



**Briefing Report**  
**Suspected and Documented Gang-Involved Youth: How Much and What Types of Crime Are They Responsible For?**  
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***Issue:***

There is a lack of systematic examination of the prevalence of gang-involved youth and the offenses they commit in the Florida juvenile justice system. The basic questions are: "What percent of the juvenile crime do gang-affiliated youth commit?" and "What types of offenses are they disproportionately responsible for?"

***Highlighted Results:***

The following bullets provide a brief synopsis of the analyses. Methodology, comprehensive results, and detailed explanations follow below the bullets:

- Only 4% of youth arrested have any gang alert with 1.4% of youth arrested being documented gang members;
- Documented gang members committed 3% of all offenses (twice their proportion of offenders) and averaged 3.7 arrests each over the two year period;
- The vast majority of both males and females have no gang alerts, though the prevalence of being a documented gang member for males is 4.5 times (450%) the rate for females;
- Youth with gang alerts indicated are considerably more likely to be high risk to re-offend on the C-PACT assessment and to be classified as Serious, Violent, and Chronic (SVC) offenders.
- Youth with gang alerts are more likely to have past alcohol and drug use, and over 50% had household members with jail or prison history;
- Over 30% of those with gang alerts were 12 or under at the age of their first ever arrest;
- Documented gang members (1.4% of the youth) are referred for a disproportionate share of serious and violent felony and weapons offenses, including **three times their proportion** of the offender population of the murder/manslaughter, attempted murder/manslaughter, armed robberies, obstruction of justice with violence, automobile theft, and escape from a secure FDJJ setting over the two years examined;
- Youth with any gang alert (roughly 4% of the juvenile offender population) committed **24%** of all attempted murder/manslaughter offenses for which an arrest of a juvenile was made.

### ***Methodology:***

We examine data from July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2013, which encompasses the last two complete fiscal years. We examine every referral received by the FDJJ that was non-administrative. Contempt of court, non-criminal infractions, pick-up orders, interstate compacts (transfers from other states), re-opened cases, transfers between counties, court ordered detention orders, and administrative “referrals” were excluded. Violations of probation were retained/included in the analysis.

The current study used these arrest data for fiscal year 2011-12 (FY11-12) and fiscal year 2012-13 (FY 12-13), and matched them to the corresponding C-PACT assessment closest to the date of the referral (arrest). The C-PACT assessment captures the youth’s overall risk to re-offend and rank orders the youth’s top risk factors. The C-PACT assessment has been validated across multiple samples of Florida DJJ youth, published in multiple peer-reviewed journals and independent research agency reports (Baglivio, 2009; Baglivio & Jackowski, 2013; Winokur-Early, Hand, & Blankenship, 2012). The closest C-PACT assessment to the arrest date was used in order to capture the youth’s risk to re-offend level at time of arrest. This process resulted in a final sample of 148,904 arrests of 77,134 individual youth (many youth were arrested multiple times during the five year period). These arrest numbers may not match those reported elsewhere due to the exclusion of administrative referrals and the necessitation of an available C-PACT assessment.

Each arrest was classified as to whether it was committed by a youth with no gang alert entered into JJIS, a suspected gang affiliation, a documented gang associate, or a documented gang member. All categories are mutually exclusive; a youth can only be classified as one such category at any given arrest. A youth may be classified as one category for one arrest, and a different category for another arrest. For example, a youth may have no gang alert at the time of arrest X, and then have a suspected affiliation at the time of arrest Y, and have documents returned from law enforcement and be a documented member at arrest Z. The gang alert categories are defined as such:

**No Gang Alert:** The youth did not have any gang alert entered in JJIS at the time of the arrest.

**Suspected Gang Affiliation:** Indication of potential gang involvement or activities based on staff observations, supplemental information such as pictures, drawings, other documents or statements by youth or other sources.

**Gang Associate Documented:** FDJJ has received written documentation from law enforcement certifying a youth as a gang associate per F.S. 874.03(2) (a-b).

**Gang Member Documented:** FDJJ has received written documentation from law enforcement certifying a youth as a gang member per F.S. 874.03(3) (a-k).

According to the 2013 Florida Statutes (F.S. 874.03) a “Criminal gang **member**” is a person who meets two or more of the following:

