

Section 1 – Key Findings

Key findings in this report highlight significant issues that are supported by multiple types of data across multiple domains. They serve to identify areas of concern related to local gang issues or areas of need which currently hinder the community’s ability to respond effectively to gangs.

Key Finding 1

While identified incidents of gang violence have decreased from 2011 levels, gun violence in Tacoma remains high in relation to comparable cities in Washington and has increased slightly in the past three years. This violence, which is primarily perpetuated by individuals aged 18 to 30, diminishes the quality of life for many residents and puts young people at risk of violent victimization.

Since 2015³, 3,568 serious violent assaults and/or drive-by shootings have occurred in Tacoma, and 46 people have been murdered. Tacoma’s overall rate of violent crimes per 100,000 people (811.7) in 2017 was almost three times as high as the statewide rate (Crime in the United States, 2017)

This high level of violent crime rate is largely driven by Tacoma’s large number of aggravated assaults per capita. Tacoma’s rate of 538.8 aggravated assaults per 100,000 people in 2017 is significantly higher than the rates in Seattle (+40%), Spokane (+32%), Vancouver (+176%), and Lakewood (+18.4%). Tacoma’s rate of robberies per capita (188.3) is the second highest in the five cities (Crime in the United States, 2017).

Murders in Tacoma between 2015 and 2018, by gang-related and non-gang-related

	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Gang-related	3	0	0	1
Non-Gang-related	11	12	10	9
Total murders	14	12	10	10
Percent gang-involved	21%	0%	0%	10%

*2018 crimes are for January – August, 2018

Aggravated assaults in Tacoma between 2015 and 2018, by gang-related and non-gang-related

	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Gang-related	26	38	32	18
Non-Gang-related	865	1030	887	672
Total agg assaults	891	1068	919	690
Percent gang-involved	3%	4%	3%	3%

*2018 crimes are for January – August, 2018

Table 3.7 2017 violent crimes per 100,000 people, by city and state

	Tacoma	Spokane	Vancouver	Seattle	Lakewood	Washington
Population	213,504	218,066	176,884	721,365	61,080	7,405,743
Homicide	4.7	2.8	5.1	3.7	6.5	3.1
Agg Assault	538.8	406.9	201.7	382.2	455.0	184.6
Robbery	188.3	105	68.9	210.1	145.7	72.8
Violent crimes	811.7	623.9	368.4	633.0	695.6	304.5

(Crime in the United States, 2017)

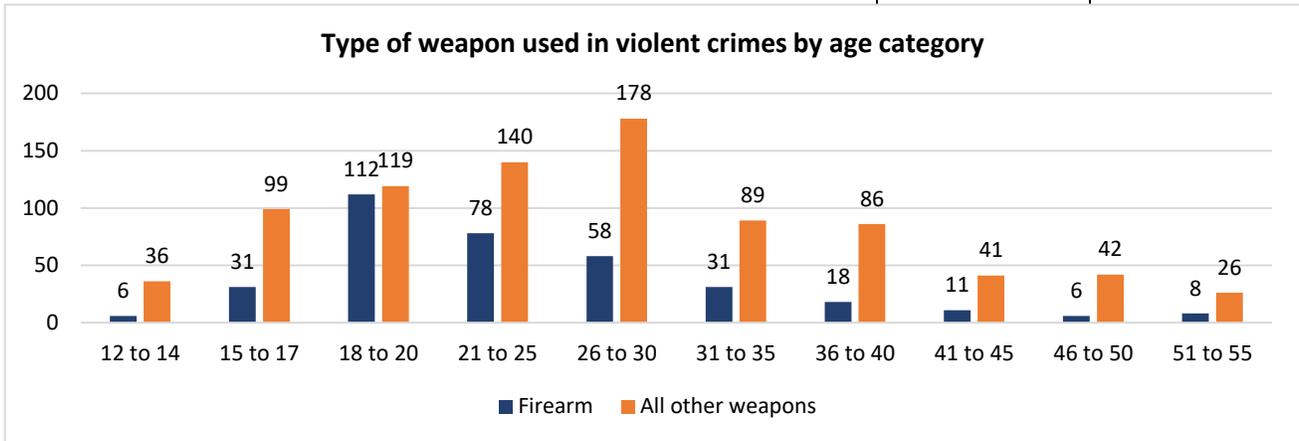
³ Crime statistics are for the period from January 2015 to August 2018.

