

gun control  
aggression payback  
NO PEACE handguns  
retribution  
anger second amendment  
no JUSTICE protection  
GUN VIOLENCE  
smoke  
bullets mental health racism  
firearms  
right to bear arms  
guns social justice strapped  
HELP ME exploitation  
vindication

**Enough: Gun Violence Prevention  
and the Black Perspective  
A Social Work Response - Research and Reflections**

**Robert L. Cosby, PhD, MSW, MPhil, Editor**





**“Enough: Gun Violence Prevention and  
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Howard University School of Social Work (HUSSW)  
601 Howard Place, NW  
Washington, DC 20059

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## Foreword

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Also, special thanks to the many contributors to this book, the people of Washington, D.C. and the many Social Workers and people across the country affected by gun violence.

Additional appreciation is extended to Vera Fields, SMPA Enterprises, LLC, copy editor, David A. Morris Jr., graduate assistant, and others who helped bring this project to fruition.





**The Impact of gun violence on Families and friends, after and another life is taken.  
(Picture Courtesy of TRAVIS SPRADLING/The Advocate)**





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### ***Message from Dean Sandra Edmonds Crewe***

Principal Investigator, SAMHSA Mental Health  
and Substance Abuse Awareness Grant

Gun violence is both a mental health and public health crisis. While the two words “gun violence” have become much too familiar to all of us, they fail to capture the complexity of the problem facing our communities. The Howard University School of Social Work’s Black Perspective cautions us to avoid oversimplifying complex and intersecting issues contributing to our national crises. This monograph titled “Enough” captures the pain and the loss associated with victims of gun violence. Mothers, fathers, children, grandchildren, friends, teachers, clergy, classmates, helping professionals, and more are changed by losing precious individuals in their circle of loved ones. In addition to the loss of irreplaceable relationships, there is the accompanying loss of the feeling of being safe. The violence associated with schools, shopping, places of worship, and more places us on edge and exacerbates negative mental health in our communities.

Our authors in this monograph not only highlight the urgency of now to address the grand challenge of gun violence, but they also offer solutions and interventions at micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Their collective call to action is a powerful reminder that change is needed. Our social work core values compel us to move from a passive to a more active stance and get involved. By using our collective strength, we can be more than just bystanders to the problem, but informed and effective responders.

Marcus Jones, a member of our Board of Visitors and Chief of Police of Montgomery County, Maryland, states, *“Gun violence has both individual and collective impacts on our communities. It is a complex public health problem that requires a focus on mental health and partnerships with all aspects of our community to end the violence and provide treatment for impacted families and the broader community.”*

As social workers, we understand that there are no simple solutions to the complex issue of gun violence. However, we also recognize that the solutions extend beyond individual rights and stricter penalties. Gun violence is a problem that affects all of us, and the change must begin with our collective declaration of "ENOUGH." It's only through our unified efforts that we can effectively address this crisis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sandra', followed by a long, horizontal flourish.

June 27, 2024



## ***CRISIS STATISTICS – Some things to think about...***

- Over the last 10 years the number of mass shootings, mass murder, teen injuries and teen deaths in the US has nearly tripled increasing from 2.568 to 5.952 American lives affected. (<https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>) (2023).
- In 2023, there were 18,854 gun violence deaths and 33, 838 injuries due to gun violence in the US. (<https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>)
- Of the 1,247 people killed by police in 2023, 96% were killed by police shootings and, of the 95 unarmed people that were killed by police, most were people of color and were Black. (<https://policeviolencereport.org/>)

June 2024





**Sister of slain brother killed by gun violence in Washington, DC Picture Courtesy of the Washington Informer.**

# **“Enough: Gun Violence Prevention and the Black Perspective” A Social Work Response -- Research and Reflections**

## ***Executive Summary***

Gun violence has become a serious public health epidemic if not tragedy, affecting communities across the United States. In 2023, Gun violence prevention was recognized as one of the Grand Challenges of Social Work (Grand Challenges of Social Work, 2024). Gun violence was responsible for 18,854 Americans deaths by firearms and 36,338 injuries in 2023 (Gun Violence Archives, 2024). For each death by gun violence, many more people experience trauma from being shot, surviving their injuries, vicariously being traumatized or witnessing gun violence. These experiences impact the mental health of community members. The greatest impact of Gun violence in the United States is not limited to physical injuries and death. It also encompasses the emotional and psychological wounds that may not be immediately visible. Gun violence is a public health epidemic, impacting all segments of community including social workers asked to step in and help individuals and communities heal. Social Workers help individuals and families cope with loss by providing bereavement therapy, counseling, helping families that have lost breadwinners, working and assisting children, youth and older adult community members. Communities torn by gun violence tragically experience the loss of future productive citizens, fractured families that will be forever affected by the psychological trauma and an overall threat to their economic well-being.

Social Workers see firsthand what challenges exist in communities because gun violence affects the actions of survivors of gun violence. Whether it is retaliation, fear or other responses; the need for mental health support is present. Social workers must assess clients, meet community members where they are, find resources for individuals and families, and help support communities who have lost productive members. This includes individuals who may or may not have had a trajectory towards immediate success and survival. Everyone killed or injured is someone’s child, sibling, parent, or relative. Added to that group are friends, school mates, extended family members and those known at some point in the community. Collectively, members of our respective communities must ask ‘what can be done to prevent future gun violence?’

Communities are inwardly hurting and showing outwardly signs of trauma due to gun violence. These writings show the impact of gun violence trauma and the impact of exposed and unexposed pain, warranting a social work response. Diagnosed cases of mental health neuroses and psychoses may be influenced by the stressors and triggers related to gun violence. All of the aftermath of gun violence suggests that the results of the gun violence have a lasting impact on the health and well-being of everyone in the United States, especially communities of color. This compilation document **“Enough: Gun Violence Prevention and the Black Perspective – A Social Work Response Research and Reflections”** builds upon the Black Perspective collection of research and writing by Howard

University School of Social Work (HUSSW) faculty, and students. Some of the HUSSW faculty are documented in prior HUSSW monographs, discussing poverty, race, power and control, and mental health. Another document on Critical Race Theory is slated for future publication (See Howard University School of Social Work website under Monographs (<https://socialwork.howard.edu>)).

This Howard University School of Social Work Gun Violence Response document provides a broad overview of gun violence from the viewpoints of several Howard University School of Social Work (HUSSW) individuals. Comments by HUSSW students, faculty, and staff come from both the on-campus *Flagship* MSW program, and the Online *Starship* MSW Program. The writings provide great opportunities for further cogitation about gun violence in the United States. The voices represent a cross-section of people who come from many walks of life. The HUSSW demographic of faculty and students are predominantly African American women, but there is a cross section of men. Together, this group represents a growing number of persons that have something to say about gun violence. The views may align with what other gun violence survivors may not have articulated. What is known is that gun violence has seeped into the psyche of each of us.

- Over the last 10 years the number of mass shootings, mass murder, teen injuries and teen deaths in the US has nearly tripled increasing from 2.568 to 5.952 American lives affected (<https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>).
- In 2023, there were 18,854 gun violence deaths and 33,838 injuries due to gun violence in the US. (<https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>)
- Of the 1,247 people killed by police in 2023, 96% were killed by police shootings and, of the 95 unarmed people that were killed by police, most were people of color and were Black. (<https://policeviolencereport.org/>).

“For the purposes of tracking crime data, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines a “mass shooting” as any incident in which at least four people are murdered with a gun” (<https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/analysis-recent-mass-shootings>.) It is interesting to note that there is no one uniform definition regarding mass shootings. The Gun Violence Archive defines mass shooting as an event where more than three persons at a time are killed or injured (Gun Violence Archive, 2023).

The HUSSW Black Perspective presents six principles that help to elucidate the way writers explore this subject of gun violence. The six principles include social justice, diversity, inclusion, vivification, advocacy, and strengths. The contributing faculty and graduate student Social Workers for this document, “Enough” come from Black communities and the African Diaspora. This writing contributes to the understanding of violence that is perpetrated within many aspects of society from a gender, class and race perspective. The use of weapons such as handguns and long guns/rifles (guns requiring shoulder mount or rest) requires some explanation and unpacking to increase our understanding of their use, where we are, how we got here, and what we must change now and in the future. Promoting understanding is imperative if we are to seek and find different non-violent outcomes.

This publication includes recommendations to curb gun violence in the U.S. The format for this monograph includes: the introduction followed by first person views from a variety of voices that speak in 30 words or less about what gun violence means to them. The power of student voices can be felt as you can perceive visually and see their thoughts in writing, and the feelings evoked by their cumulative survival perspectives.

Also, the use of poetry, artwork and photographs are used throughout the book. Collectively, they give voice to survivors from a position of memory, hope, and resilience and in some cases to simply provide some respite from the onslaught of pain associated with gun violence and the response from survivors, from social workers and those empathetic to the severity of the issue. In other places social workers help individuals feel a sense of hope, and in still other places social workers help us to remember why we believe in the sun, even when it does not shine. It should be noted that over half of all gun-related fatalities are due to suicide (Pew Research Center, 2024).

Ms. Ahmari Anthony writes as a recent MSW graduate of the HUSSW program. Ms. Anthony provides a first-person account as a middle school social worker in her school-based placement working in Washington, DC. She recounted how her young students shared their thoughts about gun violence suggesting that their words reflected the tip of the iceberg of their thinking. Ms. Anthony details having lived through the death of one of her student advisees. She witnessed the pain and disillusionment of middle school students who wrestle with death and injury from gun violence as survivors who now live with that trauma. Ms. Anthony shares how students, embraced fear that remains almost palpable for the young students and for the readers.