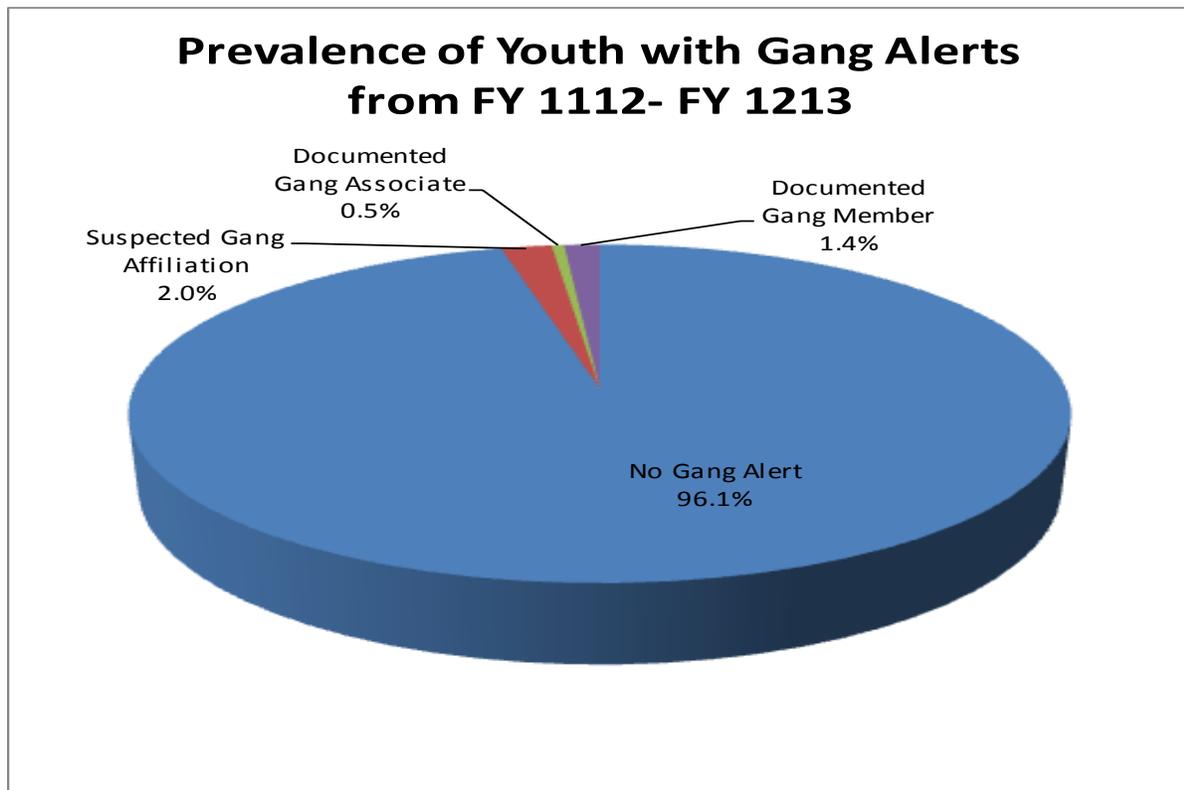
- (a) Admits to criminal gang membership.
- (b) Is identified as a criminal gang member by a parent or guardian.
- (c) Is identified as a criminal gang member by a documented reliable informant.

- (d) Adopts the style of dress of a criminal gang.
- (e) Adopts the use of a hand sign identified as used by a criminal gang.
- (f) Has a tattoo identified as used by a criminal gang.
- (g) Associates with one or more known criminal gang members.
- (h) Is identified as a criminal gang member by an informant of previously untested reliability and such identification is corroborated by independent information.
- (i) Is identified as a criminal gang member by physical evidence.
- (j) Has been observed in the company of one or more known criminal gang members four or more times. Observation in a custodial setting requires a willful association. It is the intent of the Legislature to allow this criterion to be used to identify gang members who recruit and organize in jails, prisons, and other detention settings.
- (k) Has authored any communication indicating responsibility for the commission of any crime by the criminal gang.

A “Criminal gang **associate**” is a person who “admits to criminal gang association” or “meets any single defining criterion for criminal gang membership” (meets any one of the categories a-k above). Therefore, the difference in being a gang member over a gang associate is meeting one (or more) additional category.

**Comprehensive Results:**

Figure 1.



Prevalence of gang alerts among the youth arrested during the two fiscal years is shown in Figure 1. Over the two fiscal years examined, documented gang members made up 1.4% of the individual **youth** arrested, while youth with no gang alert composed 96% of the sample.

While Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of youth arrested that had gang alerts during the two year period, Figure 2 shows the prevalence of **arrests** for offenses committed by those youth. Figure 2 shows while documented gang members are 1.4% of the youth (as shown in Figure 1), they are responsible for 2.9% of the arrests. Those youth with no gang alert (96.1% of the youth according to Figure 1) were responsible for 92.3% of all arrests. The average number of arrests for offenses committed by youth with no gang alert over the two year period is 2.2, while the average number of arrests for offenses committed by documented gang members was 3.8 (results not shown). The average number of arrests for offenses for those with suspected gang affiliation was 3.4, and the average for documented gang associates was 3.7 arrests over the two year period. It is important to note that these are the offenses for which the youth was arrested (official records) and not self-reported offending.

Figure 2.