This high rate of violent crime is exacerbated by frequent use of firearms. During 2018, firearms were used in 70% of homicides, 42% of aggravated assaults, and 33% of robberies in Tacoma.

Firearm use was particularly high by individuals ages 18 to 25. In fact, 48% of offenses committed by 18 to 20-year-olds during 2017 involved a firearm.

During 2018, firearms were used in:

70% of homicides	42% of aggravated assaults	33% of robberies
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While only small percentages of violent crimes in Tacoma have been classified as gang-related in crime reports, data from other sources suggests that gangs play a much larger role in local violence issues. The most recent conviction for 86.8% of individuals identified as Security Threat Group (gang) members in Tacoma by Washington Department of Corrections was for a violent offense (assault, aggravated assault, manslaughter, murder, robbery and sex crimes). (Washington Department of Corrections, 2018).

86.8% of security threat group members in Tacoma have committed a violent offense.



Gang-involved individuals who were interviewed for this assessment reported high levels of associations with peers who have committed a violent offense:

Percentage of interview participants who knew someone who had:

Beaten up or battered someone 100%	Threatened someone with a weapon 96%	Participated in a shooting or shot someone 80%	Injured or killed someone 52%
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They also reported high levels of victimization in the past year:

48.1% were assaulted or beaten	14.8% were assaulted or beaten by someone in their home	40.7% were robbed	18.5% were shot or stabbed
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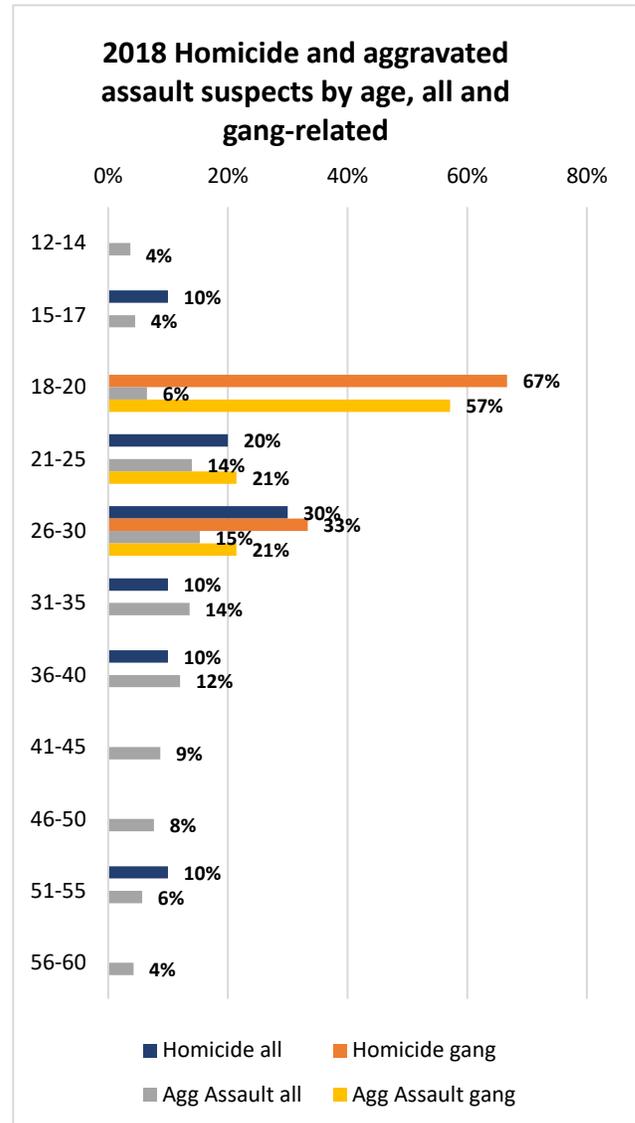
Young people are disproportionately involved in and affected by violence in Tacoma. The most common age of suspects and arrested persons in homicides and aggravated assaults from 2016 to 2018 was between 18 and 30.