Dr. Gloria Cain writes about the multifaceted perspectives of gun violence that separate people and communities of color. This includes how more Blacks have resorted to similar behaviors as whites and seek conceal and carry gun permits. She questions whether society is ready for the impact of gun violence on communities.

Dr. JaNeen Cross writes about the Civil Rights Movement and its icon, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who wrote about the possibility of martyrdom and not getting to the mountaintop. He still maintained the hope of a non-violent solution for the world, and one that could be present without his death, and yet he succumbed to death from gun violence and his assassination.

Dr. Cudore Snell suggests in his essay the need for a Social Work Call to Action regarding the issue of Gun Violence and examines its impact on youth in America. He suggests that something bold must be done to curb gun violence that is decimating Black youth across the United States.

Dr. Kendall Moody writes about Gun Violence in Washington, DC and takes a critical look at how the Male Ego may contribute to gun violence. He suggests using the framework of attachment theory to better understand young Black males, which may help explain how

some of the perpetrators of gun violence were profoundly affected by attachment losses in their childhoods.

Dr. Janice Berry-Edwards writes about gun violence from a psychoanalytical framework. This trauma creates and continues to create more traumas that have been with Black people since the days of enslaved Black people coming to the Americas, South American, Central and North America. These events for Blacks in communities where gun violence occurs retriggers traumas for the survivors of each traumatic loss.

Ms. Shanell Kitt writes about gun violence prevention and working with survivors of gun violence in her work at Henry Street Settlement in New York City. Ms. Kitt is an HU alum, both a licensed MSW and a master's in fine arts who uses both her Direct Practice skills and her artistic skills to help her adult clients.

Dr. Altaf Husain takes a Macro look at Gun Reform. He suggests that what is necessary is for decision makers to involve Faith Communities as natural partners for organizing effective responses to gun violence. This must include the faith communities as diverse and collaborative partners working together for change.

Ms. Joya Cleveland and Dr. Robert Cosby write about what can be learned from gun violence in Oklahoma. The essay looks at gun violence from the times when Oklahoma was largely Indian land through the times of the Greenwood (Black Wall Street) massacre. The event in the early twentieth century left North Tulsa, Oklahoma a shell of its former glory. In its present time the North Tulsa community is again in turmoil due to gun violence.

Dr. Sandra Jeter offers a first-hand account in her essay "Preventing Gun Violence Among Black Youth in Washington, DC" In it she offers resources, recommendations for change and a philosophical and action-oriented response to violence that is killing youth in Washington, DC, and other communities across the nation.

Dr. Robert Cosby writes about the history of gun violence in the United States and how and why gun violence has been so devastating in communities of color. He suggests reasons for why gun violence is not decreasing. He offers rationale that includes economic drivers of gun violence and family violence.

The HUSSW Social Work response offers a variety of perspectives that address some aspects of mental health from the view of social workers responding to communities and people in crisis. The contributors offer recommendations for how social workers can help decrease and end gun violence and explores how social workers assess and treat the survivors of gun violence. The accumulated writings articulate different facets of gun violence. The perspectives offered magnify the view as seen from the eyes of social workers in communities, with families, with individuals, older adults, adults, youth, and children. The thinking and articulated writing offer a beginning blueprint including what it might take to promote significant change. The combined offerings from the Black Perspective can serve as catalysts for change in reducing gun violence.





Photograph taken at site of person killed by gun violence. Photograph by Shanell Kitt

## ***Introduction***

It is fear that some feel when looking into the vacuous eyes of those lost souls who have killed. Gun violence appeals to those that devalue the lives of others. They may take a life and see the person killed as expendable. For young people involved in gun violence the use of their weapon is often a means of dominance. Those fueled by jealousy use gun violence to act out their aggression, and those who maintain warped and twisted outlooks on life may simply fail to appreciate the fragility of life. Some see gun violence as the primary way of gaining and maintaining power. Others see guns as a way of protecting themselves or those they care about. Regardless of the motive for gun violence the results suggest the power of the smoking gun has a crucial affect.

People justify the use of guns to protect, to enforce, or to follow the law. However, in many African American communities the results of gun violence reveal a level of tragedy where life is taken and cannot be returned. Guns may protect a life but never give life. When discussing the impact of gun violence, the psychology of perpetrators of gun violence, the sale and marketing of guns, or the misappropriation of weapons of violence, the default or common denominator is guns can and do wield power. Guns can kill and injure. When examining gun violence causes there is an association with trauma and loss, whether physically, psychically, or psychologically. The impact upon individuals, families and communities is profound. This Monograph seeks to offer a social work response and enlighten readers on a variety of viewpoints by examining their scholarship and message. The writers at HUSSW are compelled to speak on what gun violence has done to their communities, to families, particularly within Black communities.

### **Should Guns be Regulated in a Similar Fashion as Motor Vehicles?**

Rigorous and strong political positions are exercised daily regarding driving cars and different, but no less rigorous positions could be taken with the use of guns. Individuals engaged in poor vehicle driving practices or poor vehicle maintenance practices receive penalties. These penalties are resultant from policies and laws designed to punish and deter further infractions. The penalties are deterrents that are, willingly, exercised to prevent future car crashes and unsafe driving. This is accomplished with vehicle production requirements, sales and distribution of vehicles, etc... Once purchased or leased, vehicle drivers must adhere to the rules of the road, obeying the speed limit using speed detection monitors. Strict laws against reckless driving are designed to reduce potential endangerment to self or others. Persons having lost loved ones due to these types of driver or manufacturer violations have banded together to introduce advocacy-based initiatives, e.g. – Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, etc.

People exercise the right to drive by passing mandated State requirements such as requiring a driver's test once an individual meets minimum requirements such as reaching a certain age, passing visual, written and driving skills tests. The same may be required for obtaining appropriate automobile insurance. We routinely build state systems and laws to protect people by establishing checks and balances associated with legally driving a car. State laws and policies include penalties for not having vehicle insurance, a valid driver's license, a registered vehicle, and passing routine inspections.

States don't mandate or enforce gun use in the same way.

For example, states do not require or mandate universal gun safety tests, mandatory insurance, etc. One result is great variance among states as to what is or is not legal and how stringent are the gun laws. Some states mandate stricter laws and stiffer requirements such as New York State.

Gun restrictions linked to curbing gun violence and related goals for many states vary based on the vigorous work of advocates and lobbyists. The most successful political outcomes to date often lean towards the side of gun manufacturers. States that too vigorously mandate laws and processes to restrict gun use suggest that decreasing rogue or deviant gun behaviors or activities will benefit society. In opposition to these efforts legislators receive great push back from "gun enthusiasts". These are sometimes not the gun owners but are often supported by big gun manufacturers and their lobbyists. The lack of universal mandates across states often means that weapons like handguns, long guns (such as rifles or shotguns requiring shoulder mount or rests), semi-automatic and automatic weapons do not receive the same levels of evidence-based regulation or enforcement. And pressures from pro-gun lobbyists to promote "freedom" of all gun use including the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on bump stocks that turn semi-automatic weapons into fully automatic weapons that can fire multiple rounds simply by squeezing and holding the trigger.

There is a malaise in our communities when we laud the guns used to kill as opposed to stopping the killing. The rationale for limiting gun restrictions and the mechanisms that support pulling the triggers of weapons are linked to money. There is a cause-and-effect relationship that is aided not simply by the weapon of choice but by the ammunition of choice. Providing the right ammunition fits whatever the manufacturer says is the stated and suggested gun use. This suggests that ammunition (ammo) manufacturers hone the purpose and ever more lethal types of ammunition to accomplish the stated goals. Gun owners may suggest that the real reason for much gun use is stopping power. Will the bullet fired stop the person or animal?



Attempts to rationalize, sensationalize or legitimize gun use vary with the audience. Weapons use has grown over the past decade as shown by gun and ammunition sales (Callcut, et al., 2019; Brady, 2024). There is some allure to copying military, Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams weapons or those carried by organized crime gangsters or superheroes. Indirectly or more overtly these messages share a common message of acceptance in our communities. Many people, who purchase these types of weapons, may or may not receive appropriate training and licensing in many states. The Enough Monograph explores Intentionality and the role it plays in gun violence.

Make no mistake; gun violence is NOT only about protecting the right to bear arms. Gun violence is not only about protecting FREEDOM. You can ask most African Americans what does Freedom mean? Like the rationale for the use of guns, it does not mean just one thing or the same thing to everyone.

### **Does the U.S. Constitution Support Gun Violence?**

Freedom does not mean that every person has the freedom to do whatever they want. The second amendment of the U.S. Constitution is seen as having broad frames of reference to protect the right to bear arms. The fourteenth amendment broadly says: “No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States”. This is somehow twisted to imply that some have privileges to bear arms where others, who do not possess arms, are not meant to. These words are barely ever questioned or clarified in context or understanding of historical or cultural time. Having armed militias may have made more sense in the late 1700s and perhaps made sense in the later centuries. However, one must consider in the 21st century the question, but who was allowed to carry and use the weapons as members of militias, and at what cost?

Attitudes and interpretations vary considerably by race on issues including gun violence, **crime, and policing**. Walking or driving while Black for many Black males and females is a reality that demands intense attention and importance by Black parents who try to instill in their children what it could mean if they are ‘pulled over’ or stopped on the street. Black families may have completely different levels of understanding and worry than White families. Telling a Black person that they must “stand their ground” may be interpreted differently by a White person who says that they will “stand their ground”. Once again context and history play a strong role in interpretation. The “Enough” Monograph explores some of the ways issues of gun violence can be explored and understood. There remains a growing need for both short and long term solutions and support for families, and for communities affected by gun violence. Monograph readers can peruse the viewpoints of gun violence from several vantage points.

