



Gang Activity At The Durham County Detention Facility

Perception Survey results from the staff who work there

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Introduction

The Durham County Detention Facility (DCDF) is a 736-bed facility located in Durham, North Carolina. The local jail facility was built in 1996 with 576 beds, with an additional 160 beds added since opening.

In day-to-day operation of the DCDF, the Chief of Detention Services is confronted with the issue of inmate gang activity. This activity manifests itself in fighting, assaults on inmates and staff, predatory behavior, witness intimidation, gang recruitment and other issues.

Increasing knowledge about gang activity within the facility, based on feedback from Durham County Sheriff's Office staff who work there, will be beneficial in crafting policy and tactics designed for the best response to the issue.

To that end, Durham County Sheriff Clarence Sheriff Birkhead agreed to a survey of his staff working at the detention center. He and his leadership team at the jail reviewed and approved the survey prior to its distribution in April of 2021. The survey was distributed via email to jail staff by Sheriff Birkhead and his staff.

At the time of survey distribution, the average daily inmate population was approximately 375 and the average length of stay for inmates was approximately 18 days.

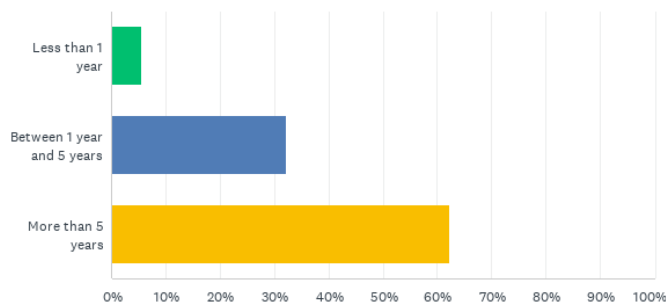
At the time of survey distribution, there were approximately 160 FTE (full-time equivalents) employed by the Durham County Sheriff's Office working at the jail. 90 staff completed the survey, for a 56% response rate. Question 1 (Q1) simply asked respondents to confirm that they were a Durham County Sheriff's Office employee based at the DCDF.

A summary of survey results is provided at the end of this report.

Tenure Length of Survey Respondents

Survey respondents were asked how long they had worked at the DCDF. 63% of respondents indicated they had worked at the facility longer than 5 years.

Q2 How long have you worked at the Detention Center?

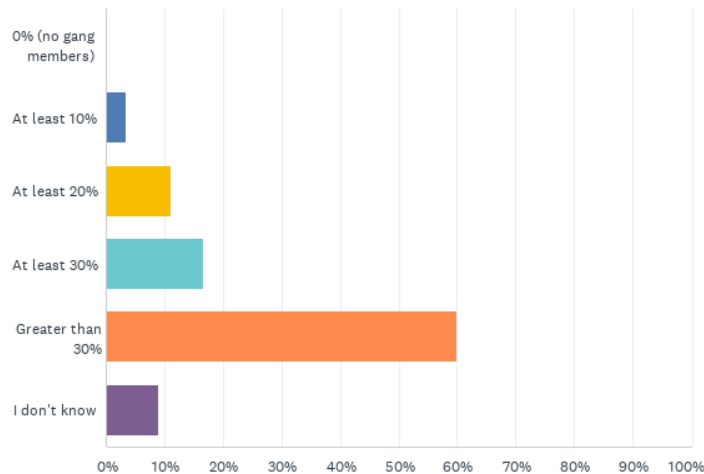


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|----------------------------|-----------|
| Less than 1 year | 5.56% 5 |
| Between 1 year and 5 years | 32.22% 29 |
| More than 5 years | 62.22% 56 |
| TOTAL | 90 |

Percentage of Inmates Perceived to be Gang Members

Respondents were asked what percentage of inmates (at any given time) they believe are gang members. Most respondents (53 of 90) believe that greater than 30% of inmates are gang members.

Q3 What percentage of inmates (at any given time) do you believe are gang members?



