to their safety in the future.

The major limitation to this survey is that the sample size is not representative of the Robeson County population. In future research studies, a wider sample size of citizens, from different counties must be surveyed in order to obtain results that are representative of the

Robeson County population. A lack of diversity among participants is also a major limitation to this survey. Majority of the participants in this survey were Caucasian, middle class, middle-aged women. Future studies must employ participants from different races, economic classes, ages and genders to model the diverse Robeson County population.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this survey supported the initial hypothesis that following the intervention phase of the survey, participants would rate their knowledge of gangs in their community higher and their perceived level of safety in their community lower on the post-test survey. However, this survey did not cause the participants to become more significantly fearful of the crimes committed by a gang which is likely due to their knowledge of high crime in the community prior to the intervention. The results of this survey show a strong correlation between knowledge of gang activity and perceptions of safety in participants prior to gang knowledge. This change in safety perceptions can trigger action by participants that will result in the community being more involved in preventing gang violence and gang recruitment by advocating for gang reform policies and keeping youth off the streets where gang violence and recruitment occurs. Knowledge of gang activity will also help citizens who live in communities with a high rate of gang violence protect themselves from becoming a victim of gang violence. These actions will improve the overall quality of life and safety of the citizens of Robeson County citizens.

Future research on this topic would be worthwhile for informing more of the Robeson County population on gangs and gang activity in their community. Recommendations for future studies include obtaining a large and diverse sample size that is representative of the entire county. A large and diverse sample size representative of the county would be better obtained by setting up on-site interviews and surveys in different locations of the county to ensure target populations are being reached. Small focus groups may also be helpful in distributing gang

information to different groups of people and comparing their results of perceived safety and fear before and after receiving information on gang activity in their community.

Chapter 7

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Under the advisement of Dr. Jeff Bolles, Assistant Professor at UNCP, Ms. Kimberly Scales, an Esther G. Maynor Honors College senior, is conducting research on the effect of gang activity information on residents' perceptions of safety and social health. The UNCP IRB Protocol Number for this study is:

Informed Consent:

Thank you for your interest in taking this survey. The purpose of this survey is to determine if perceptions regarding your social health and safety change after being informed about gang activity in Robeson County. It should only take you about twenty minutes to complete this entire survey.

Please note that participation in this survey is completely voluntary, and you are able to exit the survey at any time, without any penalty.

This survey will anonymously collect information that will help us understand what regions the participants are coming from.

It is important that you are aware that there is information in this survey regarding gang activity in Robeson County. The physical risk to you is very low, however, there are potential risks associated with participation in this survey. Discussion regarding gang activities (crimes) could evoke painful memories or images associated with personal experiences related to gangs. Should you develop the need for psychological support, the research team can make recommendations and referrals for such support. However, the research team will not be able to pay for any medical or psychological treatment.

Should you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact Ms. Kimberly Scales at 910-429-5523, Dr. Jeff Bolles at 910-522-5728, or UNCP IRB Chair, Dr. Roger Guy at 910-755-4273.

This survey is presented in four distinct parts, with the fourth part being an entry (by entering your email) into a drawing for one of two gift cards valued at \$25 each.

By completing this survey, you are consenting to participate.

Please note: If you are **younger than 18 years of age**, you must **not** take this survey.

In order to take this survey, please click on this link:

https://uncp.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3VEsS9q8ktvEXtP

Appendix B

Gang Pretest and Post-Test Survey

Default Question Block

Under the advisement of Dr. Jeff Bolles, Assistant Professor at UNCP, Ms. Kimberly Scales, an Esther G. Maynor Honors College senior, is conducting research on the effect of gang activity information on residents' perceptions of safety and social health. The UNCP IRB Protocol Number for this study is:

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By completing this survey, you are consenting to participate.

Please note: If you are younger than 18 years of age, you must not take this survey.

Default Question Block

What is your sex?

- Male
- Female

What is your age?

	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Years											

What is your race?

- White
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin
- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

What is the total gross, annual income for your household (before taxes)?

How many years have you lived in Robeson County?

	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Years											

Please enter your town/city of residence (e.g. Lumberton, St Pauls, Rowland, etc.)

How would you rate the quality of life in Robeson County?

- Very Poor
- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Very Good

How informed are you about gangs in your community?

- Not Informed At All
- Somewhat informed
- Fairly informed
- Well informed
- Very Well Informed

How informed are you about the crimes committed by gangs in your community?

- Not Informed At All
- Somewhat informed
- Fairly informed
- Well informed
- Very Well Informed

How informed are you about the location of gangs in your community?