## Gun Violence and Policy

The growing levels of reported gun violence may indeed be used as a political tool to show the need for more law and order. In Washington, DC leaders have begun work to study and evaluate gun violence interrupters and prevention programs facilitated by the DC Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP) (2024). Such efforts indicate that governments are compiling information such as dashboards of what is working to deter, lessen and prevent gun violence in real time. They call this prevention effort Building Blocks DC and **Cure the Streets** efforts (<https://www.buildingblocks.dc.gov/data>). Politics and political views have segregated, polarized, and oppressed some groups, such as Blacks, disproportionately, across the United States (Sharpe, 2023).

This Monograph does not address police violence, nor does the Monograph address violence against police. “Enough” takes no specific position on Mental Health and gun violence. The Monograph writers do not deny that there are persons with mental illness that are perpetrators of gun violence. However, suggesting only the need for more mental health services can mollify or justify some opposition against establishing tougher gun controls. There remain differing attitudes and expectations that limit addressing the core issues of gun violence. Purely blaming the tragedy of mass shootings or other forms of gun violence in the U.S. as only due to mental illness is not factual (Swanson, et al., 2015). In fact, many more people engage in gun violence for seemingly realistic cause and effect relationships such as “we reap what we sow” The idea of simple cause and effect detracts from many of the significant and perhaps related issues that are present and provide evidence, but have not gotten traction, such as need for more gun reform and have leaders and their constituents agree on how to accomplish that significant feat.

We see a growing chasm between urban and rural approaches to the use of guns and gun violence. In rural settings, gun use and ownership are viewed as part of the culture and therefore closely entwined with lifestyle and community support. For example, one example is the excitement associated with the first days of certain hunting seasons. Growing up in these settings includes gun use as receiving a gift of a first firearm as an inevitable and welcome rite of passage. Sport shooting and hunting are normal and encouraged activities. In urban settings gun use and ownership are viewed differently. It is important to understand the language used that supports gun violence. Why does owning a gun equate to “the last backstop of Freedom?” This language used by the gun manufacturers lobbying organization, the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) and the National Rifle Association (NRA) deviates from the original intent of owning a weapon, for protection, for sport and for hunting. It instead suggests acceptance of obtaining and maintaining weapons for “protection” entitles a person to justify ownership as only personal, and therefore a personal preference.

This view may include “might is right” and include the ownership of guns as a God-given right. Such thinking allows for latent and overt bias and support from some groups to push through legislation with gun enthusiasts and lobbyists suggesting the need to explain why you have a gun. This has been linked to a need to “stand your ground”. In fact, “Stand Your Ground lethal force laws deepen disparities in the legal system and disproportionately justify the use of violence by people who are white and male against people who are not” (Huang, 2020; Esposti, , et al., 2022) .

## ***Working Together to Support Communities and Empower Them for Positive Change***

### **Supporting GrandFamilies**

Social Workers, together, with community involvement, can make a difference in curbing gun violence. For example, communities, working together to support and empower community members for change can be linked to intergenerational programming with elders. In turn, they can mentor youth and children to address gun violence and perceptions of age that can result in ageism. Within Washington, DC Howard University School of Social Work Multidisciplinary Gerontology Center works with Grandfamilies, a group of African American grandparents raising grandchildren in Northwest, Washington, DC. The work has involved building trust and participating with a group of elders over several years. The primary goal is to support the grandparents so that there can be a restoration of families and create or improve a balance in their families and communities that support elders. Such support activities provide more ways to promote children, youth and elder interaction. These grandparents and related elders (e.g. Grandmothers and Aunties) have stepped up to care for these grandchildren, who minus their parents might otherwise be sent to foster homes. Such support efforts identified and promoted throughout the nation can serve as catalysts that help to identify workable and realistic solutions that encourage dialogue even among fictive kin (older adults who may help to mentor or be a listening ear that can help build trust. Such solutions can visibly demonstrate families and extended families that interact with one another, like in a village. This work with and respect for elders in the community can promote and engage in more listening to the youth and otherwise engaging with these grandchildren. It is a fact that most of these grandchildren carry the anchor of trauma due to gun violence that has resulted in the death, or incarceration of their parents. So, grandparents support is important.

### **Resources**

Brookings Institution – ([www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu))

Cure The Streets (<https://www.buildingblocks.dc.gov/cure-the-streets> )

McKenzie – ([www.mckenzieinstitute.org](http://www.mckenzieinstitute.org))

Urban Institute – ([www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org) )

202forPeace – (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7u7pgPHuV4>)

The Joint Center for Political and Social Research ([www.jointcenter.org](http://www.jointcenter.org) )

Manhattan Institute (<https://www.manhattan-institute.org/> )

International Peace Center ([www.ipinst.org](http://www.ipinst.org) )

**RAND Corporation** – ([www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org) ) For more than 60 years, the RAND Corporation has pursued its nonprofit mission by conducting research on important and complicated problems. Initially, RAND (the name of which was derived from a contraction of the term research and development) focused on issues of national security. Eventually, RAND expanded its intellectual reserves to offer insight into other areas, such as business, education, health, law, and science.

Institute for Women’s Policy Research - ([https://iwpr.org/about/on the reasons for gun violence](https://iwpr.org/about/on-the-reasons-for-gun-violence)).

<https://gwtoday.gwu.edu/white-paper-offers-research-informed-recommendations-curb-gun-violence>

<https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/business/money-report/u-s-gun-homicides-reached-highest-level-in-25-years-during-covid-pandemic-cdc-says/3047587/>

<https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/new-plan-lays-out-recommendations-for-reducing-gun-violence-in-dc/3049155/>

<https://dcist.com/story/22/05/06/dc-gun-violence-strategic-plan/>

<https://wtop.com/dc/2022/05/criminal-justice-institute-offers-suggestions-for-curbing-gun-violence-in-dc/>

There are several types of recommendations needed to address the rise in gun violence. For the purposes of this Gun Violence Monograph the recommendations are divided into three areas: Community Based; Practice based Policy and Macro-based Policy



## Practice Related Community Recommendations

1. Discuss with children and youth in congregate settings what are the top issues they believe are important.
2. Set up focus groups to ask Children and youth what they feel when they hear about and see gun violence. Repeat focus groups for adults asking same questions.  
  
Provide a follow up to the community to share the findings with each group. Discuss what are the top behavior modifications and related actions that can be developed. The goal is to influence change in future behaviors and actions.
3. Establish community led safe space forums or after school related safe zones for dialogue.
4. Encourage dialogue in schools, churches, temples, and synagogues with youth about what they might be solutions to gun violence.
5. Is murder or suicide something that you think could be considered with a firearm weapon, **Yes** or **No** and why?
6. Establish Violence Interrupter programs such as in Washington, DC.
7. Establish gang and crew related safe zones for dialogue and addressing friction points.
8. Provide grief and loss initiatives including care services and supports for families of gun related injury and death.
9. Develop more buy-back programs for removing handguns from the streets.
10. Establish ongoing trauma and grief counseling programs for individuals and families.

## Community-based Policy Recommendations

1. Establish funding for community engagement where participants receive stipend for participants with faith based or develop diverse and multi-tiered work plan with strategies for change.
2. Advocate for services that are already in place and can be replicated in other jurisdictions.
3. Provide how to documents that show how services can be scalable.
4. Provide services and supports readily available and can meet those in need.
5. Develop local and state residents who can be part of a speaker's bureau or group that legislative staff can contact to share their stories
6. Dictate or write down these stories as first-person accounts for fact sheets, briefing documents or story collections that can show how the stories are human and real and link stories to facts.
7. Develop updates to statistics on numbers of persons killed, injured,
8. Provide information on economic impact on businesses, workers, families showing cumulative impact of losses at the individual, community, and state levels.
9. Provide examples of what might be a different outcome if there were changes to policy that can appeal to moderate and conservative positions such as ....
10. Introduce examples of legislation that can be shared with specific legislators on modifications to 'stand your ground' 'Castle Laws' or other related legislative issues in the states that have this legislation already in place and those that might be contemplating introducing this language.
11. Provide directives that can be given to legislators who may be empathetic to change at the state and local levels.
12. Develop SWOT analyses on how issues related to gun violence might be perceived at the local, state. and national levels with ongoing threat assessments revised monthly or in real time.

13. Seek financial supporters that can provide help that include grassroots and organic group support
14. Provide both front line and back-room groups to develop and continually energize supporters.
15. Establish teams by state that can be broken down into programmatic, legislative, and economic teams that are continually updated with spokespersons, supporters.
16. Establish Advocacy and write in campaigns where each constituent contacts their legislator.
17. Reward legislators and their staffs that listen with thank you letters and legal campaign contributions.



gun control  
aggression payback  
NO PEACE handguns  
retribution second amendment  
anger NO JUSTICE protection  
GUN VIOLENCE  
smoke mental health racism  
bullets firearms  
right to bear arms  
guns social justice strapped  
HELP ME exploitation  
vindication

## ***HUSSW Faculty and Student First Person Thirty Word Comments on the Effects of Gun Violence***

### **Student Perspectives**

1. "Gun violence is a calamitous by-product of misused power emanating from thoughts that have not been thoroughly contemplated, or the result of reconciled, unconscionable motives."

**Daniel Harris**, 2nd year MSW Online graduate student

2. "Confronting gun violence is about listening to the sound of breath leaving bodies. How many more mothers must taste the bitter tears from crying more often than she desires?"