- For incidents flagged as gang-related by Tacoma Police Department, 67% of homicide and 57% of aggravated assault suspects were between the ages of 18 and 20.
- 87.5% of all individuals arrested for homicide during 2018 were ages 15 to 30; 60% were between the age of 18 and 30.
- 62.5% of homicide suspects in 2018 were 18 to 30; 37.5% were between 18 and 20.
- 35% of suspects in aggravated assaults during 2018 were between the ages of 18 and 30.
- 37% of arrested persons in aggravated assaults during 2018 were between the ages of 18 and 30

87.5% of individuals arrested for homicide in 2018 were between 15 and 30 years old.

Significant percentages of all Tacoma constituency groups who were surveyed for this report expressed concerns about safety issues and/or gang violence issues.

- 30% of community residents reported that they feel less safe or much less safe in their neighborhood than they did one year ago.
- In a community survey conducted by the City of Tacoma in 2018, 29% of black residents reported feeling “not very safe” in Tacoma.
- 12.9% of community residents surveyed for this report reported that violent crimes (shootings, murder) are one of their top three concerns in their neighborhood, and 9% reported gang activity as a top concern.
- 46% of residents reported that gangs are at least somewhat active in their neighborhood.
- 47.3% of residents with children reported that they believe their child could be injured by gang activity.



30% of community residents reported that they feel less safe or much less safe in their neighborhood compared to a year ago.

Key Finding 2

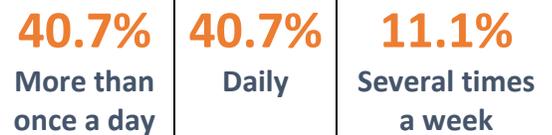
Gang-involved youth and young adults in Tacoma are affected by multiple complex issues and high-risk behaviors that keep them trapped in criminal behavior. The lack of intensive, coordinated, flexible and comprehensive services for criminal justice and gang-involved individuals exacerbates their difficulties in transitioning from gangs into productive endeavors.

Interviews with gang involved individuals and focus groups with professionals who work directly with this population indicated that gang-involved individuals in Tacoma have elevated levels of exposure to trauma and risk, and involvement in high-risk behavior in a variety of areas. Data reported in this finding is explored in more depth in Section 4.

High levels of substance use

Four in five gang involved individuals (81.4%) reported using some sort of drug on a daily or more than daily basis. The most commonly used substances were marijuana and alcohol, with higher levels of marijuana usage than any other substance

Reported frequency of substance use by gang involved individuals



High levels of trauma exposure

85% of gang member interview participants had an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) survey score of 3 or above. 59% of these individuals had a score of 5 or above. This level of childhood trauma exposure has been correlated to high rates of depression/anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance use, low educational attainment, unemployment, and long-term health risks.

Personal victimization

In the past year, respondents reported high levels of personal victimization. Almost half reported being assaulted/beaten (48.1%), 40.7% reported being robbed, and one in five reported being shot/stabbed (18.5%).

Interview participants' reports of personal victimization:



School suspension, expulsion and drop-out

All the gang-involved individuals interviewed for this report had been suspended. More than half (59.3%) had been expelled or had dropped out before completing a diploma or equivalency degree.



100% Suspended from school



Expelled or dropped out **59.3%**

58% of gang-involved individuals were unemployed at the time of their interview.

High levels of unemployment

While 75% of gang-involved individuals who were interviewed reported being employed at some point in time, more than half (58.3%) were unemployed at the time of their interview.

High levels of criminal involvement

86.8% of individuals identified as security threat group/gang members by Washington Department of Corrections are on probation/parole for a violent offense (assault, manslaughter, murder, robbery or sex crimes) (Washington Department of Corrections, 2018).



86.8% of security threat group members are on probation/parole for a violent offense.

High levels of access to drugs and weapons

Gang-involved individuals reported an extraordinarily high level of access to drugs and firearms

% of interview participants who reported that it would be easy or very easy to obtain:

A handgun	An assault weapon	Crack, cocaine or heroin	Opiates	Methamphetamine
88.9%	85.2%	92.6%	92.3%	92.6%

Homelessness

One in five (21%) of Tacoma individuals identified as security threat group (gang) members by Washington Department of Corrections are transient/homeless (Washington Department of Corrections, 2018).