- Not Informed At All
- Somewhat informed
- Fairly informed
- Well informed
- Very Well Informed

Do you feel that gangs/gang activity is a big problem in your community?

- No, it is not a big problem
- It is a problem, but not a big problem
- Yes, it is a big problem

On a scale of 0-10, with 0 being no problem at all and 10 being a very big problem, please describe how big a problem each of the following crimes in your community.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Theft (other than auto)											
Auto Theft											
Larceny (theft of personal property) from your home or person											
Larceny (theft of personal property) from your vehicle											
Mugging/Robbery (larceny with violence or the threat of violence)											
Assault/Battery											
Sexual Assault/Rape											
Kidnapping											
Trespassing											
Breaking and Entering											
Drug Use											
The Selling of Drugs in Public											
Guns											
Vandalism											

Do you believe gang activity is a big influence on the severity (number and danger) of the crimes listed in the previous question?

- Yes
- No

Do you feel like the following are big problems for school age children?

	Not a Problem	Minor Problem	Big Problem
Distance from school or home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Safe travel to and from school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Absences from school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting homework help	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having after school activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you feel that gang activity in your community has a big impact on youth and how they choose to behave?

- Yes
- No

In the following locations, how safe do you feel?

	Unsafe	Somewhat Safe	Safe
In your home during the day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In your home at night	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On your street (not in a vehicle) during the day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On your street (not in a vehicle) at night	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On other streets (not in a vehicle) during the day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On other streets (not in a vehicle) at night	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Traveling around town, in a vehicle, during the day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Traveling around town, in a vehicle, at night	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In store/mall parking lots (not in a vehicle) during the day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In store/mall parking lots (not in a vehicle) at night	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In local parks during the day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In local parks at dusk or dawn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Does your knowledge of gang activity in your community influence your perceptions of safety in the above scenarios?

- Yes
- No

On a scale of 0-10, with 0 being no fear and 10 being a great fear, please describe how fearful you are of each of the following crimes in your community.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Theft (other than auto)											
Auto Theft											
Larceny (theft of personal property) from your home or person											
Larceny (theft of personal property) from your vehicle											
Mugging/Robbery (larceny with violence or the threat of violence)											
Assault/Battery											
Sexual Assault/Rape											
Kidnapping											
Trespassing											
Breaking and Entering											
Drug Use											
The Selling of Drugs in Public											
Guns											
Vandalism											

10/29/14, 2:00

Does your knowledge of gang activity in your community influence your fears of the crimes listed in the previous question?

- Yes
- No

Appendix C

Gang Intervention

Default Question Block

The following information was collected from the former detective responsible for investigating gang activity and gang-related crimes in Robeson County. This data represents a sample of the crime data collected by that detective from January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2013. The detective readily admitted that these data are likely to underestimate the gang activity, some of which went unreported.

In addition, we would like to provide you this article, run in the July 7, 2013 Fayetteville Observer, which describes gang activity in Robeson County.

Spurred by slayings, Robeson County wages a fight against gangs
Greg Barnes Staff writer | Posted Jul 7, 2013

The funeral for 18-year-old DuQuan "Mucco" Stephens starts with a song:

"People are giving eulogies, drugs are taking them easy. People are crying all around, a solution must be found..."

DuQuan's body lies in the center of the Fairmont High School gymnasium, hidden under the lid of a coffee-colored coffin.

Slyvia Stephens sits in front, near the box bearing her boy. A sea of anguished faces surrounds her.

"Gangs are destroying all our schools, no more interest in the golden rule," the singer sings. "They look prayer out of the class, tell me how long will it last?"

DuQuan died seven days earlier, on March 12. Police say he was shot repeatedly on a Fairmont basketball court by a 16-year-old Lumberton boy in a gang member. They suspect DuQuan was, too.

"Yes, there is hope, Lord, there is hope, 'The singer sings. "There is hope for all, there is hope as long as Jesus is alive, yes, there is hope..."

Sleep apnea and stress keep 44-year-old Jose Hernandez awake at night.

Doctors have told him to quit his job as the Robeson County sheriff's sole gang investigator.

"It's going to kill you," Hernandez says they warn.

Part of Hernandez wants to heed their advice. He knows he is fighting a losing battle. When he took the job in 2005, an estimated 150 gang members roamed the streets in Robeson County. Today, Hernandez conservatively estimates, there are more than 500 members in at least 64 gangs.

Those gang members are breaking into homes, robbing drug dealers at gaspumps, buying and selling drugs, and committing other crimes.

They also are killing one another.

Since 2008, Hernandez says, 78 gang members have been charged with murder and 35 with attempted murder.

The violence continues to escalate.

