

Understanding Life in an East Los Angeles Public
Housing Project:

A Focus on Gang and Non-Gang Families

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Anthropology

July 1996

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A research grant (90-CL-1105) funded by the Department of Health
and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.
1992-1995

All opinions and interpretations are the author's and not to be
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Executive Summary

This three-year investigation examined family life and gang activities in a low-income, East Los Angeles public housing project, Pico Gardens. A quantitative-qualitative research strategy was employed together with a collaborative strategy involving both academics and community residents on the research team. Quantitative data collected by questionnaire-structured interviews from a randomly selected sample of households was compared to similar data collected from households in which at least one family member was also an active gang member. Ethnographic information and the insights of community research trainees were used to illuminate the similarities and differences between the two different types of households.

Pico Gardens and two adjacent housing developments comprise of a geographically and socially isolated entity. Poverty is rampant in these units, as over half of the households qualify for and receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments. Nevertheless, there are some important differences between the gang families and the randomly selected families in our study. These differences strongly suggest that the gang families, even in a community that is sometimes stigmatized as a haven for welfare recipients, criminals and drug users, are more at risk to fall prey to local problems than most of their neighbors. Gang households, for example, were significantly larger and more likely to be headed by single females. There are also indications of greater economic stress in the gang families, as suggested by the fact that a significantly smaller proportion of gang households have access to a car. Moreover, the gang family household heads and family members have less access to social capital, fewer relatives nearby to assist them, and even fewer positive interpersonal experiences in their backgrounds to draw upon as resources.

Recommendations stemming from this research include:

- The creation of more Macro level policies that are developed to better incorporate low-income populations, similar to the one found in Pico Gardens, into the mainstream economy through the development of more good paying, productive jobs.
- The introduction of more effective policing that emphasizes a positive police presence and the familiarization of officers with community members.
- Personnel in all social service agencies need to become more familiar with the public housing residents as people; realizing that differences among such families do exist and that different families require different services.

- Public and private service agencies must coordinate efforts to reinforce the strengths of families and ameliorate their problems.

Introduction

The purpose of the research reported here is to identify and explore the key forces that distinguish gang families from non-gang families living in a small and socially isolated area. The research was conducted in The Pico Gardens Housing Development in Los Angeles between October 1992 and September 1995. Pico Gardens is located just east of downtown Los Angeles. Pico Gardens and two other adjoining housing projects cover 57.5 acres of "townhouse configured units." The three projects have a total "official" population of 4,762 residents as well as a substantial but unrecorded "unofficial" population (Housing Authority, 1990:3-4).

The effectiveness of social control institutions (family, school, church, and police) is limited in Pico Gardens because of larger social and cultural forces at work. These forces include chronic unemployment, residents' lack of adequate job skills, and a wide array of barriers that are based on race, language, and cultural practices. The difficulties that pervade the housing development predispose youngsters who live there to be socialized on the street.

Previous research in two nearby barrios found substantially similar structural and historical forces at work. At least three generations of gang members were identified in those two barrios—some coming from the same family. Despite similarities among the barrios' demographics, there is significant variation from one family to another within each barrio. Children from some families are much less affected by street socialization and are more likely to follow conventional lifestyles and avoid membership in the local gang (Moore and Vigil 1987). Residents of these two barrios were subjected to many of the same historical strains as those from Pico Gardens and the main objective of this research is to discover what factors make some families' members more vulnerable to gang membership.

Pico Gardens was selected as the research site for this study, in part, because it lies in the heart of the East Los Angeles barrios - all of which have all been adversely affected by the major socioeconomic developments of the past several decades (Moore and Vigil 1993). It is possible that because Pico Gardens consists of rented apartments, its residents have fared worse under the impacts of these transformations than most of the

areas' residents who reside in single family, stand-alone houses. Latinos make up 85 percent of the residents in the project and this number would be significantly larger if "an unknown, but undoubtedly significant, number of individuals and families with non-legal immigration status" (Housing Authority, 1990:3-4) were included. The principal source of income for over one-third of the households in Pico Gardens is AFDC payments. Although many of the households derive their incomes primarily from employment, most job-holders work in low-paying, low-status service and manufacturing jobs that have largely replaced the unionized, high-paying jobs that were once available to East Los Angeles residents (Moore and Vigil 1993). In Pico Gardens, the average annual income per household is \$10,932 (see Condon 1989 and Jencks and Mayer 1988, for discussions of the relationship of crime levels for housing project residence and extreme poverty, respectively).

Public schools and health services in the area have also become increasingly overburdened in recent decades because of the continuing state and local government budget "squeeze." These cutbacks have significantly added to the stresses that local residents face. Under these dire conditions, participation in secondary and marginal labor markets, including criminal activity, has markedly increased (Moore 1989). The combination of these economic pressures with the increasing inability of social control agents to maintain effective control in the streets and within many families has led to increasing gang violence in recent years (Moore and Vigil 1987; Dubrow and Garbarino 1989 discuss these relationships in another public housing setting). The per capita arrest rates for drug-related offenses and violent crimes among residents in the three projects were much higher, between 40 and 50 percent more, than the national average (Housing Authority 1990; see also Dunworth 1994 for comparable reports). While these arrests are not exclusive to gang members, because there are many other street dealers who are not gang affiliated, it is not surprising that gang activities have also become more prominent under these desperate circumstances. (Venkatesh 1996, for example, reports on the similar complex interrelationships of gangs, criminal activities, and public housing in Chicago.)