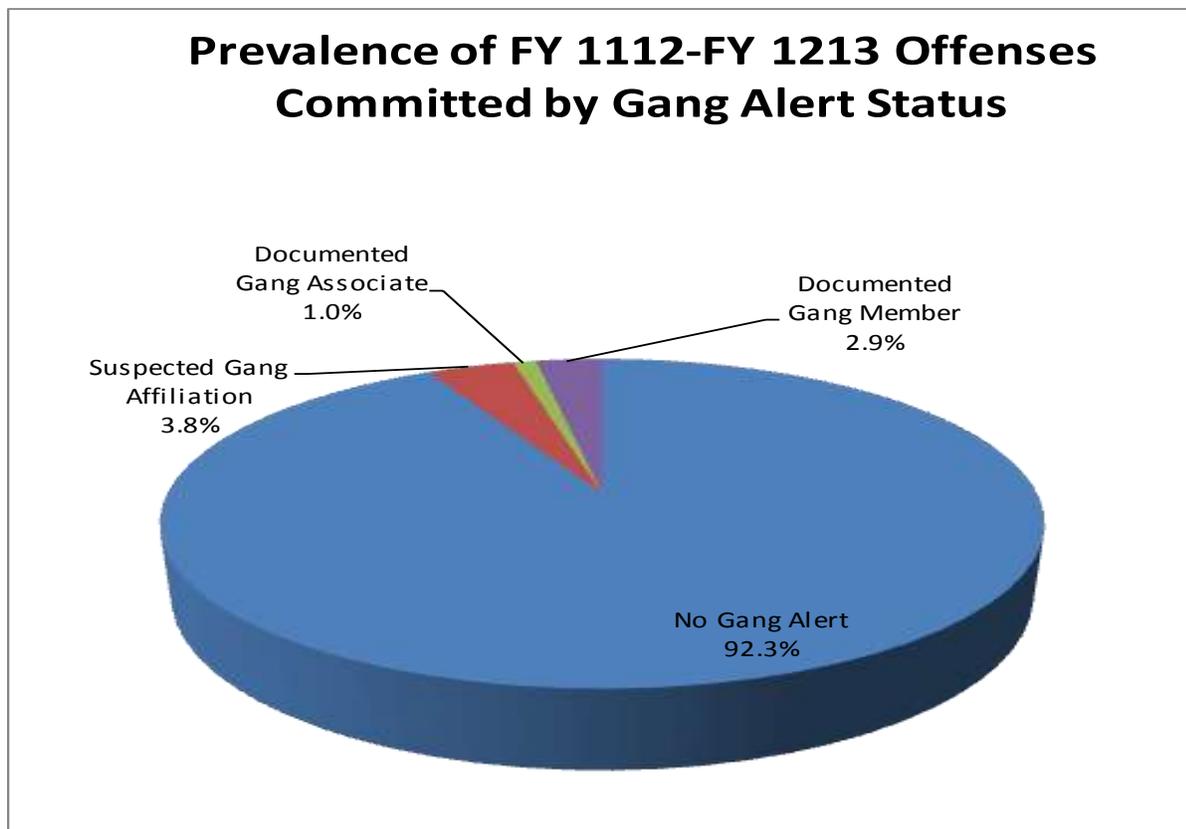


Figure 3 illustrates the prevalence of each gang alert type for males and females. The figure is arranged specifically to show the gender differences in prevalence rates of each alert type, with the actual percent of each sex per gang alert type notated within each bar of the graph. Figure 3 demonstrates the vast majority of both males and females are composed of youth with no gang alert

(98.6% of females and 95% of all males). However, males are 3.7 times more likely to have a suspected gang affiliation (2.6% compared to 0.7%), 3.5 times more likely to be a documented gang associate, and 4.5 times more likely to be a documented gang member.

Figure 3.

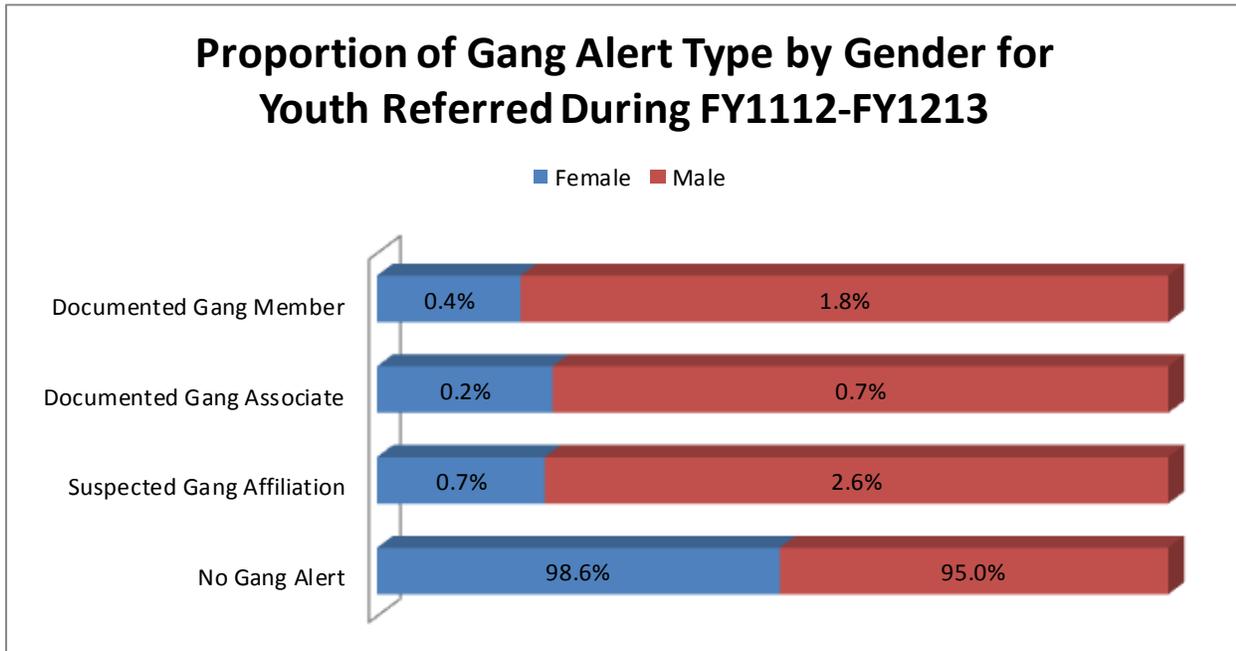


Figure 4.