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|----------------------|-----------|
| 0% (no gang members) | 0.00% 0 |
| At least 10% | 3.33% 3 |
| At least 20% | 11.11% 10 |
| At least 30% | 16.67% 15 |
| Greater than 30% | 60.00% 54 |
| I don't know | 8.89% 8 |
| TOTAL | 90 |

The Durham County Sheriff's Office uses a vendor-furnished software for the jail admission process. This process is also used to identify gang members and place them in appropriate pods in the facility. The fields in the software are not always conducive to identification of gang members, so additional effort is

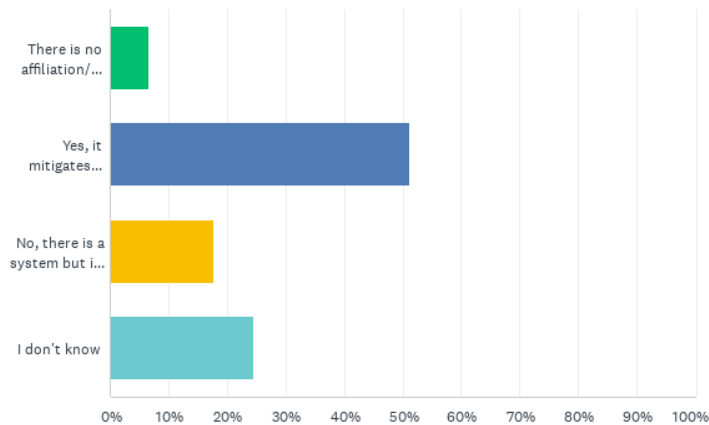
required using the 12 criteria specified by NC GangNET.¹ One of the most common methods of identifying gang members at the time of jail booking is self-admission, where the person being booked admits to being in a gang (usually to be placed in the correct pod with the most protection provided from competing gangs). Informal designation ends upon release and does not carry over from previous visits to the facility. NC GangNET designation ends after 5 years of no additional law enforcement contact. Based on self-admissions and knowledge of seasoned detention officers, there are usually many more gang members confined who are not in the NC GangNET database. The table below provides some “point-in-time” data of detainees identified as gang members by the NC GangNET database.²

| Date | Jail Population | Validated Gang Members (NC GangNET) | Percentage Validated Gang Members (NC GangNET) |
|----------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| 9/21/16 | 505 | 143 | 28% |
| 5/31/18 | 468 | 111 | 24% |
| 11/20/19 | 375 | 87 | 23% |

Effectiveness of Affiliation/Classification System

Survey respondents were asked for their perceptions on the effectiveness of current affiliation/classification systems in place.

Q4 Is the affiliation/classification system effective at the Detention Center?



¹ NC GangNET is a database that has a web-based capability of allowing certified users to enter and/or view information on gang suspects and members that have been validated as such using standardized criteria

² This data was provided by DCDF staff at Gang Reduction Strategy Suppression Team meetings on the indicated dates

| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|---|-----------|----|
| ▼ There is no affiliation/classification system | 6.67% | 6 |
| ▼ Yes, it mitigates conflict | 51.11% | 46 |
| ▼ No, there is a system but it is not effective | 17.78% | 16 |
| ▼ I don't know | 24.44% | 22 |
| TOTAL | | 90 |

Approximately half of respondents believe that the classification system in place is effective and mitigates conflict.