In April, Lumberton police found the body of a 19-year-old lying in a road. Lintrevick Tracy Jackson had been shot to death. Hernandez says Jackson - "Trigger Tray" as he was known on the streets - was a gang member.

That makes at least five gang-related deaths in the county since September, including the slaying of DuQuan "Mucco" Stephens.

At DuQuan's funeral, mourners quickly singled out those responsible for his death would pay. That hasn't happened, at least not yet.

Robeson County was losing ideas long before the Great Recession that began in 2007. The North American Free Trade Agreement - NAFTA - robbed the county of its textile industry in the 1980s. About the same time, tobacco sharecroppers gave way to corporate farmers and new ways of buying and selling tobacco, leaving broken skeletons of Fairmont's once-vibrant tobacco warehouses.

Unskilled laborers had few places to turn. More than 45,000 Robeson County residents now receive food stamps, nearly one in three. Close to 12 percent of the workforce is unemployed.

Add to that a lack of government resources to fight crime and give children alternative activities, an abundance of single-parent families and a host of other socioeconomic problems.

"You can lie to the economy, feelings of hopelessness," says Brit, the district attorney. "A lot of it is, 'What else do I have to lose?'"

But something more lies beneath the surface in Robeson County, the only county in America that has almost an equal number of blacks, whites and Latinos.

"Ultimately, I think it comes down to there is just something embedded in our culture," says Brit, who was born here. "That violence has not only become too prevalent, but has become a way of life for some people. That's what they know, and it just repeats itself."

The violence, most everyone agrees, is getting worse, and teenagers and young adults are largely to blame.

"They are worse here," Hernandez says. "They are more violent here, because they will kill without a purpose."

Hernandez says he grew up on the streets of Brooklyn, in a housing project. He probably to a scar on his arm, a wound made by a .22-caliber bullet. He says he lived the life of a gangbanger, until the Army saved him. Violence in Robeson County is even worse than it was in Brooklyn while he was growing up.

Now, he and a few others in the county are trying to save the kids who are considering joining a gang.

Hernandez and Brit say the county's middle schools have become fertile recruiting grounds for gang members. Brit says the older gang members are smart enough to realize that children caught committing crimes are likely to get probation, not prison time.

The gangs recruit and retain the kids, Brit says, through "fear and intimidation."

Lumberton Police Chief Mike McNeill says he has seen gang members as young as 8 or 9.

For most contemplating joining a gang, Hernandez and others say, the biggest lure is a sense of belonging that they don't get at home.

"The bond that these gang members have is greater than toward their own family, their own brother or sister," Brit says.

Garrett Alford had all the signs of a gang member. He wore the colors, red for Bloods, he got himself tattooed. He kept a binder of gang slang.

He even told his mother he was a gang member.

"He said he was, but I didn't believe it," Julie Kennedy says. "He made me cry."

Kennedy is an articulate single mother who raised Alford and her other three sons and a daughter in her illness. Her son Isaiah is an honors student at N.C. A&T. Her son Journey just graduated from high school, and her daughter Destiny is taking classes to earn her OED. The eldest son, Kendrick, just earned an online college degree in criminal justice. He hopes to overcome a chronic illness and become a police officer.

But Garrett was different. Smart, a high school graduate who liked to help other people but lacked the motivation to help himself.

He started hanging with the wrong crowd shortly after the family moved from Durham to Lumberton in 2007, his mother says.

Kendrick, who does confidential informant work for the Robeson County Sheriff's Office, says he tried to steer his brother in the right direction. But Garrett was trying to get his law enforcement certificate.

"He hated me then, but trying to be a cop," Kendrick says.

Kendrick says Garrett looked up to him like the father he never had. Kendrick bought him things, disciplined him when he needed to, tried to point him in the right direction.

Still, Kendrick says, he didn't realize the extent of his brother's gang involvement until shortly before he was shot.

Police found 21-year-old Garrett Alford's body behind a house on Colonial Drive in September. Kendrick says his brother had been shot three times in the chest and once in the back of the head. Two 25-year-olds have been charged with murder in his death.

Kendrick says Garrett was killed because he refused to carry out the gang's order that he murder someone else.

His mother takes it a step further.

"He couldn't kill no one," she says. "That's why they killed him, because he would not kill his brother."

After her son's death, Kennedy began to earnest her quest to establish a nonprofit organization to help and guide young men in the county, to keep them away from gangs.

"I'm getting my Calhoun's suit on," says Kennedy, who now works for the Center for Community Action with longtime activist Mac Leggett. "The fighting back."

In the 1990s, back when Leon Burden was one of the biggest drug dealers in Robeson County, gangs were small, loose-knit operations.