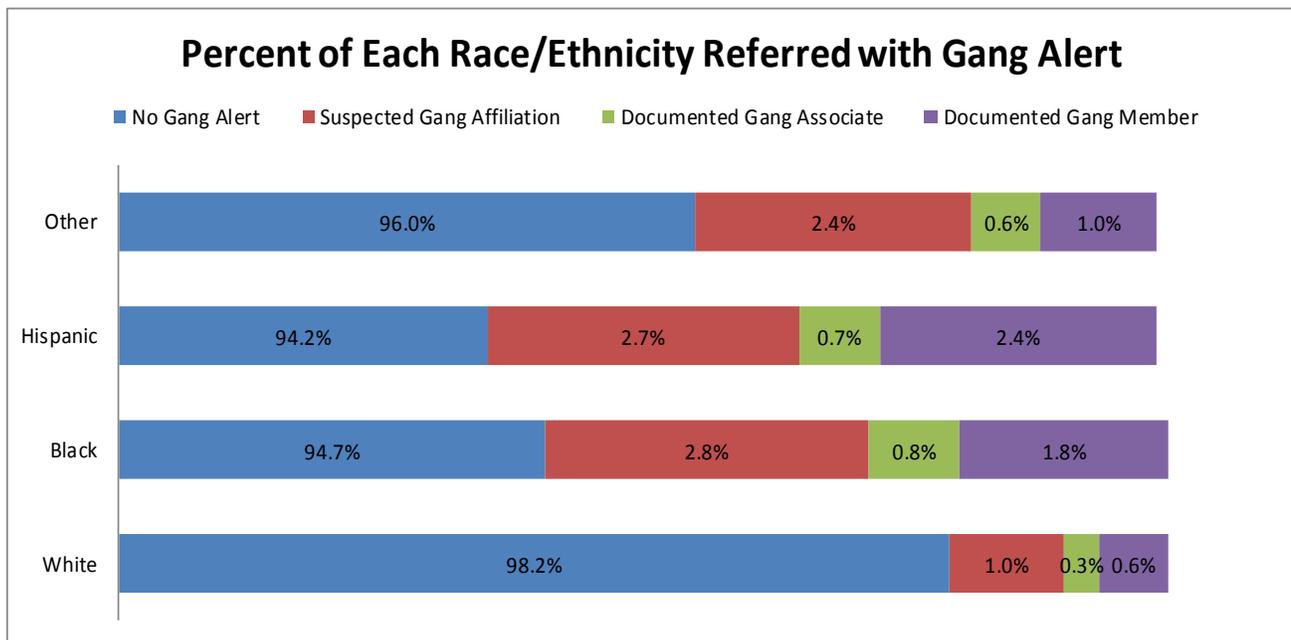


Figure 4 demonstrates the vast majority (over 94%) of youth classified according to each race/ethnicity have no gang alert. White youth have the lowest proportion of each gang alert, with under 1% (0.6%) documented gang members. Black youth have three times the proportion of documented gang members at 1.8%, and Hispanic youth have four times the proportion of White youth with 2.4% documented gang members (differences are significant at  $p < .001$ ).

Figure 5 shows the percent of youth failing into each gang alert type by overall risk to re-offend level of the validated C-PACT risk/needs assessment. Figure 4 illustrates almost 74% of youth without a gang alert are low risk to re-offend, compared to only 14% low risk of suspected youth, and 19% low risk for both documented associates and documented members. Only 6.3% of youth without a gang alert are high risk to re-offend compared to over 36% of youth with any kind of gang alert. Figure 5 shows the prevalence rate for being low risk to re-offend is roughly 4 times lower for documented gang members than youth with no gang alert. The rate for being high risk to re-offend is roughly 6 times higher for documented gang members. The risk to re-offend level prevalence rates are approximately equivalent between youth with any positive gang alert (suspected affiliation, documented associate, documented member).

Figure 5.