**Leah Burgess**, Recently graduated MSW/MDIV graduate student

3. "Gun violence arises from identification with systemic brutality and as a reflexive mechanization of social neglect in a nation where even welfare is weaponized."

**Avah Toomer**, Recently graduated MSW graduate student

4. "The accessibility to deadly weapons in the US cultivates an environment where Americans are constantly wondering if they will be the next person to experience a mass shooting."

**Dori Brown**, 2<sup>nd</sup> year MSW graduate student

5. "Gun violence is like an infectious disease that is killing communities. Due to this country's infirm policies, families are tragically being dismantled, leaving them with endless trauma to bear."

**Tasha Mazique**, MSW graduate student

6. "Gun violence is the result of systematic failures such as poverty and early exposure to violence"

**Trayonna D. Barnes**, recently graduated MSW graduate student

7. "Gun violence in the United States is an evolution of systemic issues, and the issues can't be resolved with a government that is divided in response to a society that has mixed sentiments."

**Joya Cleveland**, recently graduated MSW Online graduate student

8. "It is time we the people face the choice between our love of guns and the sanctity of life. Is the right to bear arms more important than the right to live?"

**Rev. Kyle Sigmon**, 2nd Year MSW Online graduate student

9. "The Gun Laws are rooted in racism and anti-blackness. They are pro-power and anti-life. They are structured around capitalism and politics. If they don't change, the Black American people will become extinct."

**Tenisha Percell**, 1st year MSW Online graduate student

### **Faculty and Staff Perspectives**

1. "Gun violence is a manifestation of historical oppression exacerbated by social welfare policies that harm rather than help African Americans".

**Dr. Sandra Edmonds Crewe**, Dean of the Howard University School of Social Work.

2. "Gun violence, the heartbeat of America". –

**Dr. Tracy Robinson Whitaker**, Associate Dean of Academic and Student Advancement)

3. "Gun Violence is invasive; it lives in the DNA and the Psyche"

**Dr. Janice Berry-Edwards**, Professor, Chair of Direct Practice

4. "Gun violence perpetuates systemic racism and economic inequality, causing tremendous social, emotional, physical, and mental harm to vulnerable populations, especially children and youth."

**Dr. Meirong Liu**, Associate Professor

5. " Gun violence shows up without notice."

**Dr. Gloria Cain**, Assistant Professor

6. "Gun Violence is a sore that will not heal in our U.S. Society. It hurts our society, particularly children, youth, and older adults. People learn gun violence. We can learn non-violence."

**Dr. Robert Cosby**, Assistant Dean for Administration

7. "The impact of gun violence has a lasting imprint on the development of children. We need to work diligently to help them process the trauma to mitigate some of the long-term impacts."

**Dr. Janice Davis**, Director of Clinical Agency Based Education

8. "Gun violence is a symptom of deeper societal illnesses. It is not enough to target the symptoms; we need to cure the illnesses."

**Dr. JaNeen Cross**, Assistant Professor

9. "Gun violence is destroying the future of our children! "

**Ms. Sharon Fletcher**, Assistant Registrar, MSW online student

10. "Gun violence is the result of a broken system."

**Dr. Kendall Moody**, Assistant Professor

11. "Gun Violence hurts so many people and is a leading cause of death for adults and young people...The issue is heartbreaking".

**Dr. Cudore Snell**, Assistant Provost for International Programs, Professor

"This strife among ourselves wastes our energy and destroys our unity. My message to those of you involved in this battle of brother against brother is this: Take your guns, your knives.... And throw them into the sea! "Nelson Mandela quote referenced by Dr. Cudore Snell.

## Gun Violence Statistics

### 2023 Year-to-Date Crime Comparison\*

The statistics below reflect the data entered in the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department's (MPD) records management system (Cobalt) as of 12 am on the date above. The homicide numbers are based on numbers submitted by the Homicide Branch. April 19, 2023.

Offense	2022	2023	Percent Change
<b>Homicide</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Sex Abuse</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>Assault w/ a Dangerous Weapon</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>-1%</b>
<b>Robbery</b>	<b>741</b>	<b>763</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Violent Crime - Total</b>	<b>1,220</b>	<b>1,267</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Burglary</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>-17%</b>
<b>Motor Vehicle Theft</b>	<b>972</b>	<b>1,997</b>	<b>105%</b>
<b>Theft from Auto</b>	<b>2,095</b>	<b>2,255</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Theft (Other)</b>	<b>2,826</b>	<b>3,508</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Arson</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>500%</b>
<b>Property Crime - Total</b>	<b>6,230</b>	<b>8,045</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>All Crime - Total</b>	<b>7,450</b>	<b>9,312</b>	<b>25%</b>
2022 Year End Crime Data*			
Year-end 2022 data accurate as of January 1, 2023.			
Offense	2021	2022	Percent Change
Homicide	226	203	-10%
Sex Abuse	181	158	-13%
Assault w/ a Dangerous Weapon	1,665	1,387	-17%
Robbery	2,046	2,082	2%
<b>Violent Crime – Total</b>	<b>4,118</b>	<b>3,830</b>	<b>-7%</b>
Burglary	1,173	1,050	-10%
Motor Vehicle Theft	3,493	3,761	8%
Theft from Auto	8,688	7,825	-10%
Theft (Other)	10,905	10,832	-1%
Arson	4	4	0%
<b>Property Crime – Total</b>	<b>24,263</b>	<b>23,472</b>	<b>-3%</b>
<b>All Crime – Total</b>	<b>28,381</b>	<b>27,302</b>	<b>-4%</b>

\*Not including unrest-related burglaries

<https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/district-crime-data-glance>

## **District of Columbia**

The victims and suspects of homicides and nonfatal shootings in the District of Columbia are primarily male, Black, and between the ages of 18-34. Nearly 92 percent of victims and suspects in homicides and 88 percent of victims and suspects in nonfatal shootings were male. About 96 percent of victims and suspects in both homicides and nonfatal shootings were Black, despite Black residents comprising 46 percent of the overall population in the District.

([https://cjcc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cjcc/release\\_content/attachments/DC%20Gun%20Violence%20Problem%20Analysis%20Summary%20Report.pdf](https://cjcc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cjcc/release_content/attachments/DC%20Gun%20Violence%20Problem%20Analysis%20Summary%20Report.pdf) )

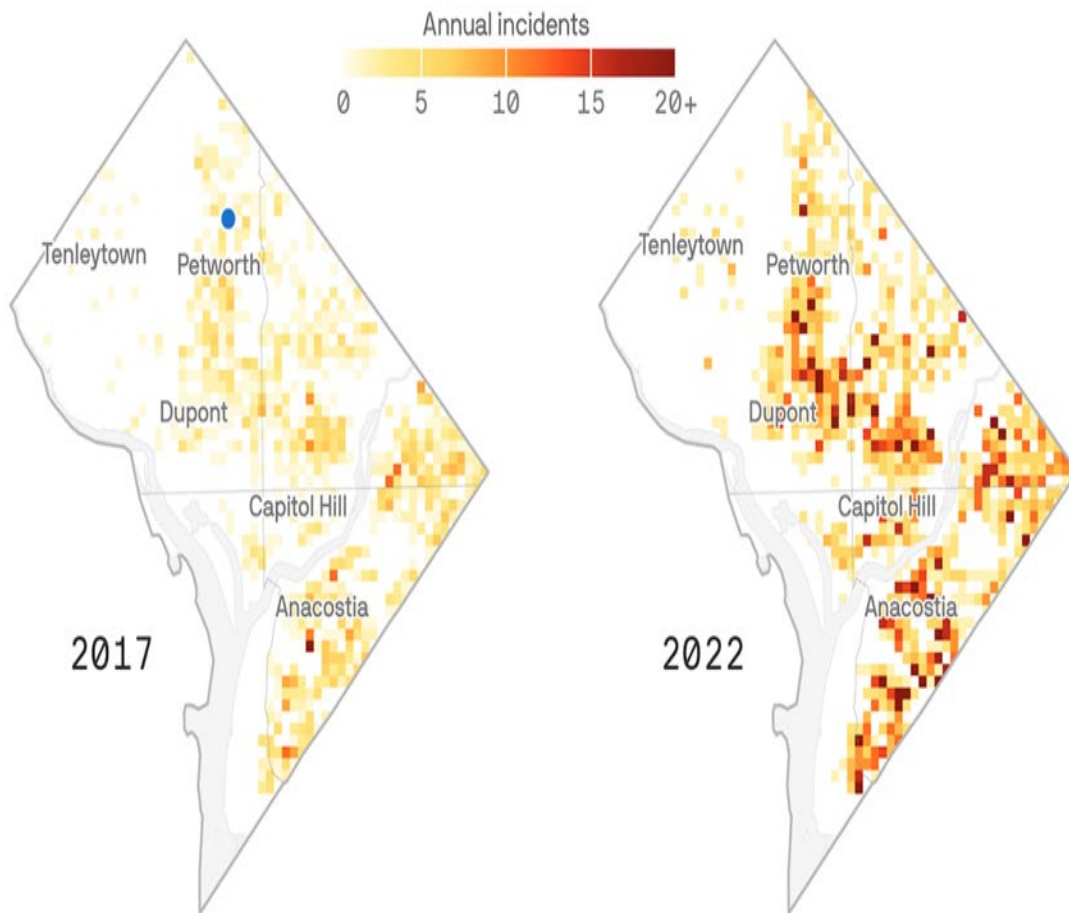
- In 2017, there were 1,573 reported violent crimes in D.C. involving a gun. Last year, 2022 that number increased to 2,203, a 40% jump.
- MPD seized 3,152 guns last year; that's over 800 more than in 2021.  
(<https://www.axios.com/local/washington-dc/2023/02/23/gun-violence-increase-dc>)

Homicides have risen gradually in the District since 2017 and this trend continued through 2021 as DC and other U.S. cities experienced increased violence. The DC homicide rate in 2020 was 18% higher than the city's 2019 rate.