Burden was the leader of SK, a gang from Lumberton's south side that consisted of nine young black people who made a living off selling cocaine. Burden was the top gun - the "DOG" or Original Gangster, as they are known. Burden says he used to ply his businessmen and boot soldiers with money, clothes and knaps in exchange for their work in selling his drugs.

By the time he went to prison at age 21, Burden estimates, he had made a \$1 million profit in the drug trade.

Burden's brother Calvin, who took over as the OG when Burden went to prison, didn't fair as well. He was shot to death at a mobile home park in the county in 1998. One of his foot soldiers killed him, says McNeill, the police chief. Most of the original SK gang members are either behind bars now or dead, McNeill says.

Leon Burden spent 15 years in prison. When he got out in 2005, he says, people expected him to avenge his brother's death.

But 15 years in prison has a way of changing some people. For Burden, the epiphany came at a "Weed and Seed" meeting shortly after he got out of prison. The now-defunct program, which began in southeast Lumberton in 2000 with a \$120,000 federal grant, aimed to fight drugs and other crime.

Charles Evans, now a Cumberland County commissioner, was the guest speaker at the meeting. Burden says Evans spoke mostly about giving people a second chance.

Evans should know. In 1992, he found himself serving five years of probation after pleading guilty to cocaine possession and two counts of embezzlement.

Burden says he met Evans after the meeting, and the two spoke at length. They have never spoken since, he says.

"That man encouraged me so much," Burden says. "A lot of what I do is because of what I heard him say."

Today, Burden operates Colors of Life, a nonprofit after-school program that focuses on giving children a view of the world that doesn't include crime or gang membership.

Like Hernandez, Burden spends a lot of time in schools, encouraging youths to get an education and to rise above their surroundings.

Burden also runs a youth summer camp, and he says rarely a day goes by when he's not trying to find someone a job.

"I'm here to show them there is a better way," he says.

Burden estimates that he has helped get 150 people out of gangs.

The names of the gangs in Robeson County are all too familiar: Fish Nation, United Blood Nation, Mexican Mafia.

Hernandez says about six or seven of the county's 64 gangs are well structured. The rest are small sets, many tied to a specific area, even a specific neighborhood.

Whether big or small, the gangs by definition have one common denominator: They commit crimes.

Hernandez has spent considerable time and effort pinpointing each gang on a map of the county. Most of the gangs are centered in Lumberton and the many small towns surrounding it.

In his office, Hernandez displays binder after binder of each known gang and the crimes their members have committed.

It's just one of the methods Hernandez uses to keep track of the hundreds of gangs as part of his attempt to fight back.

But Hernandez, Burden, Kennedy and others who devote their lives to curbing gang violence all say the same thing: They can't do it alone.

"A lot of the kids are hollering for help," Burden says. "They want to get out."

But they don't - or can't - for a number of reasons:

The pressure from other gang members can be intense. Many parents don't give enough attention or support. There are too few available jobs, especially for young people with criminal records. People who leave the prison system have little to turn to when they get out.

The law often is on one side, while the number of gangs and gang members in the county only continues to grow.

All the agencies that monitor law enforcement, such as back house outfits, on, in the mid-2000s, Lumberton, Fairmont and Robeson County received a federal grant through the Governor's Crime Commission. The two-year grant was used to hire four gang investigators - two for Lumberton and one each for Fairmont and the county. The idea was for the investigators to work together to reduce gang problems. The grant stipulated that the agencies would pick up funding when it expired, but that never happened and the positions went away. Hernandez says.

Lumberton has not had a gang investigator for nearly a year, since Officer Jeremiah Goodson Jr. was shot to death. McNeill said he wants to hire another gang investigator - possibly two - but he hasn't found the right person for the demanding job. Hernandez said he has been waiting months for the Sheriff's Office to hire an investigator to help him.

But there is some progress being made.

Three years ago, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was awarded a \$5.6 million federal grant to determine the root of violent behavior in the county and to establish programs to combat it.

Operating on the county's middle schools, the N.C. Academic Center for Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention has established new courts, adult programs to improve mentoring, and a program for every student in grades six through eight that focuses on teaching them skills in deal with conflict and stress.

The center, led by UNC social work professor Paul Smokowski, is tracking about 8,000 middle school students in Robeson and Columbus counties. Although the effects of the center's efforts won't be evaluated until the end of the grant cycle, Smokowski says progress is being made. One major study shows that failure in the middle schools has been reduced by 31 percent. He says.

Another UNC program involves hiring and training about 100 community mentors to help with school performance, graduation rates and test scores.