Lack of services

While Washington Department of Corrections provides substance abuse treatment to individuals on probation/parole, adult probation officers reported that there are few intensive services in Tacoma that can support the complex needs of gang-involved individuals, ages 18 to 30.

Key Finding 3

A significant percentage of children and youth in Tacoma are exposed to critical risk factors for gang involvement in multiple domains of their lives. This creates a consistent recruiting pool of vulnerable youth for local gangs.

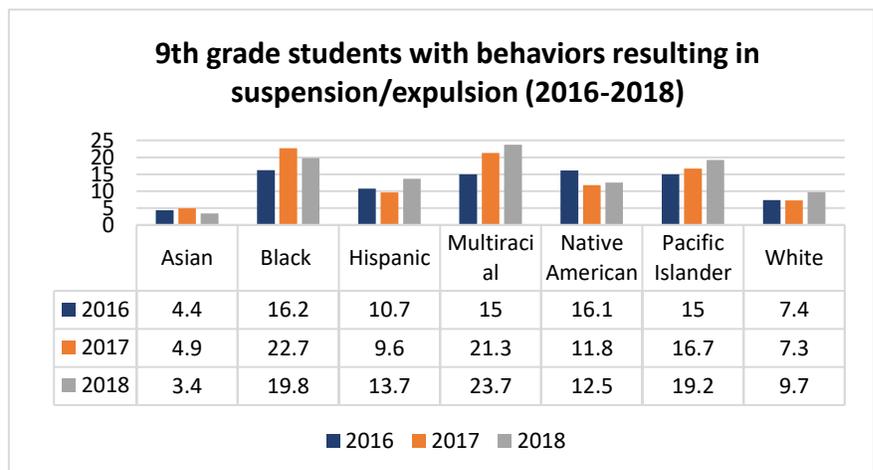
Data across multiple areas indicates that significant percentages of youth in Tacoma experience risk factors in multiple domains, including individual, family, school, peer and community. A meta-analysis conducted in 2010 identified six risk factors that are directly predictive of gang-involvement and two with mixed results (Klein and Maxson, 2010). Where data is available, the percentage of youth in Tacoma that appear to be affected by these risk factors will be reported below.

Negative life events (death, absent parent, school suspension, injury, illness)

- In 2017, 37.5% of children ages 0 to 17 in Tacoma are estimated to live in a single parent home; 11.5% live with other family members or non-biologically related adults (American Community Survey, 2018).
- 13.6% of 6th graders and 16.4% of 8th graders were suspended or expelled in 2018 (Tacoma Public Schools, 2018).



The highest rate of suspensions for youth in Tacoma Public Schools occurred at critical ages when young people are vulnerable to joining gangs (6th and 8th grades). Suspension/expulsion also disproportionately effects Black/African American, multiracial, Native American and Pacific Islander youth, who are 1.5 to 2.5 times more likely to be suspended, per capita comparison to white/Caucasian or Hispanic/Latino students (Tacoma Public Schools, 2018).



Positive attitudes toward delinquent behavior

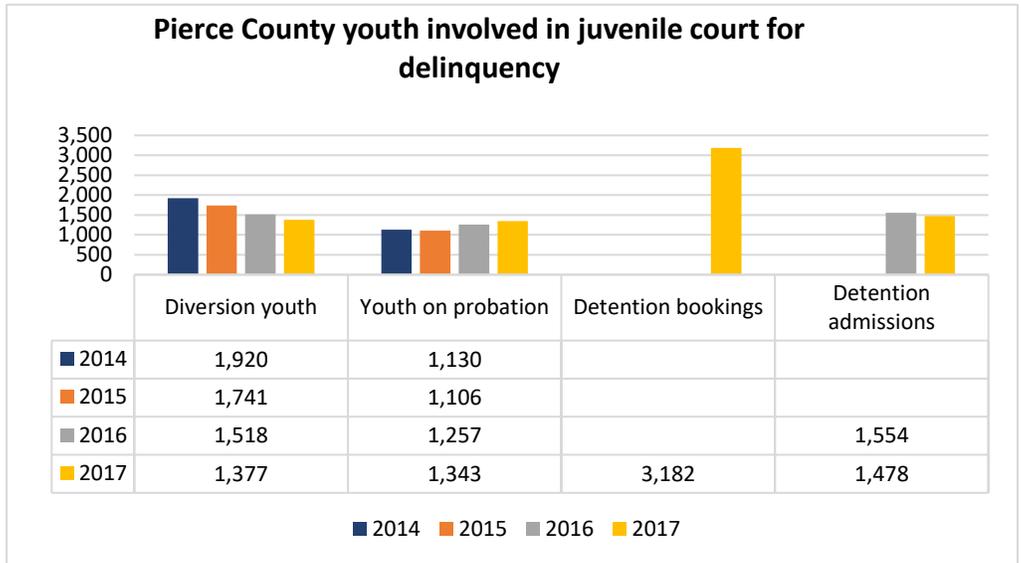
- 21% of 6th graders, 24% of 8th graders, and 40% of 10th and 12th graders reported favorable views of drug use (Washington Healthy Youth Survey, 2017).