Of the ten known street gangs that are active in Pico Gardens and the two neighboring developments, two -- Primera (First Street) and Cuatro (Fourth Street) Flats -- have been in existence for over forty years (Housing Authority, 1990). Cuatro Flats predominates in Pico Gardens and there are still veteranos (members of the earliest cliques) who either live in the project or regularly visit family members who still live there. The

majority of gang members in Pico Gardens, however, are not only first generation participants in gang activities, but are also first generation (or "1.5 generation") immigrants (see Vigil 1996a for a discussion of the "1.5" generation). At one time, families that were closely connected to Mexican culture, as first generation immigrants usually are, tended to succeed in preventing their children from joining gangs (Vigil 1988). This is much less true today, however, as more and more first generation Mexican and Latino children are either joining established gangs or spontaneously creating new ones alongside of previously existing gangs (Vigil 1993b; Romo and Falbo 1996; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 1995). Both immigrant and American born Mexicans are represented in this study and both groups are visible in the local gangs.

Two conceptual frameworks have guided our investigation of gang families and the interplay between the societal macro and micro level structures. The first framework consists of a macro examination of how certain factors, which I have termed "multiple marginality" in some of my earlier works (Vigil 1988), additively and cumulatively lead some families and youth to become more "choloized" (marginalized). Finn-Aage Esbensen (2000) explains multiple marginality as "the combined disadvantages of low socio-economic status, street socialization, and segregation of ... gang members who live in these socially disorganized areas" (p.5) The process of "choloization" that occurs when children are subject to the negative impacts of multiple marginality puts individuals and families more at risk of being street socialized and joining gangs.

There is a large body of research that suggests that it is necessary to examine the interaction of different risk factors when looking at youth gang involvement. This is so because despite popular belief, "Most youth who reside in areas where gangs exist choose not to join these gangs, additional factors are required to explain why youth join gangs" (Esbensen 2000, p. 3). It is the existence of a large number of inter-related risk factors that make youngsters more prone to joining a gang. Byron Egeland, Elizabeth Carlson, and L. Alan Sroufe (1993) argue that, "for children living in poverty, stressful life events are numerous and compounded by adverse social and economic factors" (p. 521).

Lisbeth Schorr (1988) has similarly endorsed the multiple marginality theory, suggesting that in order for children to suffer adverse outcomes due to risk factors, they must be subjected to a number of simultaneous stressors. Schorr (1988) states that, "Lasting damage occurs when the elements of a child's environment - at home, at school, in the neighborhood - multiply each other's destructive effects" (p. 28).

Hetherington, Stanley-Hagen, & Anderson (1989) agree with Schorr's findings, determining that "a single stress typically carries no appreciable psychiatric risk for children. When children are exposed to multiple stressors, however, the adverse effects increase multiplicatively" (p. 304).

Multiple stress factors in Pico Gardens often lead individuals in subsequent generations to become gang affiliated.

It is not uncommon to see several siblings or two or more generations of gang members from one family to leapfrog over each other. The pervasive poverty in Pico Gardens has meant that many families have few options and avenues available to them that would enable them to leave the development. Furstenberg (1993) has found that communities have a major impact on children's positive or negative developmental outcomes. He believes that, "the interplay between neighborhood and parenting process probably affects their children's success in averting serious problems and finding pathways out of poverty" (p. 234). The potential harm that ensues from this pattern, however, is that younger relatives are enticed to emulate the gang members in their families.

The second, micro level approach deals with social control networks, i.e., families, schools, police, and church. Our current study focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on the family. Family networks, especially in Latino culture, are the primary source of early socialization and enculturation for children (Moore and Pachon 1985). Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Garbarino et al. (1986) have noted ways that wider social forces are linked to the dynamics of family life. Parker (1988) suggests that children are impacted by the "dynamic interplay between the environment and the child" (p. 3) and Schorr (1988) has found that "the interplay between constitution and environment is far more decisive in shaping an individual than either alone" (p. 25). Moore (1991) discovered that barrio family life was impacted by economic opportunities that are determined by larger, macro forces. In an area like Pico Gardens where many people experience "persistent and concentrated poverty," the reverberations in other social and cultural realms are profound and must be carefully dissected. In a previous study by Moore and Vigil (1987), it was noted that four family types exist in most barrios: 1) poverty-stricken, 2) conventional/controlled, 3) unconventional/controlled, and 4) conventional/uncontrolled.

In the first type of family, the poverty-stricken or "cholo" family, it was found that family members often became involved in deviant behavior and were just as influential, if not more so, than gang peers in effecting barrio youngsters' lives. The families were ineffective at controlling family members, who were

often involved in the gang/criminal subculture. The polar opposite to this type of family is the second variant, the conventional or controlled family, which resembles the type of family that is often found in stable, working class communities. These families usually consisted of two parents -- although occasionally headed by a single parent - and the family heads were exemplary role models for their children, being able to effectively maintain control over them. The third type of family, the unconventional/controlled family, is comprised of adult members who may be involved in gangs and some deviant activities, such as drug sales, but are able to maintain the façade of conventionality and conceal their deviance from the rest of the family. These adults are still able to provide guidance and leadership to their children. Finally, the fourth type of family, the conventional/uncontrolled family, is simply ineffectual. There are many different variants within this category.