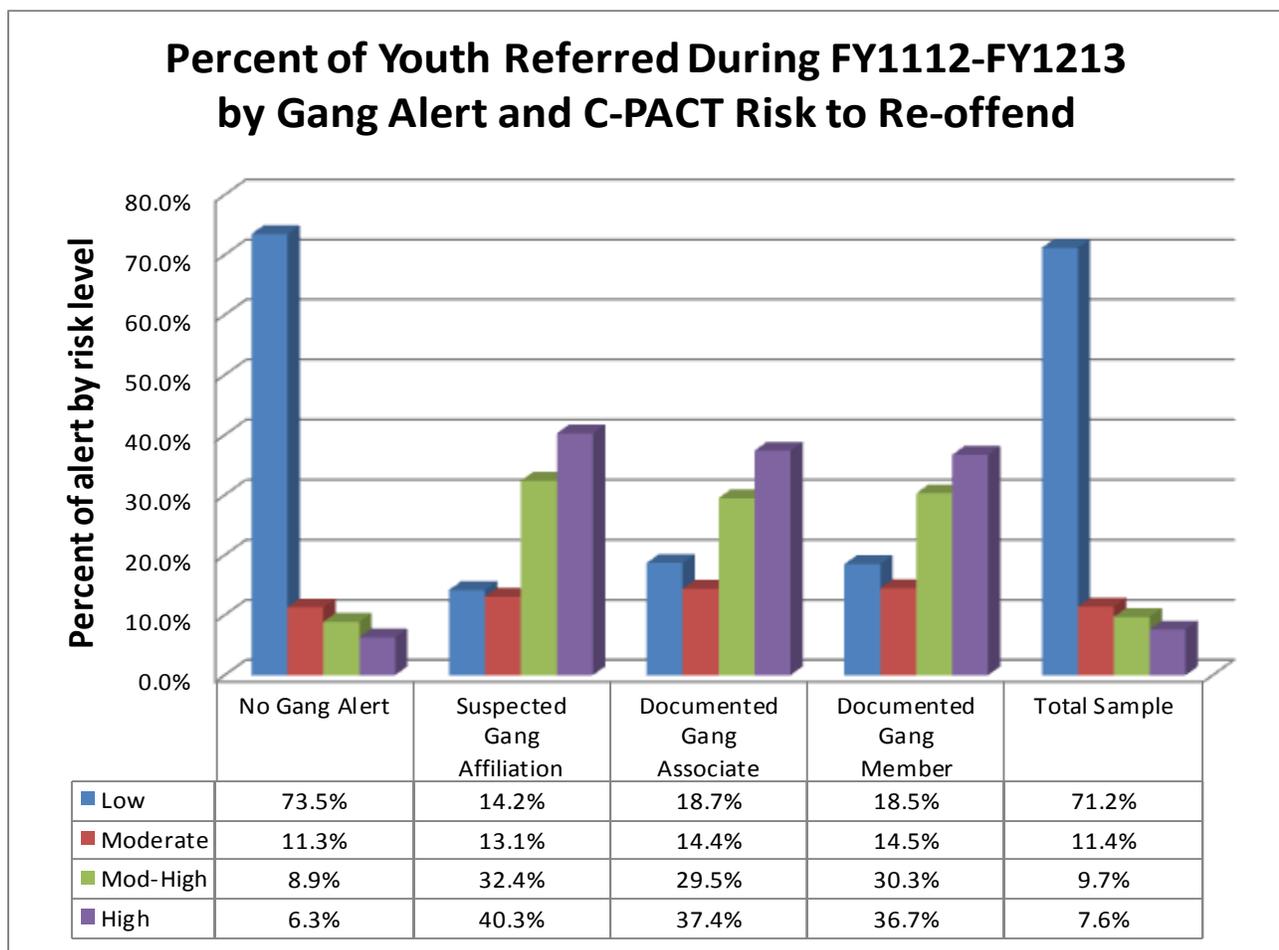
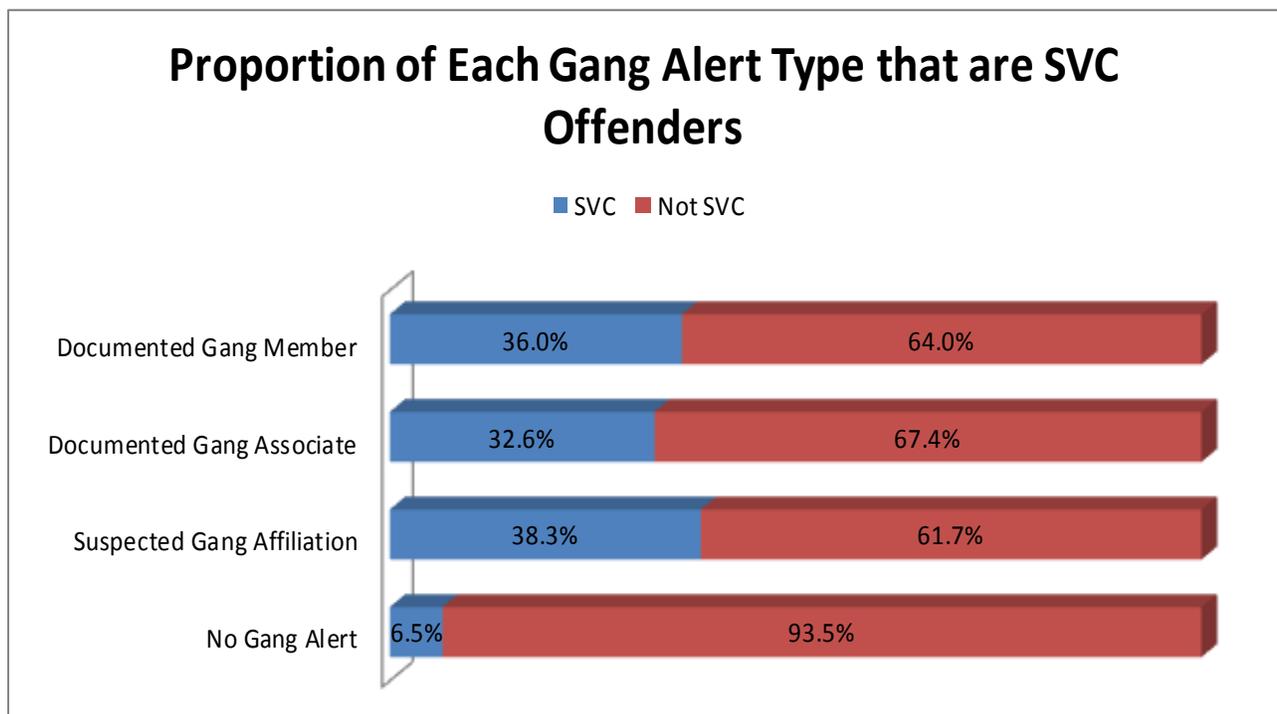


Figure 6 illustrates the proportion of youth with each gang alert type that can be classified as a Serious, Violent, and Chronic (SVC) offender. These offenders are youth that have committed a violent against-person felony offense, as well as have four or more arrests in their criminal history. Prior research has shown between 8-9% of youth referred to FDJJ are SVC offenders (Baglivio, Jackowski, Greenwald, & Howell, in press). Figure 6 shows only 6.5% of those youth with no gang alert are SVC offenders. In comparison, 36% of the documented gang members are SVC (5.5 times the proportion). Figure 5 (overall risk to re-offend) and Figure 6 (SVC offenders) show the drastic differences in both criminal history, and criminal propensity of youth with gang alerts. While only 4% of all youth have some type of gang alert, these 4% are exponentially more serious offenders.

**Figure 6.**



An interesting avenue to explore is the peer associations self-reported by youth with gang alerts. The C-PACT assessment includes an indication of peer association measuring whether the youth has never had consistent friends, had prosocial friends, had antisocial friends, and/or has been a gang member/associate. The categories are not mutually exclusive, with the exception of the never had consistent friends category, meaning a youth could be classified as having both pro- and antisocial friends, for example. Figure 7 demonstrates youth with any of the indicated gang alert types are much more likely to report having antisocial friends, and approximately 18 times more likely to report having been a gang member or associate, with only 1.7% of youth without a gang alert indicating having been a gang member/associate.

Figure 7.