([https://cjcc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cjcc/release\\_content/attachments/DC%20Gun%20Violence%20Problem%20Analysis%20Summary%20Report.pdf](https://cjcc.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cjcc/release_content/attachments/DC%20Gun%20Violence%20Problem%20Analysis%20Summary%20Report.pdf) )

Compared to all states, DC had the highest homicide rate per 100,000 persons in 2021 in the US – with 226 deaths and 1330 gunshot wounds treated at emergency departments in 2021. Each fatal shooting costs DC more than \$1.53 million in direct costs. Gun violence cost DC taxpayers \$1 billion in 2021. (<https://www.peacefordc.org/> )

## Alleged D.C. crime incidents involving guns



The two maps of the District of Columbia above show the increases in crimes involving guns between 2017 and 2020.



The following two photos depict two little girls that were killed in the District of Columbia by gunfire. One fatality involved an innocent child hit during a drive by shooting. The other shooting involved a stray bullet that hit the little girl in the head in the family's car while they were headed home after a Mothers' Day outing.

Six-year-old Nyiah Courtney, was killed in a District of Columbia drive-by shooting, July 16, 2021  
(<https://wtop.com/dc/2021/08/funeral-set-for-nyiah-courtney-little-girl-killed-in-dc-drive-by/>)



A 10-year-old girl died after she was shot while heading home with her family on Mother's Day, May 14, 2023.  
(<https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/10-year-old-dies-after-being-shot-on-mothers-day-in-northeast-dc/3350495/>)



### **Atlanta, Georgia**

Atlanta exhibited a large spike in violence that Atlanta and other cities have experienced amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, Atlanta tallied 157 homicides, with the City recording 158 homicides in 2021.<sup>1</sup> The homicide rate in Atlanta in 2021 was 31.7 per 100,000 and reflected the highest number of homicides in the City's history dating back to 1997.<sup>2 3</sup> When comparing the 2010 homicide rate with the 2020 homicide rate, there is a staggering 58.3 percent increase. The city is 49.8 % black and 85 percent of the suspects and victims were Black suggesting Black on Black crime. Eighty Eight percent of the victims were Black.

National Institute on Criminal Justice Reform

[https://nicjr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Atlanta-GVA\\_061022.pdf](https://nicjr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Atlanta-GVA_061022.pdf)

## Boston, Massachusetts

There were 41 homicides in 2022. The Boston Police Department does not identify or distinguish gun violent crimes. One can interpolate that over half of the total crime (14,863) identified in 2022 were gun violence related.



### Boston crime stats for 2022 compared to the same period in 2021.

CRIME	INCREASE/ DECREASE	2021	2022
HOMICIDE	UP 2.5%	40*	41**
RAPE & ATTEMPTED RAPE	DOWN 25.8%	225	167
ROBBERY & ATTEMPTED ROBBERY	DOWN 2.2%	758	741
DOMESTIC AGGRAVATED ASSAULT	UP 2.2%	813	831
NON-DOMESTIC AGGRAVATED ASSAULT	UP 5.6%	1,569	1,657
COMMERCIAL BURGLARY	UP 13.7%	313	356
RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY	DOWN 15.8%	947	797
LARCENY FROM MOTOR VEHICLE	DOWN 3.9%	2,690	2,584
OTHER LARCENY	DOWN 1.5%	6,475	6,376
AUTO THEFT	UP 4.5%	1,257	1,313
TOTAL CRIME	DOWN 1.5%	15,087	14,863

SOURCE: Boston Police; Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2021 vs. Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2022. Percentage change, to nearest tenth, calculated by Flint McColgan. The Boston Police cautions that this data should be considered preliminary and may change once coding is complete.

\*\* 2022 Homicide totals include 0 incidents that were ruled a Homicide in 2022 but occurred in prior years.

\* 2021 Homicide totals include 3 incidents that were ruled a Homicide in 2021 but occurred in prior years.

<https://www.bostonherald.com/2023/01/03/bostons-overall-crime-rate-is-down-1-5-in-2022-but-fatal-shootings-rose-by-8-over-2021/>

## **New Orleans, Louisiana**

NEW ORLEANS (WVUE) - The Metropolitan Crime Commission (MCC) reported the number of shootings in New Orleans was up 104 percent through seven months of 2022 compared to all of 2019. Homicide totals were up 139 percent for the same period.

“Violent crime in this city continues to outpace the nation on a per capita basis,” said Rafael Goyeneche, president of the MCC. “It is really at a point that I haven’t seen in nearly 40 years that I’ve been here.”

Within a 24-hour span Sunday into Monday, nine more people became victims of gun violence. No arrests were announced in connection to any of the shootings, which MCC President Raphael Goyeneche said could lead to more retaliatory gun violence in the days and weeks ahead.

<https://www.fox8live.com/2022/07/26/gun-violence-has-new-orleans-track-become-one-nations-deadliest-cities-per-capita-mcc-says/>

In 2022 there were 280 murders. There were approximately 660 shootings. (Interview with Dr. Allison Smith, MD, PHD, Trauma Surgeon, Louisiana State University (LSU) Medical Center, New Orleans). She said that New Orleans hospitals treat over 5,000 trauma patients in 2022.

"Atlanta, Georgia; New Orleans murder rate is twice that," said data analyst Jeff Asher. "It's been a really tragic horrific year."

Asher says with 2022 crime numbers, New Orleans is on track to have the highest murder rate in the nation. The city ended the year with a rate of 70 homicides per 100,000 residents.

Homicides: 280

Shooting: 482

Carjacking: 279

Robbery: 541

## **Cumulative murders by day**

As of April 7, 2023, there have been 58 murders in New Orleans. That's 19% less than at the same point in 2022.

Source: New Orleans Police Department

## **Sacramento, California**

City of Sacramento, CA Crime Statistics,

<https://www.cityofsacramento.org/Police/Crime/Crime-Statistics>



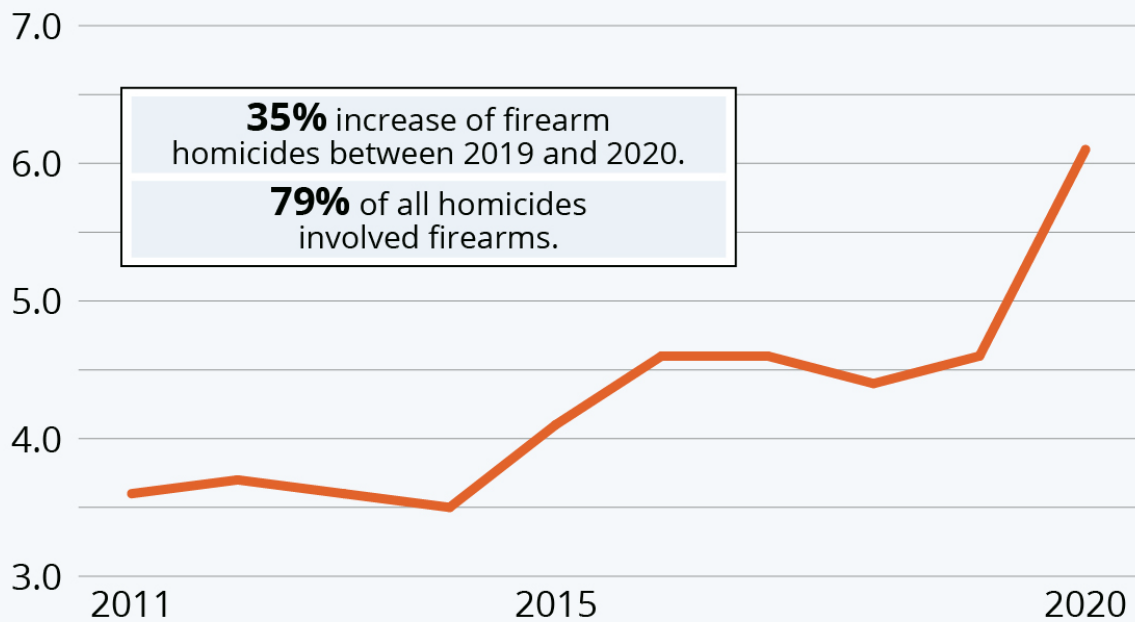




Photograph taken at the site of a person killed by gun violence. Photograph by Shanell Kitt.