A vast body of literature argues that single-parent households adversely affect children's developmental outcomes by thwarting and undermining their integration and involvement in society (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986; Whitehead 1993; McLanahan 1997). Growing up in a single-parent household has been linked with increased economic hardship, receiving less parental supervision and having less access to social support networks (McLanahan 1997). Why is it that single-parent households contribute to delinquency? There are three explanations that are commonly cited to answer this question. One explanation is that when there is only one parent to handle two roles, that of breadwinner and breadmaker, there is simply not enough time or energy for the parent to do a good job of parenting (see Matsueda and Heimer 1987). The second explanation frequently cited is that the single mother is less capable of supervising and disciplining her children, especially her male children. This has been demonstrated by statistics that illustrate that over 70% of the juveniles in state reform institutions come from single-parent households (Whitehead 1993). Generally, the most serious difficulties that children in single, female-headed families encounter emerge during adolescence, when they are under-going the developmental crisis that occurs during the passage from childhood to adulthood (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986). Burden, Miller, and Boozer (1996) have determined that adolescents who grew up in a "one-parent home, with the single parent being the mother" (p. 287) were more likely to join a gang than their peers in two-parent homes. The final explanation is that single-female households are substantially more likely to be living in poverty than any other type of family (DaVanzo 1992). Children often suffer from the far-reaching and

negative impacts that poverty has on them and their families. Specifically, living in poverty is closely linked with a number of other risk factors. Whitehead (1993) states that, "Single-mother families are vulnerable to not just poverty but to a particularly debilitating form of poverty: welfare dependence" (p. 16). DaVanzo (1992) similarly writes that, "Living in poverty has a demonstrably adverse effect on the lives of children ... children in poverty are more likely to engage in delinquent activity" (p. 85).

Methodology

To broaden and better understand the variation in families whose members are associated with gang activity and drug problems, our research employed a combination of survey, interview, and observation techniques (Copeland and White 1991).

A quantitative/qualitative mix of approaches and information was utilized in carrying out these steps:

- (1) Baseline sample: A random sample of the heads of households from 30 of the 239 units in Pico Gardens was selected to complete a two-hour questionnaire-guided interview that covered basic demographic, family, and household information. The instrument was constructed on the basis of field-testing and focused on the social control issues of attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Hirschi 1969). Along with data from housing project management, the census, and other sources, this survey information became the baseline for all families in the research site.
- (2) Intensified observation of gang families: While we were collecting our baseline data, our community researchers were also conducting informal observations of family life and all the families exhibiting a ganging pattern were designated for further study.
- (3) Gang-based selection of second sample: A sample of all the remaining households in Pico Gardens who had family members who belonged to local gangs were identified and the heads of these families were interviewed with the same survey instrument mentioned above. By combining the data we gathered from our initial, random sample with the data we collected from our second sample of all gang families, we were able to get information on all families in Pico Gardens that had one or more of its members in a gang.
- (4) Focus on gang families: After initial analysis of this body of research, concerted contacts and interviews with local leaders and service providers (churches, probation officers, schools, etc.), we were better able to identify families that showed an intergenerational "ganging" pattern (two or more siblings or two or more generations in the

gang).

Taking a broad approach to the enculturation process of recent immigrants, this study has combined interviews, life and family histories, and observational techniques in order to compile and trace the acquisition and retention of cultural patterns. Specific attention was paid to parents' and/or primary caregivers' and children's interaction and modeling of behavior patterns. Another factor that was important in this environment was the linkages between siblings and adult relatives. The "Rashomon" technique was useful in this process. This technique is based on the classic Japanese movie, Rashoman, in which a murder is described and interpreted from the perspective of each of the three key participants. Many different family studies have benefited from this approach. For the purposes of this study, we encouraged family members to tell "their story" and to talk about other family members. From the dense and complex mosaics that developed, we were able to piece together "family stories" which assisted us in determining what characteristics made up gang families.

Much of the research on cultural transmission and enculturation of family members has benefited from longitudinal examinations of selected families. Within the context of our study in a public housing barrio, we initially cast a wide net from which to select "ganging" families. Once identified, we observed and interacted with these families for nearly three years. Information about these families was gathered and recorded in different settings and throughout constantly changing personal and family situations. Our baseline data includes the accumulation of recorded incidents, moods, attitudes, accomplishments and failures for each family.

In addition to a combination of quantitative and qualitative research techniques, our study in Pico Gardens utilized a strategy of collaboration between academic professionals (including the principal investigators), students, and community researchers. The collaborative research strategy was similar to that used in earlier research efforts that were conducted by the co-principal investigator, Joan W. Moore and her colleagues at the Chicano Pinto Research Project (Moore 1977). Community research trainees who were long-time residents of the housing development carried out most of the formal interviewing and served as principal sources of data that was based on their long experience in the community as well as their personal knowledge of many of the residents.

We began gathering data during the fourth month of the

research project (after an initial delay in funding was cleared up and the community researchers were trained), and we continued collecting data through the final month of the third and last year of the project. During that period, formal questionnaire-guided interviews were conducted with: (a) the household heads (or co-heads) of a random sample of the households in Pico Gardens, (b) the household heads (or co-heads) of all but two of the other Pico Gardens households in which at least one active street gang member resided (two families refused to participate), (c) the heads of an additional seven families in the housing development in which there were children in the at-risk age range for gang involvement, but who did not participate in the gangs, and (d) 11 members of the predominant street gang in Pico Gardens who did not reside in the housing development themselves. More open-ended and informal interviews and observations of members of the targeted families and other families continued throughout the research period; both the community researchers and the principal investigator, Diego Vigil, were regularly involved in these efforts. Data derived from all these sources was discussed regularly during meetings of the research team. The discussions that occurred during these exchanges often identified the need to further question specific participants as well as generate important information that was pertinent to the research.