Kent Frazer, principal at Fairmont High School, says a \$3 million grant has helped his school dramatically reduce dropout and suspension rates while increasing test scores, attendance figures and parent involvement.

But there are still the tough cases. McNeill and a few others say all the money, research and programs aimed at reducing youth violence in Robeson County won't amount to much if children and their parents refuse to change.

So the violence continues. Two weeks ago, 17-year-old Michael Warren of Lumberton was seriously injured when someone shot at the car he was riding in. Hernandez says the shooting was gang-related.

McNeill and the others in the trenches say the key to stopping some violence lies in education.

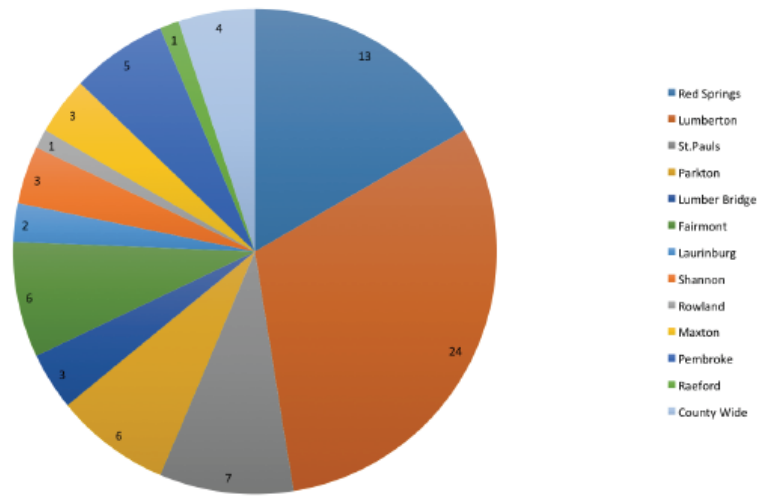
"That man or woman who walks across that stage has a reason for being," McNeill says. "These gangbangers, they don't."

The key is a good education. McNeill says it's about involvement.

"Involvement," he says. "Turn back time."

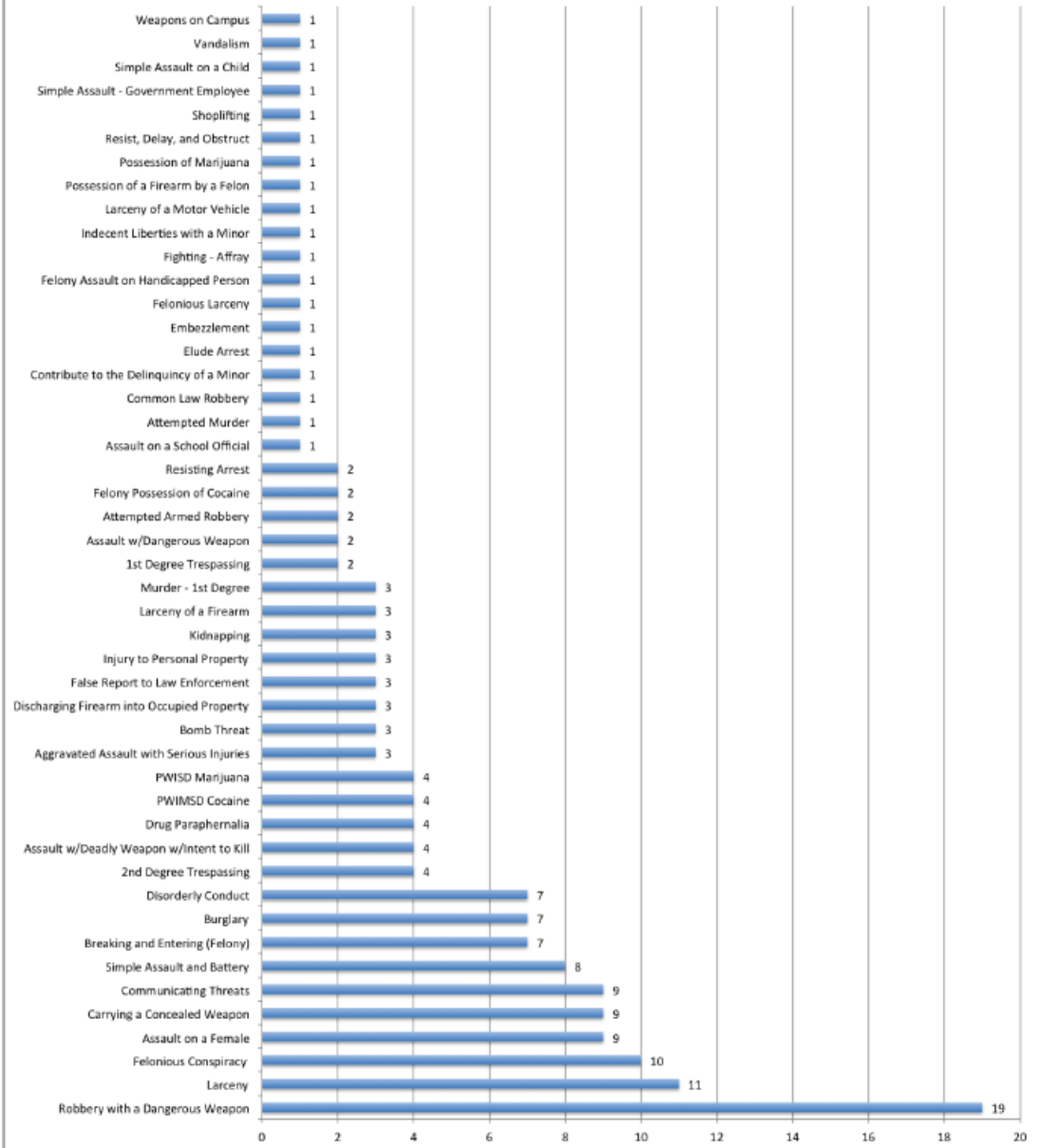
Chief Editor: Greg Barnes, gregbarnes@robesonnc.com or 484-3123.