Problem (antisocial/risky/impulsive) behaviors

- 14% of 8th graders, 20% of 10th graders, and 23% of 12th graders reported early initiation of drug use (Washington Healthy Youth Survey, 2017).
- Between 46% and 56% of youth in 6th to 12th grades were at perceived risk of drug use (Washington Healthy Youth Survey, 2017).

According to the Pierce County Juvenile Court (2018):

- In 2017, 1,377 youth were sent to a Pierce County Juvenile Court diversion program for delinquent or status offenses.
- In 2017, 1,343 youth in Pierce County were on juvenile probation.
- In 2017, there were 3,182 detention bookings for juveniles in Pierce County
- In 2016, Pierce County had the highest number of youths admitted to juvenile detention in the state of Washington (Pierce County (Gilman and Sanders, 2017)).

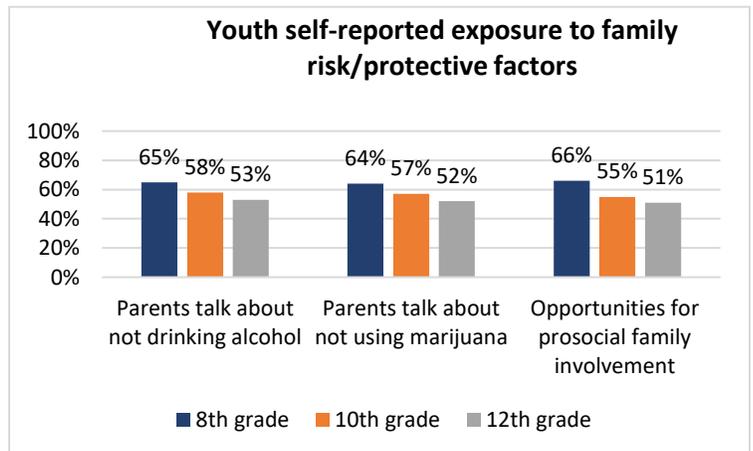


Delinquent peer network/negative peer influences

- Between 15% and 21% of youth in 6th to 12th grade reported having friends who use drugs.

Low parental supervision and monitoring

While not specifically addressed by the Washington Healthy Youth Survey, questions on the WHYS did address parental messaging on drug/alcohol use and prosocial involvement with family.