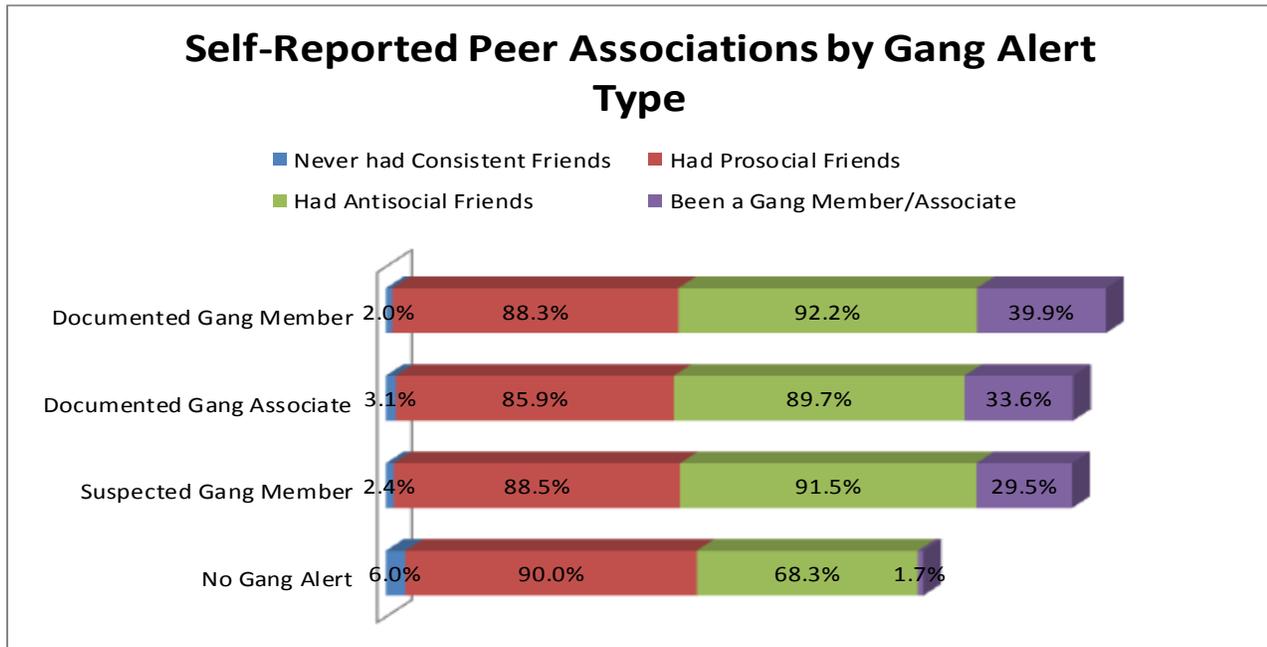
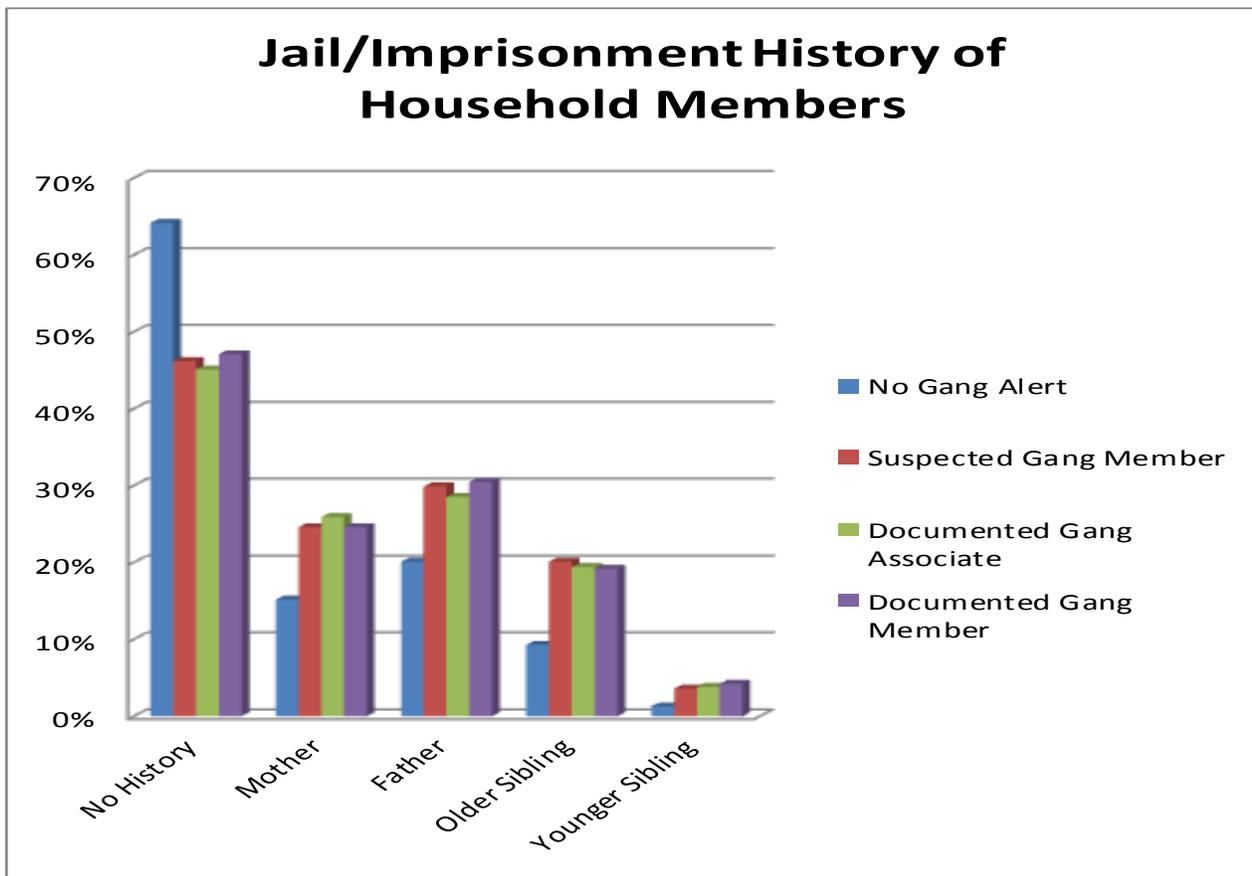