Additional information that was important to the study but unintended from the start of the project was also collected during the research project: (a) During the first year of the research project an ethno-historical record was compiled of the five decades of the Cuatro Flats gang. This history was based on interviews with former members of the predominant gang in Pico Gardens. A less complete record of the gang's chief rivals was also created. (b) During the study's second year, a yearlong chronicle of all the incidents of violence in the barrio (with a particular focus on gang activities) was recorded by a resident who has lived in Pico Gardens for decades and is frequently sought out by residents (including gang members) for assistance and advice when dealing with service agencies and authorities. (c) During the third year, extensive photography and videotaping was done in both public and private family settings within the housing development. Most of the photos were taken by Vigil, who gave copies of the materials to the residents. This proved to be an effective means of expressing the researchers' gratitude to the residents. A graduate film student at the University of Southern California was hired to train the community researchers how to use the video camera and to videotape community events herself. She created a documentary using some of the footage she shot. (d) Throughout the research period, Vigil regularly discussed issues at the research site as well as gang activities

in the project with local police, school officials and public and private social service providers that serve the area. Father Gregory J. Boyle, formerly the local parish priest and now the director of a job development program in the area was frequently in contact with Vigil during the project as the two men worked together to address the needs of local gang affiliated youth.

As noted earlier, the initial sample of households in the study was gathered by randomly selecting (with the aid of a random numbers table) 30 of the 239 household addresses in Pico Gardens. One of the addresses selected by this method turned out to be vacant and was replaced by an adjacent unit. The household heads of the selected units and/or their spouses were interviewed using a questionnaire that consisted of elements that were previously used by the principal investigators in similar research studies. The questions asked to the residents were modified, however, as to address the foci of this study and/or problems (primarily of language usage) discovered during an extensive month-long field-testing of the instrument. The same instrument was employed when the household heads (and/or their spouses) of the "gang families" (i.e., families with an active gang member) who were not included in the random sample of households were interviewed. (Four of the households in the random sample had active gang members residing in them.) During the third year of the study, a select group of senior gang members who resided outside Pico Gardens were interviewed about their household and family structures. This was conducted by using an abbreviated form of the same questionnaire that was utilized during the surveying of resident households. A second questionnaire, consisting primarily of open-ended questions regarding parenting strategies and family dynamics was used in follow-up interviews with members of many of the households from both initial samples as well as seven additional resident families with children who had not joined a gang. All formal interviews were preceded by the researcher reading an explanation of the purpose of the project to the study participants. To ensure that the participants' privacy was respected, each person that was interviewed signed an informed consent statement in either English or Spanish (as was appropriate for the interviewee), and all data was recorded without any of the participants' names mentioned. Data from the questionnaire-guided interviews was entered into computer datasets, tabulated and cross-tabulated for analysis. Where appropriate, additional descriptive statistics were used to facilitate the analysis.

Problems Encountered

Numerous problems affected the course of the research project. Foremost among these were the repeated outbursts of

gang-related violence and other crime in the neighborhood. Specifically, six shooting deaths occurred in Pico Gardens and the adjacent area during the final year of the study. Police-community relations remained troubled throughout the study period, but were especially acute in the weeks following the shooting of a police officer just outside of Pico Gardens in May 1994. During one episode, large numbers of police swarmed into Pico Gardens, beating and arresting several young men. One of our community research trainees was arrested during this incident while attempting to assist a neighbor to inform the police that he lived in a nearby apartment. The trainee's wrist was injured during his arrest.

Other sources of tension in the housing development potentially affected the residents' confidence in the researchers' efforts. For example, just before the study got underway, the Housing Authority announced its intention to renovate Pico Gardens by demolishing and replacing most of the buildings there. Community meetings to discuss these plans were held thereafter, raising residents' apprehensions about who would have to move out of the development, for how long and with what compensation and assistance. In the fall of 1994, there was a proposition on California's ballot that would severely limit immigrants' access to public health, education and welfare services -- this became another source of tension in Pico Gardens, as many of the households are headed by immigrants.

These tensions may have affected residents' responses during our study. Moreover, residents were aware of an existing (although rarely applied) official policy of evicting resident families deemed to be "problems." In any event, most respondents in the formal interviews (which not only involved questionnaires but also tape recorded sessions when interviewees did not object) denied any involvement on their own part or that of any family members with gang activities. In fact, almost all respondents denied that any household member engaged in even legal behaviors such as using alcoholic beverages. Moreover, they did so despite the interviewers knowing otherwise and the respondents being aware of the interviewers' knowledge. During the field-testing of the questionnaire, one trainee interviewed her mother who similarly denied that she or others in the family ever used alcohol - the interviewer knew, however, that all members of her family used alcohol and some of them used it frequently.

Finally, near the end of the first year of the study, the research coordinator/data analyst suffered a stroke that hospitalized him briefly. This incident, in conjunction with the long delay in initial funding and the consequently slow start to

the research project, resulted in major readjustments to the overall research schedule and timeline and significantly slowed the process of data recording and processing.

Findings

As noted, Pico Gardens and two contiguous public housing developments lie just east of and across the Los Angeles River from downtown Los Angeles, on the northwestern edge of the Boyle Heights neighborhood. While residents have more open space and grassy lawns than people living in the apartments and residential hotels of downtown Los Angeles, the facilities in Pico Gardens are visibly less well maintained than most of the free standing homes and small apartment buildings in the residential areas of Boyle Heights. Moreover, Pico Gardens and the adjacent housing developments are isolated from downtown and the rest of East Los Angeles by physical barriers including decaying industries and warehouses, the riverbed, railroad tracks and freeways.