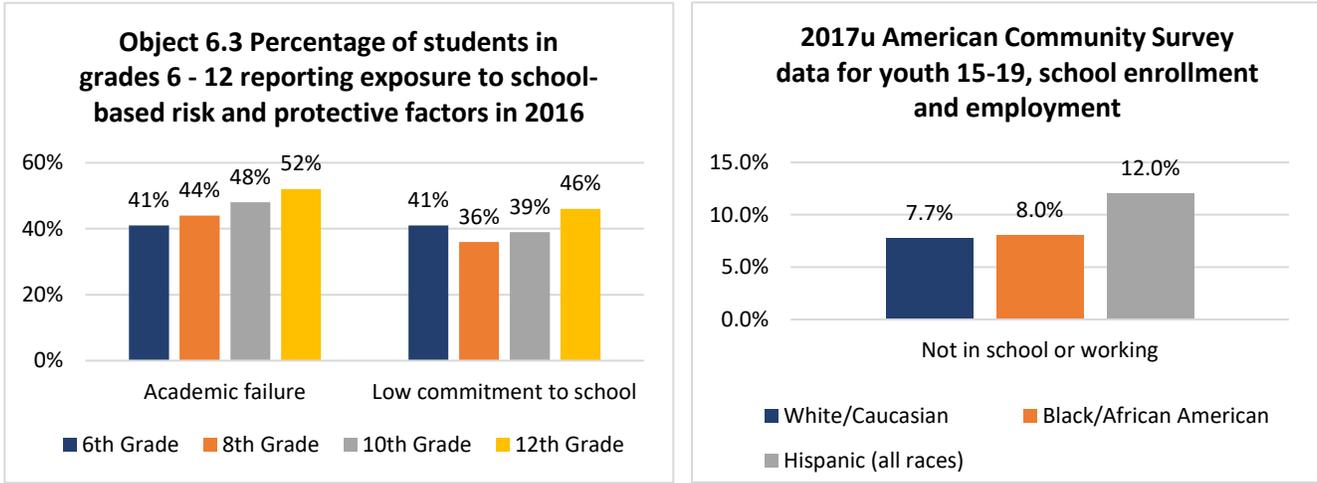
Between 35% and 49% of youth in grades 10, 10 and 12 in Pierce County report inconsistent messaging from parents on substance use and lack of exposure to prosocial family involvement. (Washington Healthy Youth Survey, 2017).

Low school commitment and attachment

Youth in Pierce County self-report high academic risk factors, both for academic failure and low commitment to school. (Washington Healthy Youth Survey, 2017). For youth ages 15 to 19,

- 18% of white youth are not enrolled in school
- 25.2% of Hispanic youth (all races) are not enrolled in school
- 8.2% of black youth are not enrolled in school.

Further, close to one in ten youth ages 16 to 19 in Tacoma is not attending school or working (American Community Survey, 2018). Significant numbers of youth in Pierce County also report high levels of academic failure and low commitment to school.



Youth risk exposure in Tacoma is covered in further detail in Section 7, along with estimates of numbers of youth experiencing specific risk factors in Tacoma. Because the Healthy Youth Survey, while comprehensive, does not cover some specific risk factors for gang involvement, policymakers in Tacoma may wish to study youth risk exposure on a local basis in further detail. Programs assessed in the gap analysis (Section 7) found that 60% of the programs provided a dosage of one hour or less per week to the young people that they serve. For youth experiencing risk in multiple domains of their lives (individual, family, school, peer), services need to be scaled to a more intensive dosage to counter the level of risk they experience daily.

Key Finding 4

Gaps in gang data collection inhibit Tacoma's ability to:

- Analyze the level and extent of local gang activity
- Share meaningful information with different constituency groups
- Measure the effectiveness of current strategies
- Engage residents, key leaders, and agency partners in collaborating on local gang issues
- Create organized, efficient, and effective strategies to reduce youth and young adult involvement in gangs and violence.

The number of gang members identified by Tacoma Police Department decreased by two-thirds (65.4%) between 2011 and 2018, from 651 to 225. This decrease in identified population resulted in significant shifts in the age and race of known gang members in Tacoma. Black/African American gang members represented 56.1% of the total population of gang members in 2011 and now represent around 69.9%. The percentage of white gang members (including Hispanics) decreased from 25.7% of the population to 20.2%.

The population of known gang members also became considerably older from 2011 to 2018. This data is covered in-depth in Section 3 of this report.

Gang population by affiliation, 2011 and 2018			
	2011 members & associates*	2018 members & associates*	% change
Total active gangs	88	46	-47.7%
Crips	335	100	-70.1%
Bloods	114	35	-69.3%
Sureños	108	15	-86.1%
Norteños	5	5	0
Other total	89	70	-21.3%
Folks/Folk Nation		34	
Juggalos	37	4	-91.9%
Other sets		21	
Total	651	225	-65.4%

*includes duplicate entries for individuals with multiple reported gang affiliations but does not include duplicate entries for individuals with multiple addresses.

Between 2015 and 2018, crimes classified as gang-related also represented an extremely small percentage of all violent⁴ crimes. No homicides were classified as gang-related in 2016-17, and only 3-4% of aggravated assaults and 1% of robberies were classified as gang-related during 2015-18.

