

# L.A.'s gang killings reach epidemic level

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LOS ANGELES — An epidemic of gang-related homicides in Los Angeles County is taking its biggest toll on a generation of black and Hispanic youths, emergency medical doctors report.

Working from police records, doctors found gang-related homicide rates for black teen-age boys soared from 60.5 per 100,000 county residents in 1979-81 to 192.4 per 100,000 in 1989-91. This statistic covers boys ages 15 to 19.

Together, blacks and Hispanics constituted 93 percent of all gang-related homicide victims and 96 percent of all the child and adolescent victims tracked in the report being presented Tuesday at the American Medical Association's 14th Annual Science Reporters Conference in Miami Beach, Fla.

But gang violence has become so prevalent that no one is immune, as a recent Los Angeles case so clearly showed.

## Wrong-turn killing

Even President Clinton took note when a 3-year-old white child named Stephanie Kuhen was shot to death in a car Sept. 17 after her family made a wrong turn into gang territory.

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Report in AMA Journal

Study author Dr. Deirdre Anglin, assistant professor of emergency medicine at the Los Angeles County-University of Southern California Medical Center, noted that since 1981, 32 black or Hispanic children age 10 and younger died in gang crossfire.

“Stephanie's death was absolutely tragic and deserved the attention it got, and each one of the other 32 were equally tragic and deserved the same attention,” she said.

The youngsters' deaths underscore one of the study's most striking findings: that two-thirds of all child and teen-age homicide victims here die at the hands of gangs.

## L.A. record

Los Angeles currently holds the U.S. record for most documented violent street gangs of any county: more than 1,000 gangs comprising more than 136,000 members, wrote Anglin and co-author Dr. H. Range Hutson, now research director in the Depart-

ment of Emergency Medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Their article appears in this week's Journal of the American Medical Association.

Gangs are responsible for a growing proportion of urban violence, up from 18.1 percent in 1979 to 43 percent in 1994, the doctors found.

“Since 1990 street gangs have been responsible for more than one-third of all homicides in Los Angeles County,” they wrote.

## LAPD's jurisdiction

Of the county's 7,288 gang-related killings from 1979 to 1994, Hutson and Anglin tracked the 5,541 that occurred within the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles Police Department and County Sheriff's Department.

They also found:

➤ 86 percent of the 5,541 victims were 15 to 34 years old; 39 percent were 19 or younger; 93 percent were male.

➤ 64 percent of the victims were identified as gang members, while a third of all victims had no gang involvement.

➤ More than 25 percent of the gang-related killings — a total of more than 1,400 — were drive-by shootings. Half the drive-by victims were children and teens.

➤ Gun use during gang killings rose from 71.4 percent in 1979 to 91.5 percent last year. But more strikingly, the use of semiautomatic weapons rose from 5.3 percent of the cases in 1986 to 44.3 percent last year.

Although Los Angeles leads the nation in gangs, the authors noted 94 percent of U.S. cities with populations over 100,000 have gangs too.

“Law enforcement and the criminal justice system by themselves can't prevent gang violence or gang homicides,” Hutson said in an interview.

“The United States must develop a national policy on violent street gangs, must focus on the root cause of violent street gang formation: poverty, stressed families, lack of education, underemployment, racism, and a breakdown of social and cultural institutions. The U.S. must also deal with the problem of firearms.”

Anglin suggested attacking the problem as one would an infectious disease.