# U.S. Gun Deaths Surged in First Pandemic Year

Number of firearm homicides per 100,000 population (aged 10+) between 2011 and 2020



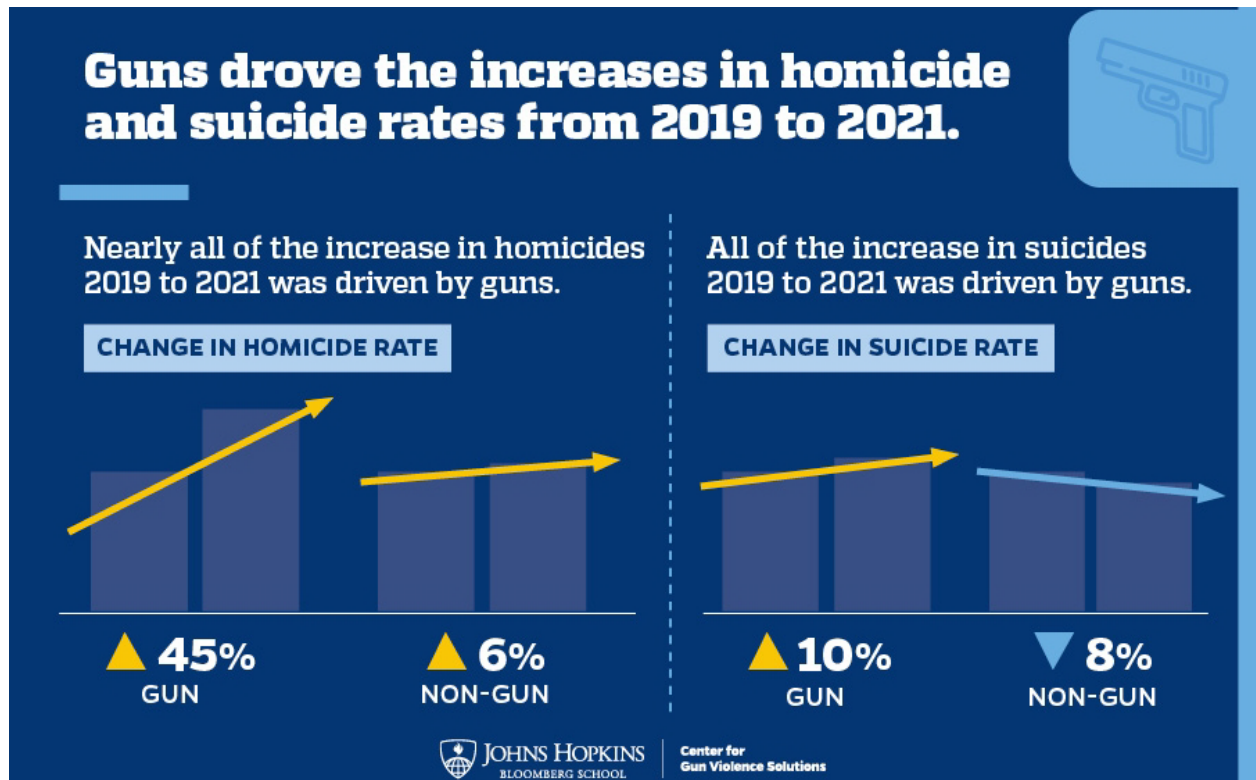
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)



statista



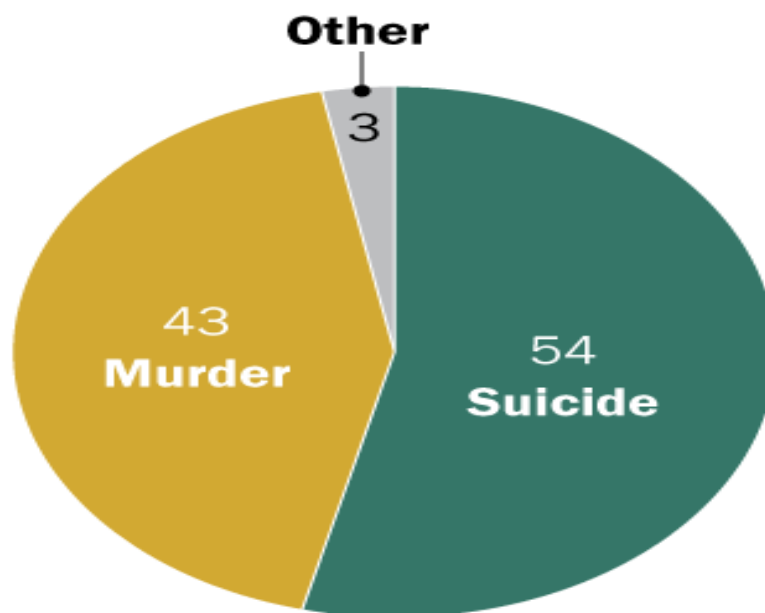
Chart of U.S. Gun Violence related deaths. Please note the increase in gun related deaths from 2016 forward with a dramatic surge from 2019 into 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic.



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## Suicides accounted for more than half of U.S. gun deaths in 2021

*% of U.S. gun deaths, by type*



Note: "Other" includes gun deaths that were accidental, involved law enforcement or had undetermined circumstances.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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[https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/26/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/ft\\_23-04-20\\_gundeathsupdate\\_1-png/](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/04/26/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/ft_23-04-20_gundeathsupdate_1-png/)

## **Practice Based Policy and Macro based Policy to Reduce Gun Violence Recommendations**

### **Practice Based Policy Recommendations**

1. Discuss with parents and separately with children and youth in congregate settings what are the top issues they believe are important.
2. Set up focus groups to ask children and youth what they feel when they hear about and see gun violence. Repeat focus groups for adults asking the same questions.  
Provide a follow up to the community to share the findings with each group and then discuss what are the top behavior modification related actions that can be developed to change behaviors and actions.
3. Establish community led safe space forums or after school related safe zones for dialogue.
4. Encourage dialogue in schools, churches, temples, mosques and synagogues with youth about what they might be solutions to gun violence.
5. Is murder or suicide something that you think could be considered with a firearm weapon,  
Yes or No and why?
6. Establish Violence Interrupter programs such as 'Building Blocks' in Washington, DC coordinated with the D.C. Office of Gun Violence Prevention.
7. Establish gang and crew related safe zones for dialogue and addressing friction points.
8. Provide grief and loss initiatives including care services and supports for families of gun related injury and death.
9. Develop more buy-back programs for removing handguns from the streets.
10. Establish ongoing trauma and grief counseling programs for individuals and families
11. Implement evidence-based Policing Strategies: This includes hotspot policing and focused deterrence strategies considered positive in Oakland, CA and Philadelphia, PA to work with Social Workers and Police to carry out strategies in ways that respect the rights and dignity of all persons.
12. Address root causes of violence: poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education and modernism. For example, technology and access to computers and broadband may skew true working and social relationships. Individualism within social media and with educational systems do not encourage problem solving such as with small groups or one on one family, parent, or grandparent and child or elder and youth interaction. This is where informal socialization and empathy learning interaction

often can take place. Implement strategies for helping create jobs for adults and youth, socialization and recreation spaces. Such efforts can help by visibly investing in communities, families, youth, and children.

13. Encourage and implement intergenerational programs to promote relationships with older adults, children, and youth. Grandparents and grandchildren interaction encourages positive interpersonal relationships, promotes more understanding among each group such as storytelling, identifying history and similarities in family, expressing empathy about survival and fears. These empathetic human interactions may help to bond the individuals where younger persons may relate to similarities to older adults. These types of interactions may help discourage isolation, simplistic answers and ageism. For some youth gun violence may signal the need for obtaining a gun for protection, or as a street badge of honor that ultimately promotes the inevitable, gun use.  
Intergenerational empathetic interaction may result in and encourage more mutual respect between generations. The journey toward gun violence mitigation and prevention can promote more lifelong respect and dignity between the individuals. The positive interactions may transfer to others in the community and across their life spans.

## **Macro-based Policy Recommendations**

1. Request that the President of the United States, by U.S. Presidential Executive Order, target \$50 million dollars of funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) who develop innovative gun violence prevention research, teaching, training, and implementation projects. Emphasis would be placed on evidence-based initiatives limiting or eradicating gun violence at the local, state, and federal levels as gun violence disproportionately affects Black families.
2. Federal Administration should develop a multi-year plan with matching federal funds for local jurisdictions where several Malcolm Baldrige style Innovation awards are given through the U.S. Department of Commerce, or similar federal agencies, who have mechanisms for distributing funding to state and local jurisdictions that show through innovation how they partner to develop and implement gun violence prevention or reduction efforts. These efforts in turn may spawn new commerce and business, as well as safer streets, etc. Teams would be recognized for their collaboration, their inclusivity, their developing and collaborating with competitive ideas that compel organizations and states to make a difference. This could be done in similar ways as was done with big tobacco settlement funding that spawned many anti-tobacco initiatives.

3. Develop anti-violence tax credits that are implemented in the same way as carbon credits are initiated where those cities and states that can demonstrate reduction in gun violence can receive additional funding for community development, peace centers, neighborhood enrichment programs and job opportunity centers?
4. Develop a domestic group for anti-gun violence mirroring the Stimson's Future of Peace Operations Program (FoPo). The Future of Peace Operations program builds a broader public dialogue on the role of peace operations in resolving conflict and building lasting peace. Peace operations in local communities would involve temporary amnesty of all violence and those involved in it. Work with U.S. Department of Justice Mediation Services to help with the development and provision of temporary, post-conflict security at the local level in the same way as Stimson does with foreign nations by supporting internationally mandated forces and peace building. This could be done domestically by helping state, and local communities to create a blueprint for self-sustaining peace.
5. Make gun violence an economic issue suggesting those jurisdictions that can show reduction in violence, can increase community success with micro funding awards (e.g.- \$100/ person - \$ 5,000 to individual communities, celebrating winners and addressing how to work with other communities affected by gun violence. This would include incentives for those states that move communities from the sidelines to embrace violence prevention changes by rewarding businesses and communities that can demonstrate making a difference (providing Public Service Announcements or Ads like the Ad Council. (Provide recognition for gun manufacturers that can show they have partnered to make a difference. Identify the gun manufacturers' earnings statements for each of the top gun manufacturers)
6. Develop funding for a national federal database to make gun violence a national priority. Funding would be attached, in three or four areas, in schools, in police departments, in social work-related community initiatives and healthcare. The database created would be vetted from the four areas with GIS mapping and research component to identify not just causes but mitigation efforts.
7. Review and duplicate pro tobacco initiatives based on Tobacco supporters' blueprint ([https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/sgr/2000/complete\\_report/pdfs/chapter2.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/sgr/2000/complete_report/pdfs/chapter2.pdf) )
8. Identify a blue-ribbon national Gun Violence Task Force (Like the Civil Rights era U.S. Senator Koerner Commission). The Commission would make recommendations to the President of the U.S. by each State. The Gun Violence Task Force would assemble a cross section of the best and brightest, such as economists, researchers, social workers, healthcare experts, etc. with evidence about the communities that have struggled with gun violence, revitalized and managed to turn things around in their communities. The Task Force would review and identify lessons learned and best practices that address the top ten reasons for unrest. Then these identified communities would be examined for similarities and comparisons to other