Gangs in Cities of Robeson County

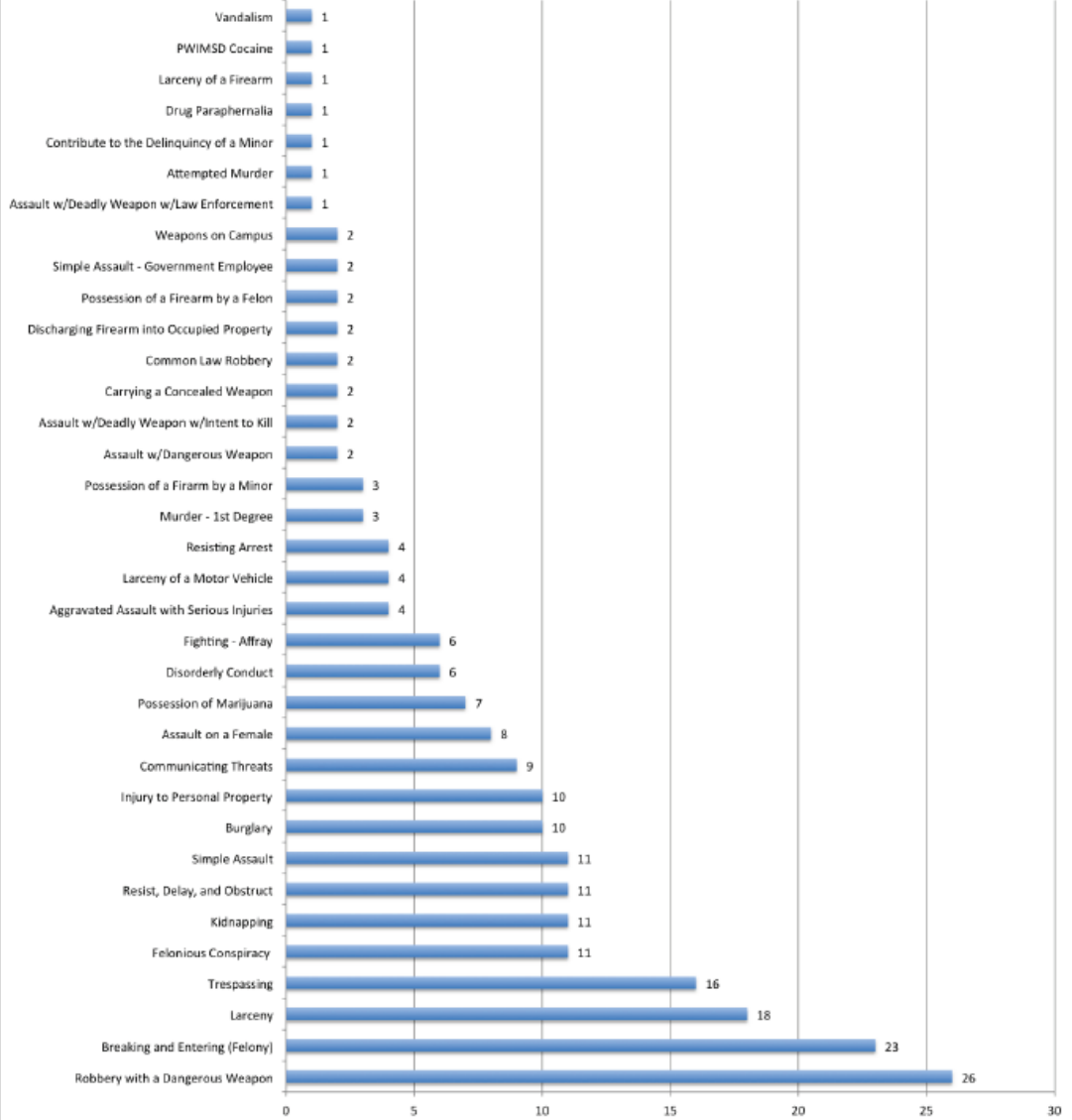


The following four tables identify the known (admittedly probably under-reported) crimes committed by four of the