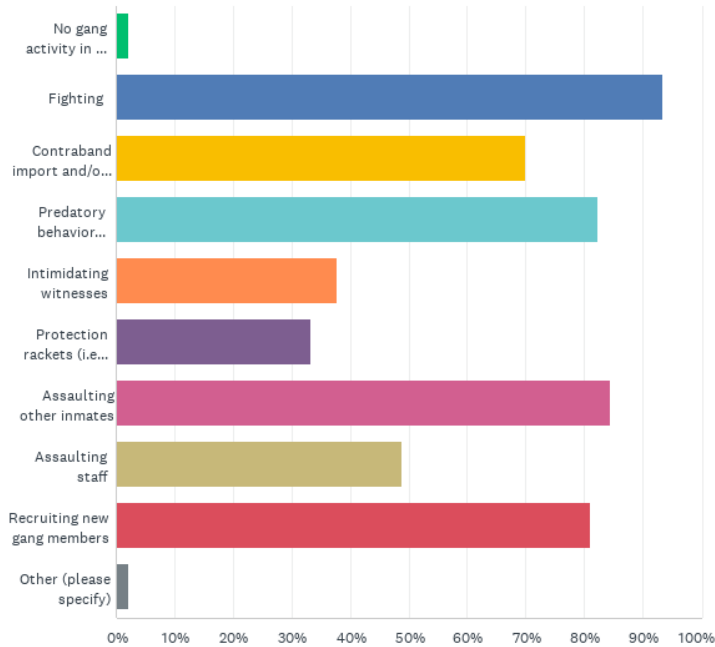
Respondents were provided space for comments on this question, and those comments are shown below.

1. *They do a good job, but there is room for improvement*
2. *There's no proper paperwork to distinguish who is gang related*
3. *The system works but because of the number of potential gang members it can put a strain on the system*
4. *There is a system, however it has been scaled back and gang members have been getting housed more with different gang members*
5. *It mitigates conflict to a certain extent*
6. *No comment at this time*
7. *There is more of them than space. Sometimes it is difficult to manage the different gang sets*
8. *There are things that could be better considering the pandemic*
9. *It would be helpful for the officers to know who are affiliated. Considering they are the frontline workers who would benefit from having this information the most*
10. *There really isn't much of a system. Rival gangs are still housed in the same pod as each other. There have been multiple gang fights since I started. Gang tension is pretty big in most of the pods*
11. *For the most part, but with certain gangs being associates you can't always separate them from all known enemies*
12. *It certainly helps as it gives us an early advantage on keeping certain gang members apart from each other*
13. *The detention facility does not classify detainees based on affiliation. There are several affiliations being identified as a Security Risk Group. Neighborhood alliances and street gangs, traditional and national are some of those affiliations. Several detainees in the same housing unit affiliated with the same neighborhood pose as much of a security risk as detainees in a housing unit that are affiliated with the same street gang.*
14. *There appears to be a significant amount of gang activity in the inmate population. Communication between pods is not restricted through windows, gambling is unrestricted, and assaults happen often.*

Activities Gang Members Engage in at the Facility

Respondents were asked about what type of activities gang members engage in at the DCDF. Several suggestions were provided, and a comment box was provided to note any not on the list.

Q5 What type of gang activity do gang members engage in at the Detention Center? Check all that apply or add activity in comments box.



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| ▼ No gang activity in the Detention Center | 2.22% 2 |
| ▼ Fighting | 93.33% 84 |
| ▼ Contraband import and/or distribution | 70.00% 63 |
| ▼ Predatory behavior towards other inmates (i.e. taking phone time, food or other supplies/materials) | 82.22% 74 |
| ▼ Intimidating witnesses | 37.78% 34 |
| ▼ Protection rackets (i.e. forcing other inmates to pay for protection) | 33.33% 30 |
| ▼ Assaulting other inmates | 84.44% 76 |
| ▼ Assaulting staff | 48.89% 44 |
| ▼ Recruiting new gang members | 81.11% 73 |
| ▼ Other (please specify) | Responses 2.22% 2 |
| Total Respondents: 90 | |

The top 4 answer choices were:

1. Fighting (93.3%)
2. Assaulting other inmates (84.4%)
3. Predatory behavior towards other inmates (i.e., taking phone time, food or other supplies/materials) (82.2%)
4. Recruiting new gang members (81.1%)