communities with emerging and re-occurring gun violence. If the causation (such as links between smoking and lung cancer are similar to gun violence related injury or death...then tie the identified reasons to a strategy for reducing gun violence. This could be one that incorporates community alternatives such as more jobs for youth, more community resources, and jobs for all seeking work in these communities. The final report would incorporate aspects of the federal database/s on gun violence and gun violence prevention. The analyses and findings would be shared with the U.S. President and Executive Branch Cabinet members and members of the U.S. Congress. The report would also be presented to the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), the trade association for the firearms industry, who regularly interact with members of U.S. Congress for comment. Links that show benefit for the NSSF and for communities could lead to potential for shifts in actions to denounce one or both groups.

9. Develop State and local coalitions of Physicians, (Emergency Department Specialists, Primary Care Doctors, Nurses, Social Workers, major corporate representatives, purchasers of weapons united to provide letters to Shareholders requesting support for anti-violence activities?
10. Identify a geo-map (A GIS Map is developed by using a computer system that analyzes and displays geographically referenced information such as where gun violence has occurred that is then mapped to show specific locations). This geo map could be used to identify current and potential future hotspots and sync the top 50 hotspots for gun-violence in the U.S. Once identified communities could work to strategically diminish gun violence and improve prevention efforts with national and international think tanks like:

## Resources

Brookings Institution – ([www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu))

McKenzie – ([www.mckenzieinstitute.org](http://www.mckenzieinstitute.org))

Urban Institute – ([www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org))

The Joint Center for Political and Social Research ([www.jointcenter.org](http://www.jointcenter.org))

Manhattan Institute (<https://www.manhattan-institute.org/>)

International Peace Center ([www.ipinst.org](http://www.ipinst.org))

RAND Corporation – ([www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)) For more than 60 years, the RAND Corporation has pursued its nonprofit mission by conducting research on important and complicated problems. Initially, RAND (the name of which was derived from a contraction of the term research and development) focused on issues of national security.

Eventually, RAND expanded its intellectual reserves to offer insight into other areas, such as business, education, health, law, and science.

Institute for Women's Policy Research - ([https://iwpr.org/about/on the reasons for gun violence](https://iwpr.org/about/on-the-reasons-for-gun-violence)).

<https://gwtoday.gwu.edu/white-paper-offers-research-informed-recommendations-curb-gun-violence>  
<https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/business/money-report/u-s-gun-homicides-reached-highest-level-in-25-years-during-covid-pandemic-cdc-says/3047587/>  
<https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/new-plan-lays-out-recommendations-for-reducing-gun-violence-in-dc/3049155/>  
<https://dcist.com/story/22/05/06/dc-gun-violence-strategic-plan/>  
<https://wtop.com/dc/2022/05/criminal-justice-institute-offers-suggestions-for-curbing-gun-violence-in-dc/>

## ***Gun Violence: A District of Columbia School Social Workers Response to the Effects of Gun Violence on High School Aged Children***

***Ms. Amari Anthony, MSW***

Earlier this week, one of my students came into my office to greet me after Spring Break. He shared that he had been making songs with another student, and they planned to record a music video that weekend.

“What type of video?” I asked.

“You know, a rap video,” he answered, smiling sheepishly.

“And what are y’all going to do in this rap video?”

“I mean, we got the guns and stuff. But look,” he interjected rapidly as my eyebrows shot up and I opened my mouth to respond. “Before you get mad, they’re fake ones. And yes, I’m sure they are.”

“But why would you want them anyways?” I asked.

He just shrugged.

I have conversations like this with students on a regular basis, but it has become more personal and urgent than ever before. Many schools and communities have been touched by gun violence against youth over the past few years in the city of D.C. We have unfortunately lost two former students in our school community to gun violence in less than a year’s time. After each death, grief washes over our students, the weight of mortality drops on them, and they recoil from guns. But only for a moment; they always seem to find their way back. I began to wonder why.

When I ask young people these questions, the answers are often brief. They speak to me as if I am naive about the ways of the world.

“Everyone has guns, Miss Ahmari.” “We have to protect ourselves.” “So, I don’t get shot.” “I don’t want to get jumped again.” “I need one in case somebody ever tries to rob me again.” Other staff in the building hear these answers and think our children are foolish, reckless, or even dumb. They think they are uncaring and dangerous. But I have come to understand it differently. Our children are responding to their environments. What these answers tell me is that our youth feel unsafe. They live under a constant threat of harm. Our kids cannot ride the bus, go to the corner store, attend concerts, or even rest in and around their homes without wondering if it is their last time doing so. They know this intimately, but they refuse to quietly accept their fate. And to them, a gun is not just a deadly weapon; in their eyes, it is a shield.

These thoughts are not abnormal. Gun culture is embedded into the fabric of America, stretching back to the United States’ colonial period. Since that time, gun culture has



produced constant legal battles among adults who have very similar desires and ideas about playing defense for their homes and families. But now, Americans no longer want to just protect the things they value most. Even the most leisurely, mundane, and necessary activities run the risk of becoming a battleground for gun violence. The 21st century has taught our children that even their schools are not safe havens in their community.

Black children have learned this. Historically, they learned how Blacks were treated not as White people; therefore, the 2nd amendment right did not apply to them. When we, as Black people were granted citizenship, Black communities began to carry guns to defend themselves from racist assailants, especially in isolated, rural areas, going as far back as the U.S. Civil War Reconstruction period.

In the early and mid-20th century, bearing arms was still a powerful, controversial, and dangerous assertion of our Civil Rights. By the mid and late 20th century Black Panthers and southern Civil Rights leaders alike showed the power and the solidarity of linked arms. They shared a message and showed White racists that Blacks were not afraid. Yet, White racists showed menacingly what it meant to display guns, (brandishing their weapons) as Black people gathered at polling places to vote, in churches to worship, and even at State Capitol buildings to protest unfair treatment. Blacks understood they were not welcome (by the White racists) but said as citizens, as taxpayers, they (Blacks), were equal members (of communities), and if open to the public, Blacks should be able to access the same buildings as Whites. These acts of brandishing weapons may have been, as much as they were acts of self-defense, were also displays of White strength. And the desire for that image of Whites maintaining untouchable strength continued in the mid and late 20th century. Another example of this was the rise of the War on Poverty and later War on Drugs, when many Black communities were under surveillance and invasion by law enforcement entities.

Unfortunately, for many Black youth in this country, they must face the consequences much more readily than other white children. For nearly a century and a half, Black youth have buried friends after playground outings and barbecues gone wrong. Simultaneously, they have watched other friends and community members be criminalized or incarcerated for carrying weapons. They are confused and conflicted, as any child or youth would be. But they have integrated the messages that our society gives them about guns into their psyches, as they stumble through grief, fear and trauma. And the resulting message is often that guns mean power and safety.

The solution is complex, though the roads to get there are variable, messy, and lengthy. The solution is to create a safer world for our children to live in. If we want our children, black and white children to live in ease, we must provide it for them. If we want them to hold onto childhood friends for a lifetime, we must create a world where all children can do just that:

grow up. We must give them places to feel safe, and we must heal the deep wounds of growing up watching our friends' become casualties of socio-political warfare.

Implementing restorative practices, providing ongoing grief counseling, emphasizing relationship building, and discussing gun violence openly with youth are vivifying steps that our school social work team takes to support our youth. We do all that we can each day that our students are with us. But I call on others to join us in combating gun violence so that we can stop holding our breath every time the school bus doors shut.

## ***Gun Violence Fueled by Emotion Will Likely Continue***

***Dr. Robert Cosby, Ph.D., MPhil, MSW***

Most current gun laws are commerce related, are designed to increase sales of firearms, and do not decrease usage of firearms. The final manufacturer of a firearm, meaning the company that assembles all the parts, and puts their name brand on the piece, may be only part of the story as they are not the only companies who make the parts for the firearms. For example, the sale of rifles such as the AR-15 Civilian Rifle are marketed as a modern sporting rifle. They (M4 and AR-15) have a similar look and there is similar style between the M4 Military Assault Rifle (which replaced the M-16 Rifle for the U.S. Military) and the AR-15 Civilian Rifle. There are differences. The M-4 assault rifle is issued to U.S. service personnel in most branches of the U.S. Military (Clossman, & Long, 2015).

There are differences between the two rifles such as the ability of the M4 to shoot in bursts as fully automatic (M-4) as compared to the semi-automatic AR-15 Rifle which requires that you must repeatedly squeeze or pull the trigger, as opposed to simply holding the trigger as with the M4 to fire bursts of ammunition to be fired toward the intended target.

### **Increases in Weapons Use**

Increases in the use of weapons (not always the sales of weapons) appear to occur in States with relaxed concealed firearms laws (e.g., North Carolina and Texas).