Percentage of violent crimes classified as gang-related, 2015-2018

	2015			2016			2017			2018*		
	Homicide	Agg. Assault	Robbery									
Gang	3	26	5	0	38	7	0	32	6	1	18	5
All	14	891	486	12	1068	541	10	919	466	10	690	358
% gang	21%	3%	1%	0	4%	1%	0%	3%	1%	10%	3%	1%

*Only crimes between January 2018 and August 2018 are included in this analysis.

⁴ Between January 1 2018 and August 31 2018.

However, while the percentage of crimes classified as gang-related were low, Tacoma’s violent crime problem was high compared to other cities in Washington. It is impossible, based on existing police reports, to know if a decrease in gang membership and involvement in violent crime has occurred since 2011.

However, surveys with public safety professionals seem to indicate that officers believe that improvement needs to be made to current gang intelligence and enforcement strategies. Only 11% of public safety professionals who were surveyed indicated that they are satisfied with Tacoma’s current response to gangs. Suggestions for improvement included:

- Increase collection of intelligence on gangs
- Assign more officers to gang enforcement and investigation
- Engage in more proactive gang enforcement activities

One comment by a public safety professional was quite specific:

The Tacoma Police Department Gang Unit was reduced and now consists of two officers and one sergeant, who have been assigned to Special Investigations Division (SID) for nearly two years. They are no longer in uniform, in patrol cars, contacting gang members, or responding to gang-related calls. There are very few (2-3) officers in the Tacoma Police Department who are formally trained in gang-related culture and activities, and they are on patrol, making the largest impact. The department needs a robust gang/violent crime unit with 6 to 8 proactive patrol officers who focus on various activities connected to gangs: burglaries (for weapons), controlled substances, firearms, human trafficking, promoting prostitution, etc.

Most constituency groups reported that gangs are a problem in Tacoma. Almost 9 in 10 community leaders (87%) reported that gangs are a problem in Tacoma and rated serious crimes among their top concerns.

Community leaders’ top 3 gang concerns:	
46%	Increase in violent crime
43%	Increase in weapon crimes
38%	Increase in drug crimes

But, while significant percentages of each constituent group expressed concerns about gangs, including about safety issues, substantial percentages of survey respondents also reported an overall lack of knowledge about gang issues in Tacoma and a lack of awareness of activities currently being undertaken to reduce gangs.

% of respondents who do not know if gang activity is increasing or decreasing in the past 3 years:



When asked what is currently being done about gangs, responses from community leaders included:

- Nothing, no one wants to talk about it
- Not sure, but it seems that most attention to the gang issue comes from the police
- Not enough due to funding issues
- I have not heard any information about the current response
- Not much, you need to pay attention to what is happening in the community
- Police monitoring and some outreach to youth is about it
- Not enough. We need to get in the homes to determine what these kids need, not all kids that are subject to gang exposure need the same services
- While I know there are efforts being made to address gang activities and gang violence, I have not heard or read about what is being done, so I am unable to respond fully to this question

Agency personnel survey	Do not know	Gap analysis survey	Do not know
What signs of gang activity have you observed in the youth that you serve?	16%	What percentage of youth served in your program are current or former gang members?	53.3%
Community residents	Do not know	School personnel survey	Do not know
What are the top three problems caused by gangs in your neighborhood?	31.8%	Do you believe gang-involved students attend your school?	20.6%

Community residents expressed concerns about neighborhood issues, but did not know if they were connected to gangs:

- “I hear gunshots often, don’t know where they come from, but we can hear them.”

They also expressed dissatisfaction at a lack of available information on gangs and a perceived lack of response to gangs and related crime:

- “I have not seen any response to gangs by the City of Tacoma”
- “We don’t know what is being done to curb gang activity. It would be nice to know.”
- “We have an active drug house in our neighborhood. Why did police wait to respond until someone was shot?”
- “It feels like gang activity is on the rise again, and we do not have enough police officers to patrol and control gang issues effectively.”

Agency personnel expressed a need for more training and information on gangs that would enable them to more effectively identify and respond to gang-involved youth in their program.

It should be noted that Key Finding 4 in the 2011 Tacoma Gang Assessment was:

“Gaps in information/data about gangs have affected Tacoma’s ability to understand and significantly impact the local gang problem.”