As one of the oldest public housing developments in Los Angeles (dating from 1942), Pico Gardens also suffers from a deteriorating infrastructure. Electrical shorts, leaks in the plumbing and roofs, and insect and vermin infestation are recurring problems. The courtyards and parking lots provide open space, but the paved areas are potholed and cracked and most of the large trees and shrubbery have been removed to eliminate hiding places (a strategy developed in the wake of a major police-resident clash in 1978). All of these factors have made Pico Gardens a somewhat barren, desolate place to live and raise a family. Recreation and social facilities are somewhat better, but still limited and show similar signs of neglect. Most residents complain at one time or another about the condition of their neighborhood.

The residents of Pico Gardens came to live in the housing development for a variety of reasons; most remain there primarily because of economic factors. Several household heads in our sample were raised in Pico Gardens or an adjacent project. Most, however, lived elsewhere before moving into the projects. They relocated in Pico Gardens to take advantage of cheaper rents, larger apartments, the allowance of a large number of children, or a combination of the aforementioned explanations. As a result of the benefits of living in the barrio, the households in Pico Gardens are much more stable than might be expected in such a poor environment. There are some exceptions to this rule, however, as particular individuals within households may come and go (as will be discussed later with regard to "shadow" spouses).

As is indicated in Table 1, which compares Pico Garden's residents to nearby communities and Los Angeles County at large,

well over half of the families in Pico Gardens have resided in the same place for over five years. This number is similar to that of their immediate neighbors (downtown and in the rest of Boyle Heights) as well as the county's population in general. The average household size in Pico Gardens, is considerably larger, however, than those in nearby neighborhoods (which are themselves larger than the county average). The families in the barrio also consist of many more children than the surrounding communities; this significantly lowers the average age of Pico Garden residents. The level of economic distress in Pico Gardens is evident. More than half of the households receive government Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments and/or food stamps, eight times more often than residents of L.A. County, while over a quarter of them (two-and-a-half times the county-wide figure) have no car -- despite the fact that the nearest supermarket is two miles away. Downtown residents are even less apt to have a car, however, due to the over-represented number of elderly poor and, to a lesser degree, the lack of available parking for people living in residential hotels.

Table 1. Selected Characteristics of Pico Gardens Sample Households and Surrounding Communities

	Pico Gardens Sample	Boyle Heights & Downtown	East Los Angeles	Los Angeles County
Mean number of persons per household	5.2	3.4	4.2	2.9
Mean age (years)	22.2	30.4	28.6	32.7
Percent of population under age 18	57	28	34	26
Percent of households receiving public assistance	57	18	12	7
Percent of households without a car	27	42	20	11

Percent of households in same residence for 5 years or less	57	54	43	55
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The careers of Pico Gardens residents are marked by fits and starts and less than a third of the households in our survey included people who were employed in a salaried or wage-paying job. (Several household heads and/or their spouses earned some money by making and peddling goods in the informal "underground economy.") Not surprisingly, the residents frequently express the need for jobs and skill training programs. Pico Gardens is surrounded by buildings that housed, at one time, thriving industrial plants and warehouses. Most of these buildings, however, were abandoned in the 1970s and 1980s and are now empty and decaying. Across the river there are service jobs available to Pico Gardens residents in downtown hotels, restaurants, office buildings, and in the booming garment district. Residents seeking work in these places, however, compete with recent immigrants who are willing to accept minimum wage or, all too often, even less. Most of the adult residents (even those who immigrated long ago) feel that the entry-level jobs they might have been willing to take years ago no longer provide them with enough income to sustain their families. Moreover, they now know what constitutes a good job in America: merit salary increases, career ladder opportunities, benefits, decent working conditions, and job security. Having learned this the hard way, e.g., losing jobs, being fired without cause, being lodged in below minimum wage jobs, working in unsafe and insecure working conditions, and so on, they now realize that personal growth and improvements go hand-in-hand.

Compounding matters for the residents who want to work are the prejudices and biases that potential employers have against people from the "projects." Directly across the street from the housing development is a chicken processing factory where no one from Pico Gardens works. Knowing the importance of job opportunities for the residents, the local city councilman and an activist priest who works to secure jobs for the residents met with the owners of this facility two years ago, when it first opened. The discussion gave rise to mutual assurances that the city would expedite business permits and the employer would hire some of the housing development residents. So far, one half of the bargain has been met, and still, none of the residents are employed at the factory. Similarly, a block away from the

research site, a small brewery employs hundreds of workers for various jobs processing, warehousing, truck driving—but, again, none of them are from Pico Gardens.

Most Pico Gardens residents say they would like to work, but they know that their earnings would barely cover what their households are getting now from AFDC, food stamps, and MediCal coverage. (MediCal is California's version of Medicaid.) (??? I don't see how this helps you). The end result of this dismal, economic situation in Pico Gardens is that there is a large, potential work force that exists that is unable to find decent paying jobs. This group of people finds themselves trapped by a welfare system that only allows them to make a minimal amount of money before they lose their benefits. The economic conditions for residents who live in Pico Gardens are depressing. To add to the lack of economic opportunity available to residents, the community has been stigmatized by public officials and the media as a haven for welfare recipients, criminals, and drug users.