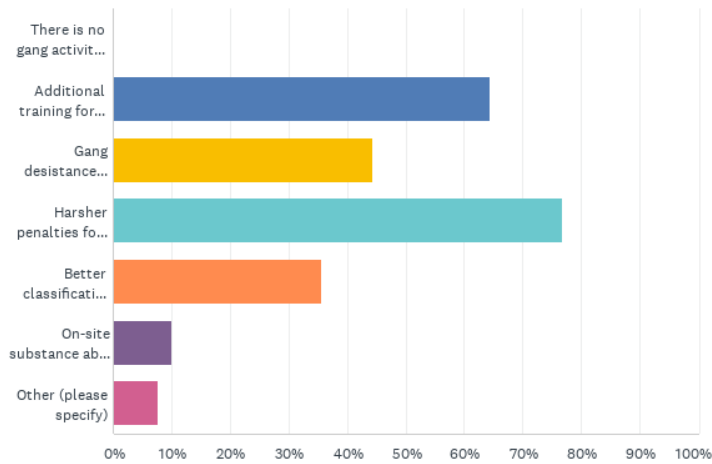
Responses in the Other (please specify) section were:

1. They use gang signs all the time to talk from one pod to another, or they talk to each other that way. It is usually unknown among staff what the meaning of the gang signs are
2. Individuals in the detention facility that have been labeled as gang members or members of a security risk group DO participate in a majority of the prohibited acts listed above. Unfortunately, detainees that have not been validated as gang members also participate in these prohibited acts

Suggestions to Reduce Gang Activity at the Facility

Survey respondents were asked what would be useful to reduce gang activity at the DCF. Several options were listed, and a comment box was provided to note any not on the list.

Q6 In your opinion, what would be useful to reduce gang activity at the Detention Center?
Select all that apply.



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|---|-------------------|
| ▼ There is no gang activity at the Detention Center | 0.00% 0 |
| ▼ Additional training for detention officers | 64.44% 58 |
| ▼ Gang desistance programs for inmates | 44.44% 40 |
| ▼ Harsher penalties for gang activity in the Detention Center | 76.67% 69 |
| ▼ Better classification at time of booking | 35.56% 32 |
| ▼ On-site substance abuse treatment | 10.00% 9 |
| ▼ Other (please specify) | Responses 7.78% 7 |
| Total Respondents: 90 | |

Responses in the Other (please specify) section were:

1. There is on-site substance abuse treatment. A better answer is opportunity for change of environment once they are released from the facility
2. More than one officer in the pod
3. Separate them and do not place them in the same pod
4. I think current containment, observation and disciplinary measures are sufficient
5. Make the disciplinary change that we have on the table that Staff Sergeant Ellerbe was adopting to for our facility which is the BMU model. It's been on the table for a while and we still have not made the changes yet
6. Enforce of current facility rules; this would require the backing of supervisors, programs staff, and classification; also, Pod 3C is not a good enough deterrent to rule violations
7. Hiring of more officers so we can have at least 2 officers per housing unit

Other Comments from Respondents

Survey respondents were given an opportunity to provide any final comments. These are shown below:

1. No
2. Detention needs paperwork notifying officers who is gang related and what gang they belong to
3. N/A
4. None
5. Domination, manipulation, intimidation is a constant threat in our facility. It is our job to ensure that all are safe
6. No other comments at this time
7. No
8. The rules need to be enforced across all the squads and seg needs to be worth avoiding for the detainees. This would reduce opportunities for gang activity.

Summary

The survey on gang activity at the Durham County Detention Facility was responded to by 56% (90/160) of DCSO staff employed at the facility. Most respondents (63%) have worked at the facility for more than 5 years.

Most respondents believe that, at any given time, more than 30% of inmates are gang members.

Approximately half of respondents believe that the affiliation/classification system at the facility mitigates conflict.

Respondents have observed many types of gang activity engaged in by gang members at the facility. The most cited were fighting, assaulting other inmates, predatory behavior and recruiting new gang members.

Most respondents cited harsher penalties for gang activity at the facility, and additional training for detention officers as ways to reduce gang activity at the facility.

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The author wishes to thank Sheriff Birkhead, his command staff and the DCSO staff working at the Durham County Detention Facility for supporting and participating in this survey.