most active gangs in Robeson County - Over a 5-year period.

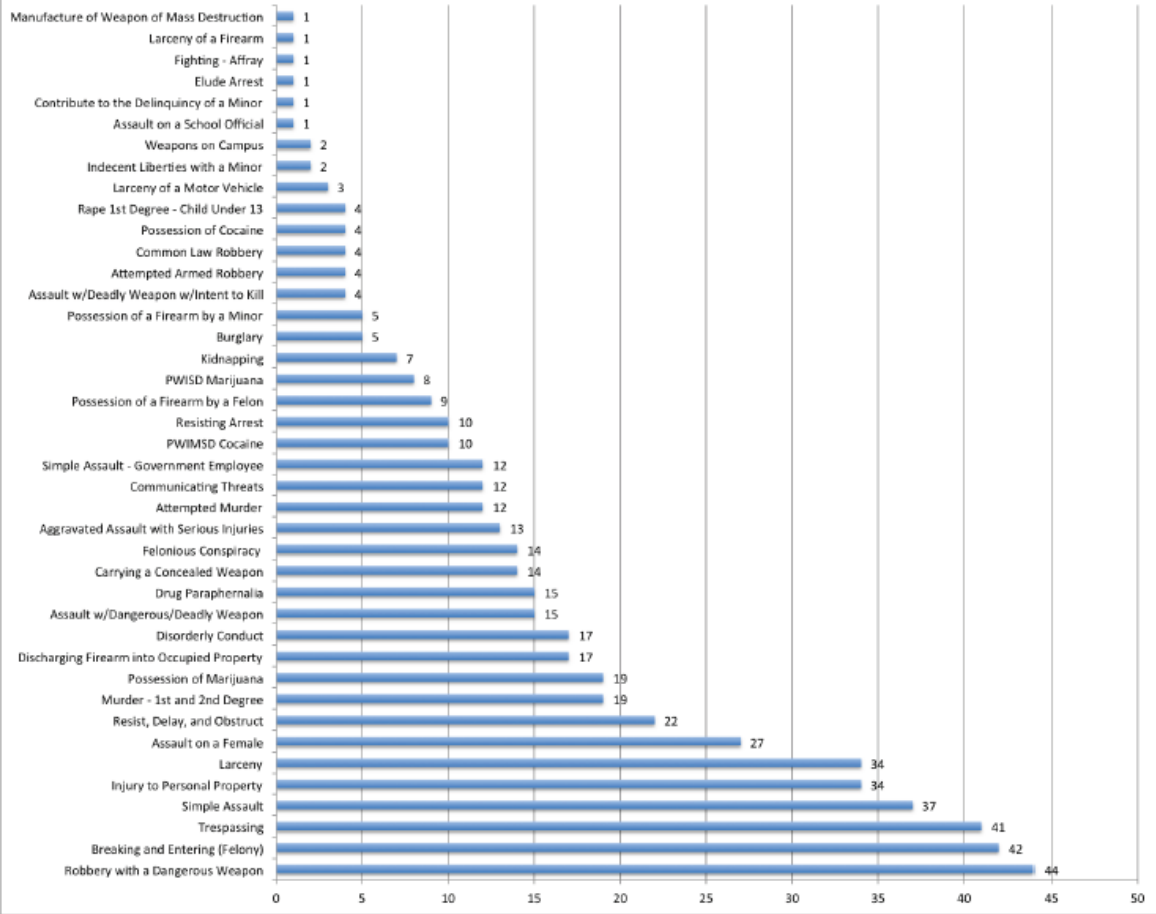
Known Crimes Committed by the Ericket Hunter Bloods Gang in Lumberton, Fairmont, Pembroke