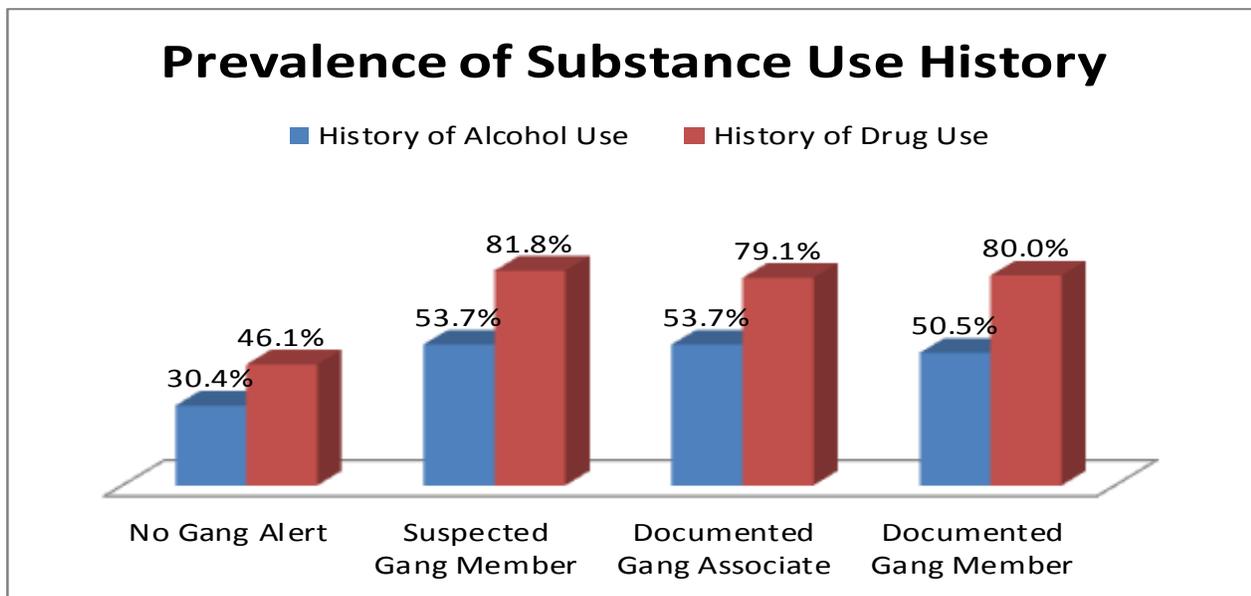
Figure 8.



Next, we examine the proportion of youth with a history of jail/imprisonment of household members. Figure 8 illustrates 64% of youth with no gang alert grew up in households with no jail/imprisonment history of household members, contrasted with less than 50% of those with gang alerts. This means that more than 1 in 2 youth with a gang alert grew up in a household with a history of jail/imprisonment of family members. Sadly, over 1/3 of the entire sample, regardless of gang alert status, have a household history of jail/imprisonment. For documented gang members, 25% have a mother with jail/imprisonment history, and 31% have a father with such a history.

The prevalence rate of a history of alcohol use is 31.3% for the entire sample of youth, while the drug abuse history rate is 47.5%. This means 3 of 10 youth entering the FDJJ system have used alcohol, and almost 1 in 2 youth have used drugs (47.5%). With respect to a history of alcohol and drug use, those with no gang alert are roughly 20% less likely to have prior alcohol use, while the past drug use of those without gang alerts is almost half that of gang-involved or suspected youth (see Figure 9). 80% of documented gang members report past drug use, compared to 46% of those youth with no gang alert.

Figure 9.



Next, we examine the age at first offense for youth with each gang alert type. Specifically, the proportion of each group that was first arrested at the age of twelve or younger was examined. Figure 10 illustrates youth with a positive gang alert (suspected, documented associate, or documented member) were 2.5 times (250%) more likely to have been twelve or under at first arrest. Roughly 1/3 of these youth were 12 or under when first arrested.

Figure 10.

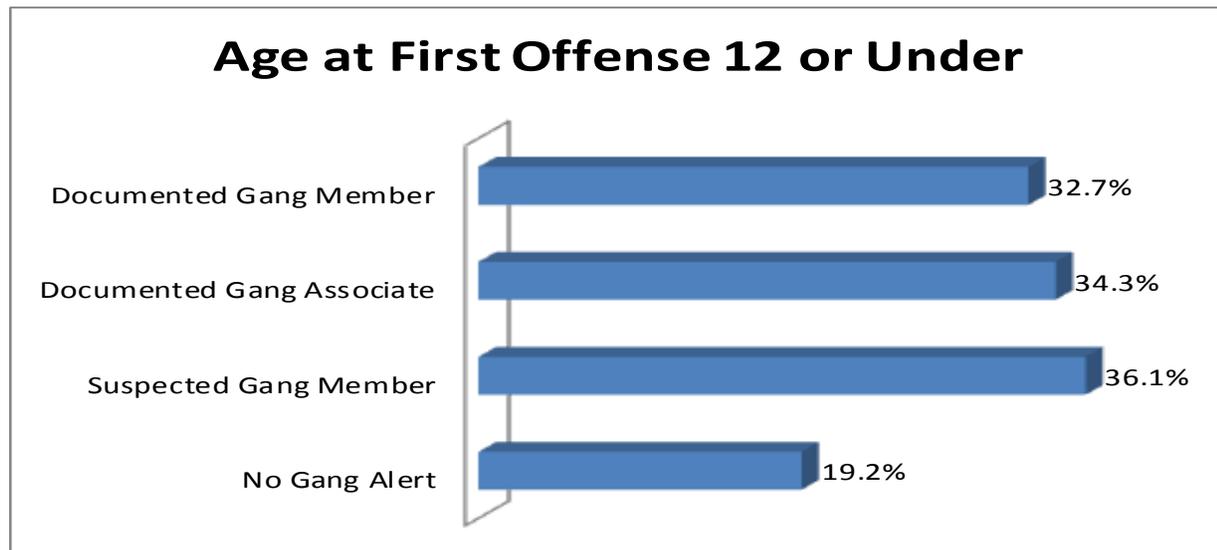


Table 1. Proportion of Offenses Resulting in Arrest Committed by Each Gang Alert Type