Our research identified some important differences among families in Pico Gardens. Many families have had greater success at resisting the worst elements in their environment. Frank Furstenberg's (1993) research supports our findings, as he too has found that, "Poor people, even those living in entrenched poverty, are not all alike. Indeed, differences among the underclass may be as conspicuous and consequential as any commonalities" (p. 231). Some people in Pico Gardens have even risen to be entrepreneurs within the context of a low status reality (for example, one woman makes and sells nachos every Friday). Furthermore, although the project is renowned as a center of gang activity, only four of the 30 households in the random survey reported having an active gang member in their family. A majority of the gang families did, however, state that they had more than one family member who was gang affiliated. Usually, this involved two or more siblings (and up to as many as eight in one family). A few of the gang members had parents who were active gang members when they were in their youth. One household head had a daughter and a grandson who lived with her and were gang members. Three households in the combined sample were headed by active gang members (their children were too young, however, to be involved with the gang). Even within this low socioeconomic, mostly minority population, some households were markedly worse off than others and their children were more at risk to fall prey to local problems, including gang involvement.

One of the most visible differences between the randomly selected households and households in the gang sample is the number of people in the households. Gang families have

significantly *larger* households, with a mean of 5.43 members as compared with 5.0 members in non-gang households ($t=1.86$, $p<.05$). When only households with children are included, a visible, albeit marginal difference between the samples remains (mean 5.79 vs. mean 5.23, $t=1.58$, $p<.10$). The difference is apparent even though there is also a larger proportion of female single-parent household heads in the gang sample. When we compare household size for only the single female-headed households with children, the average size of such households is also larger for the gang families (mean 5.69 vs. mean 4.27, $t=2.93$, $p<.005$). Both larger families (and the consequent crowding that ensues) and female single-parent households have been commonly cited in the literature as being associated with youth gang membership (Vigil 1988; Klein 1995; Covey, Menard, and Franzese 1992). Nevertheless, it was somewhat surprising to find this association within the residential population at the research site.

Comparison of the random sample household heads' responses with those of the gang sample household heads shows additional differences that, although not significant by itself, cumulatively suggests that the gang families face greater socioeconomic obstacles. For example, while less than a third of the household heads in Pico Gardens have completed high school, only half as many gang sample household heads have done so. Similarly, while 7 out of 10 households in the general population do not have any member earning a regular wage or salary (this excludes income from "hustling," i.e., participating in the informal economy), 8 out of 10 gang sample households fit into that category. Gang sample households are marginally more likely to receive public assistance. On the quintessential Californian indicator of general well being, we find a significant difference between the two types of households: While about three-quarters of the randomly surveyed households have an automobile, two-thirds of the gang sample households do not ($\chi^2=8.06$, $p<0.005$).

Some examples are useful in fleshing out these statistical comparisons. One household in the random sample consists of an immigrant couple (the husband is 70 years old and the wife 54), two teenage sons and a younger teenage daughter. The couple, who moved to Los Angeles in the 1960s also have several adult children living elsewhere, some with their own families. The husband is retired, receiving Social Security and a small pension. The household also receives food stamps. The wife has never been employed, as she has always stayed at home to raise the children whose ages span a 20-year period. Neither parent had completed high school (the mother barely made it to the third

grade) but all of their adult and teenage children attended school regularly and participated in extracurricular activities.

None of the children in the household had been involved in gangs, but the mother reported that some of her younger sons had been subjected to bullying by gang members.

In contrast to the aforementioned household, we studied another family that had a large number of children. Six of the children in this family had been or were currently gang members (two were deceased). The 63-year-old husband and his wife, who was in her fifties, had been unemployed for several years. The father had a history of brief, low-paying jobs, most recently having worked as a self-employed house painter. He also had been a heavy drinker for many years. He had been arrested for driving under the influence several times, despite claiming that he had abstained from drinking for over two years (since his last arrest). His wife apparently dealt with his drunkenness by spending most of her time outside the home, usually involved in church-related activities. Due to the parents' absence from the home, the children were inadequately supervised at home and exemplified the children most prone to "street socialization" and gang recruitment (see Vigil 1988).

Among the single female-headed households, one family head is a 34-year-old woman. She was separated from her husband (who returned to Mexico) for about three years before she moved into Pico Gardens in 1989. She has lived in the project ever since. She graduated from high school in Juarez, Mexico, where she was born, and continued on to receive two years of post-secondary training in computer data inputting and programming before becoming pregnant with her oldest daughter. Her eldest daughter was 14 when the research period began. The woman also had three younger children during the time of our study. The mother's limited English skills prevented her from working with computers in Los Angeles, but she was employed in a series of low-paying jobs until she moved to Pico Gardens. Presently, she supports her family with AFDC and food stamps, and by exchanging favors with a sister and brother who also live in the Los Angeles area.

Still another woman in our study, who was the single, female head of a household, was an inactive member of the dominant gang in Pico Gardens. This woman was still on probation (she had been serving time for a drug conviction) when she completed the initial survey. She was raised in Pico Gardens and, although she voices resentment about graffiti, crime, and drug use in her community, she also appreciates life in the projects because of the "programs" available there. Despite her protests, our community researchers claimed that she has, at times, been a

heavy drug user and that she continues to "party" and lightly use drugs today. Her drug use was apparently at fault for the lack of attention that she was paying when her four-year-old daughter drowned. Her remaining children are too young for gang membership, but according to observers who know the family, the oldest daughter (she is 11) is already smoking, experimenting with intoxicants, and involved with a 17-year-old youth.

