



Gun Violence & Mental Health in Violence-Impacted Communities

City of LA Health Commission
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Introduction

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Urban Peace Institute creates community safety and dismantles harmful systems to transform justice and ensure freedom from violence.

Impacts of Gun Violence

- Guns are now the leading cause of death for American kids. More than car crashes and cancer.¹
- In 2020 alone, 2,281 children ages 0–17 were killed by guns, marking the highest level of child gun deaths since 1997.²
- In the City of Los Angeles, approximately 850,000 children live in violent crime areas. Of these children, over 290,000 live in high violence areas.³
- A study by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) that surveyed 4,000 children found that 90 percent of them living in high crime areas reported being exposed to violence either as a victim or witness. Of these exposed children, 27% showed symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with 16% testing as clinically depressed.⁴

1 <https://giffords.org/blog/2022/08/guns-are-now-the-leading-cause-of-death-for-american-kids/>

2 Ibid.

3 Calculated by population within zip codes that were 1 or more standard deviations above the mean in gang related violent crimes. Crime data is based on 2005 LAPD PACMIS/COMPSTAT data where the mean was 7 and standard deviation was 8.1, and population data is from Census 2000.

4 Stein, Bradley D., Jaycox, Lisa H., Kataoka, Sherly H., Wong, Marleen, Tu, Wenli, Elliott, Marc N., Fink, Arlene, "A Mental Health Intervention for School Children Exposed to Violence," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 290, No. 6, August 6, 2003, pp. 603-611.

Community-Based Safety System

Every homicide costs the city \$9 million dollars, every 100 homicides costs society \$900 million dollars, not to mention the immeasurable impacts of trauma on families and communities.

Community Violence Intervention Workers

- First responders to street-level violence
- Between 2010 & 2019 City of LA recorded less than 300 homicides annually; achieved the lowest homicide rate since the 1960's.
- Likelihood of retaliatory homicide drops 99% when violence intervention workers respond to a violent homicide
- Reduced retaliatory violence by 41% citywide.

Violence Intervention Workers

Violence intervention workers experience high rates of trauma as first responders dealing with gun violence on the frontlines.

UPI Partnered with Giffords Center for Violence Intervention to create a report titled, [On the Frontlines](#).

Findings:

- **93%** of violence intervention workers have directly witnessed gun violence
- **56%** of workers had been a victim of gun violence before becoming a professional peacemaker
- **83%** of workforce reported a severe level and risk of psychological distress

Advocacy

LA Violence Intervention Coalition



Strategies & Recommendations

- Expand public safety to include community-based safety strategies.
- Create a parallel safety system to address gun violence & resident safety needs.
- Invest in strengthening & broadening the community intervention workforce.
- Work with entire families caught in the cycle of violence through direct support services.
- Invest in a comprehensive summer safety strategy.
- Ensure workforce development opportunities.
- Partner with schools & hospitals to prevent & intervene in community violence.





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