CHARGE	Committed by				N
	No Gang Alert	Suspected Gang Member	Documented Gang Associate	Documented Gang Member	
Murder/Manslaughter	88.5%	5.8%	0.0%	5.8%*	104
Attempted Murder/Manslaughter	76.3%	9.2%	6.6%	7.9%*	76
Felony Sexual Battery	96.9%	1.2%	0.5%	1.5%	1279
Kidnapping	87.2%	6.7%	2.2%	3.8%	312
Other Felony Sex Offense	96.7%	1.9%	0.4%	1.0%	689
Armed Robbery	84.4%	7.9%	1.6%	6.1%*	1,452
Aggravated Assault/Battery	91.9%	4.1%	1.1%	2.8%	10,366
Other Robbery	89.2%	5.4%	1.5%	3.9%	2,147
Obstruction of Justice w Violence	88.9%	4.6%	1.5%	4.9%*	651
Arson	95.7%	2.7%	0.0%	1.5%	328
Weapon/Firearm	90.5%	4.4%	1.3%	3.8%	2,598
Burglary	89.9%	4.9%	1.4%	3.8%	18,617
Auto Theft	85.5%	6.6%	1.6%	6.3%*	2,383
Grand Larceny	94.9%	2.7%	0.7%	1.8%	5,180
Felony Drug Laws	92.7%	3.6%	0.8%	2.9%	4,015
Escape from FDJJ Secure Setting	82.1%	13.7%	0.0%	4.2%*	95

Note: \* indicates Documented Gang Members committed over 3 times the offenses to their proportion of all offenders  
 Reminder: 1.4% of the individual youth were classified as Documented Gang Members.

The final step in the analysis is to examine the charges for which the youth in the study were arrested. Table 1 shows the proportion of each felony arrest committed by youth of each gang alert type (including no gang alert). The *total* number of each offense during the two year period is also reported to provide context of just how many offenses the table is documenting (the total includes those offenses committed by all offenders, not just gang members, in the column labeled as “N”). Offenses for which documented gang members commit more than three times their proportion of all youth are notated with an asterisk (\*). As documented gang members were 1.4% of the sample, this means that any offense for which documented gang members commit 4.2% or more of, is noted with an asterisk. Therefore, Table 1 shows the offenses for which documented gang members commit a disproportionate share. Notably, murder/manslaughter, attempted murder/manslaughter, armed robbery, obstruction of justice with violence, automobile theft, and escape from a secure FDJJ setting are all disproportionately committed by documented gang members. However, documented gang members make up less than 8% of any offense category. The highest proportion of any offense committed by all youth with any positive gang alert (suspected, documented associate, plus documented member) is attempted murder/manslaughter for which these youth were responsible for 23.7% (9.2%+6.6%+7.9%). This equates to roughly 4% of the offender population committing **one quarter** of all attempted murder/manslaughter offenses for which an arrest of a juvenile was made. Of note, documented gang members are not disproportionately responsible for any sexual offenses.

### ***Implications:***

This brief has attempted to shed light on the proportion of youth referred to FDJJ that are gang-involved. There are three specific alerts that are used to indicate a youth is gang-involved. Two of these are defined in Florida Statute and indicate law enforcement has documented a youth as such; the third is for juvenile justice professionals to use indicating they believe a youth is gang-involved and they have notified law enforcement. We found a lower than expected prevalence of documented gang associates and members (0.5% and 1.4%, respectively), with an additional 2% of youth suspected to be gang-involved. All three alerts taken together indicate approximately 4% of youth arrested during two complete fiscal years are believed or documented to be gang-involved. These youth are responsible for a disproportionate (relative to their 4% prevalence) share of many violent felony offenses, with the notable exclusion of sexual offenses. Gang-involved youth are more likely to have a history of alcohol and drug use, and more likely to come from households in which family members have jail/imprisonment histories. The finding that greater than 50% of the youth with a gang alert have a household history of jail or prison is staggering. It is the norm for these youth to have household members that went to jail/prison, usually a father or mother.

Over 30% of youth with a positive gang alert were 12 years old or younger at the time of their first arrest. Research has demonstrated early onset offenders have a two to three times higher risk of later violence, serious offenses, and chronic offending, and are more likely to carry weapons, become gang members, and engage in substance use (Howell, 2009, 2012; Krohn, Thornberry, Rivera, and Le Blanc, 2001; Loeber & Farrington, 2001; Loeber, Farrington, & Petechuk, 2003). These very young offenders have been found to have a larger percentage of serious, violent, and chronic offending careers (Baglivio et al., in press; Howell, 2009; Synder, 1998), and are more likely to become juveniles who persist into adulthood (Loeber & Farrington, 2012). The results presented in this brief mimic the

findings of these prior studies referenced. These results highlight the importance of intervening as early as possible in the lives of at-risk youth, as well as providing delinquency interventions in sufficient dosage by qualified facilitators with optimal fidelity to those already delinquent (Lipsey, 2009; Lipsey, Howell, Kelly, Chapman, & Carver, 2010).

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