All of the aforementioned examples suggest that family structure and function, especially as reflected in survey-collected quantitative data, provide a starting point for understanding the dynamics of family life and its relationship with either encouraging or deterring gang membership of its children. Many of the single female household heads occasionally had adult male companions who stayed in the household. One mother, who has young teenage children that she says she can no longer control and are involved with a gang, had a series of boyfriends staying with her for short periods of time during the research project. The woman reported, and the community researchers' observations confirmed, that the boyfriends took little or no interest in her children and contributed little to the household budget while they were there. Thus, if anything, the effect of these "shadow" spouses (so called because they are not listed on the Housing Authority roster of residents) on familial and child involvement was minimal. This did not apply to another household, however, where the mother's husband was a heavy drinker. He was often away from home and she tried to ensure that when he was home he would interact publicly with the children--playing with them or accompanying them to school or on shopping trips. The mother's motive for this was so that the children "will know they have a father, and so will the neighbors" (i.e., the children will not be stigmatized by local gossips as perhaps "illegitimate").

Family structure is an important indicator and determining factor in whether or not youths become involved in gang activities. Parental practices and family relations, however, within any type of household can be an even greater indicator. Also, the social capital inherent in the relationships, friendships, and overall competence of the parents can make a difference. When household heads were asked, for example, to whom they would go for help with a problem, one third of the gang sample respondents said they had no one outside the household to turn to, compared to a fifth of the random sample household heads. More than half of the random sample household heads said they could turn to family members residing nearby, while only a third of the gang sample respondents said they could rely on relatives for help. Similarly, only about one eighth of the

random sample household heads reported that no one outside their households came to them for help, while over a third of the gang sample respondents did. Gang sample household heads also reported being less aware of and taking less advantage of services offered by nearby service agencies. They also demonstrated less involvement in community groups such as the Residents Advisory Council and the PTA. Less concretely, but importantly, many of the gang sample household heads did not have memories of their own parents to help guide them in supervising their children. Several single mothers in this group talked about childhoods that were full of misery, conflict, and, very often, abuse. Mothers in the random sample, however, often recalled not memories of effective parental child-rearing as well as frequent contributions of numerous other adults in extended kinship networks during their childhood years.

Parental competence is central to one's ability to seek out and cultivate social capital in an environment. David Hamburg (1992) argues that parental competency and access to social networks are essential to positive child and youth development. He states that, "The family that is embedded in a strong network of social support is buffered against stressful experiences" (p. 308). Furstenberg (1993) has also found there to be benefits associated with higher degrees of parental competency. He suggests that parents with stronger social support networks have an increased ability to regulate "their children's behavior outside the home and in dealing with the formal and informal institutions in which their children participated" (p. 236). One exemplary mother in Pico Gardens follows the stereotypical tradition of being an overworked and under-appreciated suburban housewife; balancing four or five tasks a day while working part-time. She regularly made snacks and items for use in ceremonial affairs, which she sold to residents on a daily basis. She picked up her children from school, took them to their music lessons, taught dancing and singing classes twice a week (which, of course, her children attended), and she kept a sharp eye on her children during after-school play groups and homework time at night. Despite doing all of these activities, she remained active in the local church, which included not only religious observances, but also Comite por Paz (Committee for Peace) and other community-based groups.

In general, then, the parents in the random sample of households differ from those in the gang sample. These differences appear to have contributed to their children's non-involvement with gangs. This is not to suggest, however, that these non-gang families were without troubles. As was noted above, for example, the father in one of the non-gang households

had a drinking problem that exacerbated the financial difficulties of the family. In another non-gang family discussed above, the teenage daughter of a single mother was briefly involved in a romantic relationship with an older boy who was a gang member. Other children in households that had no gang involvement still often became involved in delinquent behavior. This behavior included underage drinking and/or drug use, truancy, theft, and fighting. One youth who was raised in a non-gang family is currently serving a sentence for manslaughter. Despite the fact that many of these young people still engage in some delinquent behavior, there are noticeable (although not significant) differences in the extent to which such troubles occur with the gang families (more often) and the non-gang families (less often).

Throughout the time we conducted our research project, gang violence was a major part of life in Pico Gardens. Not surprisingly, residents reported that gang-related activities (especially violence) were the most frequently disliked aspect of life in the housing development. Household heads in the gang sample were somewhat less likely than random sample household heads to say this, although a majority of both groups did. Several youths known by members of the research team were injured by this violence. Two members of gang sample households were killed.

Despite the dangers it poses, the gang life continues to attract youths. Several of the grammar school children that the researchers met with when this study first got under way had, by the end of the project, started to hang around with gang members.

The pattern they exhibited was consistent with the usual pre-initiation behavior (Vigil 1996b). One cohort of nearly a score of teenagers, who had attempted to develop an esthetically-oriented graffiti club like those found in West L.A. and the San Fernando Valley communities, were instead "jumped in" (initiated into) the local gang en masse, in large part because of pressure from gang members.

All of our data suggests that public agencies, school authorities, and criminal justice system officials need to better comprehend the family dynamics behind gang membership and behavior. To reiterate key point made earlier, poor home socialization leads inexorably to street socialization. This means not only that children are prone to getting caught up in delinquent behavior, but that they are also socialized by their peers on the street. This is one of our most important findings; echoing similar, earlier discoveries made by researchers (Thrasher 1927; Cohen 1955; Klein 1971; Cartwright et al. 1978). The absence of parental and home based influences combined with

limited schooling and teacher interactions means that there are few institutions that compel youngsters to seek out and more positive socialization agents elsewhere. In an environment like Pico Gardens, the children who live there will encounter gang members. The gang provides alternating threats with offers of protection to youngsters. Additionally, gang members show obvious emotional support for one another. The gang is a multiple-age peer group that has readily available values and norms of its own. All of these factors mean that the gang becomes extraordinarily attractive to many young people. Our research confirms that stable families and parents armed with appropriate resources can (on the average) make a significant difference in the likelihood of children becoming active in gangs. It is in the public interest, then, to find ways to promote family stability and the acquisition of appropriate resources for parents.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although the residents of Pico Gardens are clearly affected by, and for the most part negatively impacted by the presence of local youth gangs and gang activities, it is important that we put the gang problem in perspective:

(1) Gang activities are not the only problem faced by the residents of Pico Gardens and they are probably not the most pressing issues on a daily basis. When gang violence does occur, however, its impacts are widespread and pervasive.