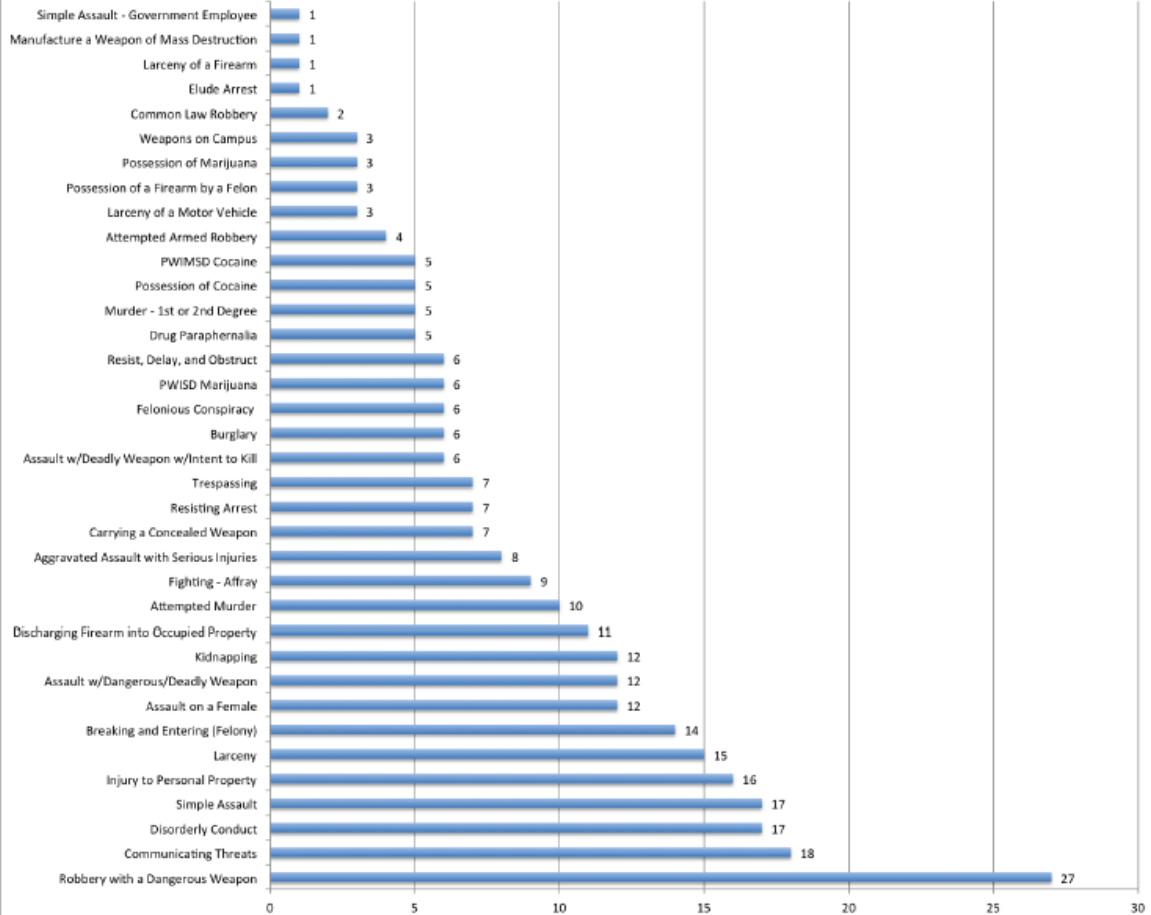
Known Crimes by the Insane Gangsters in the Southside of Lumberton, Fairmont



Known Crimes by the 41 Curve - 74 Gangsters in Southside of Lumberton



Known Crimes Committed by United Blood Nation - 9Tek - County Wide



Appendix D

E-mail collection Survey

Default Question Block

Please enter your email address to be considered for the gift certificate drawing.

Appendix E

Institutional Review Board Approval

One University Drive
P.O. Box 1510
Pembroke, NC 28372

UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA
PEMBROKE

Institutional Review
Board
FWA 00005281

October 30, 2014

Kimberly Scales
Department of Exercise and Sport Science
UNCP Campus

IRB Protocol #: 14-10-002

Dear Ms. Shelley,

The IRB has completed an expedited review of your protocol entitled, "The Effects of Gang Activity on Citizens of Robeson Country" and granted approval.

Please note that if significant changes are made to the protocol, you must submit these changes to the IRB prior to their implementation in your study, as they may change the status of your review. Also, if any unanticipated or adverse events occur during this research, please notify me immediately.

Please include your protocol number (14-10-002) on your final consent forms and in future correspondence regarding this protocol.

Sincerely,

(consider attachment to email as my e-signature)

Roger Guy, Ph.D.
Chair, UNCP Institutional Review Board