(2) The residents of Pico Gardens, including the gang members, are more like people elsewhere than they are unlike them. Similarly to most people, the residents spend most of their time engaged in activities that are familiar to and practiced by people in virtually every community in the United States. Most people in Pico Gardens just go about their daily routines, trying to minimize the impacts of gang violence on their lives.

Despite the similarities between Pico Gardens and other communities in the nation, however, there are also important differences between places like Pico Gardens and most American communities. Two of these differences include the very high rates of violent crime (most of it being gang-related) and the very high rate of unemployment. It was noted above that the high rates of unemployment are due, in large part, to the loss of manufacturing jobs in Los Angeles and, probably, prejudicial attitudes of local employers toward project residents. The lack of steady employment also reflects the low levels of schooling and job training that the residents receive (which ironically are reinforced by the poverty associated with long-term unemployment and the psychological damage it inflicts). Although detailed recommendations in this regard are beyond the scope of this

research project, it is clear that any comprehensive attempt to address problems associated with gangs must include strategies on how to incorporate largely excluded populations of the society into the mainstream economy in productive, good paying jobs. This would entail creating programs that offer remedial education as well as job training for adults who have been unemployed or under-employed for a long-time.

The high level of gang violence in Pico Gardens clearly indicates a need for more effective policing, perhaps along the lines of the "community policing" strategies that have recently been widely recommended by the Los Angeles Police Department. One resident of Pico Gardens suggested that a police substation was needed in the housing development, similar to those recently set up in other neighborhoods. During the course of our study, researchers noted that L.A.P.D. patrol cars were rarely seen within Pico Gardens. On the other hand, more than once during the duration of the study the police arrived in full force, manhandling residents (including one member of the research team) who came outdoors to see what was going on. It appears that many residents we spoke with, including, but not limited to gang members, feel that the L.A.P.D. is fearful of the well-armed local gang members and that they see all members of the community as the enemy. Many compared the current situation with the police with that of several years ago when the patrols in the community (including bicycle patrols, which have since been discontinued because of budget-cuts) were headed by the Housing Authority police. The Housing Authority Police are generally considered to be more effective by residents, in part because the officers become acquainted with many of the residents, both young and old. It is these types of police-resident relationships that proponents of community policing believe should occur.

While the police can be faulted for their lack of relationships with the residents of Pico Gardens and need to improve on this front, officials in all public and private agencies that work with members of the barrio also need to get to know the Pico Gardens residents as people. They need to be educated about the differences that exist within the population; specifically, they need to understand that not all residents are gang members or gang family members. In sum, by looking at the different types of families in the project, it is apparent that different people require different forms of assistance. For example, although adult and teen members of most families spoke of the need for jobs and job training, a large number of adults from both of our samples brought up particular concerns when asked about what kinds of programs they felt were most needed in the housing development. Members of the families selected at

random frequently mentioned a need for citizenship classes, E.S.L. training and day care for young children (and, in one case, care for an elderly dependent). Members of the gang families, on the other hand, were more apt to cite a need for personal and family counseling, (for miscreant children or husbands) and parenting classes. Agencies offering services to this population need to be aware that "one size does not fit all" and that the people in the community have a diverse range of needs.

Officials must also be concerned about the location of their facilities. Several years ago, for example, counseling services were offered out of an office that was located within the housing development that borders Pico Gardens to the north. The area where the counseling was offered was located within the area that is claimed by the archrival gang of the predominant youth gang in Pico Gardens. This poor planning on the part of officials meant that youths affiliated with the gang in Pico Gardens were not able to take advantage of the services offered there. It is also interesting to note that there was only one young man who partook in the study who the research team knew was regularly attending counseling sessions as part of his probation. This youth was assigned to a counselor whose office was located across town, meaning that the young resident was required to take a two-hour bus ride to make his appointment. Another youth who was ordered to attend counseling sessions closer to home failed to do so because he was afraid to traverse through a rival gang's territory to get there.

In order to effectively deliver the needed services to people living in Pico Gardens, public and private agencies need to better coordinate their efforts. According to Furstenberg (1993), "Rebuilding local community institutions may be a potent way of supporting beleaguered poor parents and ensuring a better future for their children" (p. 257). In order to rebuild these institutions so they meet the varied needs of community residents, however, these agencies must share information about their services with one another. This process will ensure that cross-referrals can be effectively, yet economically utilized. Clearly, if implemented thoughtfully and strategically, these services, at a minimum, will reinforce and build upon the strengths of families while ameliorating the harmful effects of their (and society's) weaknesses. Many community and socially based family self-help strategies have been generated and implemented across the country -- some of which find strength in existing cultural traditions (Kumpfer 1993). In order to successfully integrate these services into Pico Gardens, all that would be needed, in addition to employment-related and economic

assistance services, enhancing parenting and housekeeping skills through training and counseling, and providing supervised ways and means for children and youth to find refuge from problems at home, as well providing times and places for young people to feel safe, play games, and participate in other youth activities. Finally, when we asked participants about the need for recreational activities in the community, several of the household heads informed us that they too would appreciate being able to go on outings to such places as Disneyland, which for many people have always been prohibitively expensive.

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