The trend appears to be to relax current gun control guidelines or laws. The more conservative approach welcomes more weapons, not fewer, as the result increases gun sales. This hyper-capitalism presents fewer winners, but winners are often corporations, as well as conservative communities that receive greater benefits in the form of jobs, gifts, and revenue (One example is referenced in a Washington Post article on The Ruger Company which has successfully moved its weapons manufacturing from Connecticut to North Carolina where a production factory has rejuvenated a previously struggling rural town. Ruger is currently a major manufacturer of AR-15 rifles (Parker & Darsey, 2023).

A study by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found that the average rate of assaults with firearms increased an average of 9.5 percent relative to forecasted trends in the first 10 years after 34 states relaxed restrictions on civilians carrying concealed firearms in public (Doucette, September 2022). For their analysis, the researchers used data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Reports and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics. The researchers identified state laws using databases and by reviewing the state's legislative history.

The Johns Hopkins study examined two aspects of policy changes: the overall impact on gun violence when States changed their laws for civilians carrying concealed firearms from more to less restrictive ones and, secondly, whether less restrictive measures—known as “shall issue” laws—containing specific safety and screening provisions influenced gun violence outcomes.

The study found that moving to less restrictive laws was associated with a 24 percent increase in the rate of assaults with firearms (12.75 per 100,000) when individuals convicted of violent misdemeanors were eligible to obtain concealed-carry licenses. The researchers also found that states with ‘shall issue laws’ that had live-fire firearm safety training requirements did not see the significant increases in firearm assaults that were estimated for states that lacked such requirements.

### **Building Coalitions to Provide Evidence and Promote Change in Communities**

Dr. Tanya Sharpe has spoken (Sharpe, 2023) about what is necessary to build coalitions of change using evidence-based research on Black Survivors of Homicide Victims. Dr. Sharpe’s research addresses how survivors of Black homicide victims struggle to survive physically and mentally, and this affects communities. Her research on homicide finds that larger numbers of Blacks are disproportionately killed by homicide and disproportionately experience homicide. As a direct result they endure psychological consequences of experiencing this traumatic event that interfere with daily function, often in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Sharpe, 2022). Such efforts may help African Americans overcome the statistics that speak about the increases in homicides (over 17,000 in 2022) that have disproportionately targeted and killed Blacks.

So, what will shape our future efforts to reduce or eliminate gun violence?

Such a coalition of change as explained by Sharpe may help African Americans overcome the statistics that speak about the increases in homicides (over 17,000 in 2022) that have disproportionately targeted and killed African Americans.

### **Evidence Trending Toward Gun Violence Increases**

Evidence suggests that gun violence will continue to result in the killing of African Americans. Further, based on 2022-2023 NSSF \* data firearms sales have increased. Ammunition sales appear to be increasing and federal and state legislation appears to be at best at a stalemate in terms of passing Assault Weapons bans and Automatic firearms restrictions. Perhaps Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa captured sentiments of many when speaking about violence. He said: *“There can be no future unless there is peace. There can be no peace unless there is reconciliation”* (Tutu, p. 35). The hope

for our future rests in saving lives and advocating for change. That gives purpose for many African American gun violence survivors, and purpose filled hope for better days to come.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) “is the primary organization representing the U.S. Firearm Industry. It is registered as an American national trade association for the firearms industry that is based in Newtown, Connecticut. Formed in 1961, the organization has more than 8,000 members: firearms manufacturers, distributors, retailers, shooting ranges, sportsmen's clubs, and media.”(NSSF Website, 2023)

\*The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF).

Sales and volume of pieces sold with ammunition in the domestic, foreign, law enforcement and military groups are also included. The findings were published online September 20, 2022, in the American Journal of Epidemiology.

\*Special thanks to Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Gun Violence Solutions

“In 2021, Gun homicides increased; racial disparities worsened, was it all COVID-19 related? Why?

The gun homicide rate increased by 8% from 5.88 deaths per 100,000 in 2020 to 6.36 deaths per 100,000 in 2021. In raw numbers, gun homicides increased from 19,384 in 2020 to 20,966 in 2021, a record high. From 2019 to 2021, the gun homicide rates increased 45%.

This increase was primarily concentrated in Black and Hispanic/Latino communities. Black and Hispanic/Latino people were 13.7 and 2.4 times, respectively, as likely to die by gun homicide as white people in 2021, the largest disparity in over a decade.

From 2020 to 2021, the gun homicide rate increased by:

- 15% among Hispanic/Latino people
- 8% among Black people
- 2% among white people “

Maryland Attorney General summed up concern that was expressed in 2022 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against New York State in favor of those who carried weapons outside of the home.

The 6-3 ruling in New York State Rifle & Pistol Association Inc. v. Bruen struck down as unconstitutional New York’s requiring a specific reason why a person would need to carry a gun in public. Maryland Attorney General Brian Frosh criticized the court’s ruling by saying the Supreme Court decision June 23, 2022.

“Today’s decision means more deaths and more pain in a country already awash in gun violence. If the norm is that people can carry firearms, our neighborhoods, our streets and other public places will become more dangerous. It will make the lives of law enforcement more difficult and more perilous. The epidemic of gun violence sweeping our nation demonstrates daily the folly of introducing more guns into this boiling cauldron,” he said.

In their own statement, Maryland Senate President Bill Ferguson and House Speaker Adrienne Jones said:

“We fundamentally disagree with the Supreme Court’s majority opinion,” they said. “More guns in public means more violence, and more violence means more death and heartache everywhere. This is the wrong answer. The Second Amendment permits reasonable restrictions on the right to carry a firearm. We will be reviewing the opinion and, if necessary, pass legislation that protects Marylanders and complies with this brand-new precedent.”

The ruling does not directly toss out specific licensing requirements to carry a gun or laws that make it illegal to carry a handgun in specific “sensitive” places, citing historic restrictions on guns in “legislative assemblies, polling places, and courthouses.”

The District of Columbia once had some of the most restrictive gun laws in the U.S. outlawing concealed carrying of guns except by law enforcement. This D.C. law was struck down in 2009. Still the District requires restrictions on where individuals with concealed weapons can go in the City. For example, individuals cannot carry a gun into government buildings; schools or universities; libraries; hospitals; public transportation; stadiums or arenas; the National Mall, U.S. Capitol, and around the White House; or within 1,000 feet of a protest or dignitary who receives police protection.

Despite these regulatory restrictions, gun violence continues to rise in the District of Columbia and in many States across the country, particularly during and immediately after COVID. The U.S. Supreme Court decision *Garland v. Cargill*, (Supreme Court, 2024) to no longer allow the U.S. Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) to ban bump stocks, (the mechanism used to turn a semi-automatic rifle into a fully automatic one) is an example of how gun manufacturers are succeeding with gun sales. Those in favor of more guns for “protection” appear to be confident in using the Second and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution as grounds for protecting an individual’s right to carry a handgun for self-defense outside the home.

The expectation that guns protect people is a believed truth that many stand behind. However, one must ask in the same manner as Special Counsel for the U.S. Army Joseph

Welch who asked a question of Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy in speaking during the Anti-Communism hearings. McCarthy chaired the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations and was known for bullying persons asked to testify. At the time McCarthy was bullying a low-level staffer. Senator McCarthy was also known for blacklisting and slandering thousands of persons because of the U.S. fear of the spread of communism. Mr. Welch asked Sen. McCarthy: “Have you no sense of decency?”

## **Conclusion**

Until the gap is closed between fear, anger, and our national confidence in weapons like handguns the rise in gun violence will continue. With more gun violence Social Workers and others in helping professions will be asked to do more to console and assist the families of gun violence survivors. And, the economics of gun sales and distribution will likely carry on improving profits for gun manufacturers.

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([https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/20-843\\_7j80.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/20-843_7j80.pdf))



New York City Protest, Photograph by Shanell Kitt (2020)

## *Unfurled Tenderness*

Precisely Hurling words rebound errant and unintended  
I peer as a child looking for understanding  
utterances like visions askance once side by side  
each known pack power and fury  
Freighted and full of fierceness  
I lay hidden within the darkness  
Flashes and cordite smells from smoking cylinders  
Seeing and knowing what hurts

unprotected as a soothsayer in the night  
I hold self evident Dreams that once were true  
Frightening and loving thoughts  
A disguised set of expressions held tight  
My arsenal of knowing incomplete  
meant to disarm truth and violence  
instead the phrases stand alert in shadowed foyers  
invisible retribution waits as ambushers for the right time

In An instant...like an eternal star winking  
Light as bright alabaster against the ebony wood sky  
pregnant words reveal themselves  
survivors wanting to be warm and forget the trauma  
A Working man and working woman  
don't mean the same  
One is proud and maybe misguided  
The other wishes for better days of forgiveness and peace

Guilty and sorry as Un-willful combatants  
In the place where bodies descend in dimness  
touch places like memories  
listen to sighs and sounds of tenderness  
ignite thoughts like lightning to un-harvested timber  
waiting to forget frozen shuttered images  
moments to not remember the pain  
captured and unfurled like a flag of surrender

**Robert Cosby**

## ***Gun Violence Perspectives: Opportunities for Social Work Intervention***

***Dr. Gloria Cain, PhD, LMSW***

Gun violence has been deemed as the principal cause of early death and an underlying factor of mortality risk among minority populations (Bailey et al, 2019; Harper et al, 2012; Hureau et al 2019; Kaleson et al, 2019). According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), data shows that between 2019–2020-gun violence increased by 35% in the United States (CDC, 2022). Gun violence has been deemed a public health problem that has accounted for the untimely death of individuals particularly children and youth (Goldstick et al, 2022), and exceeds the death rates from vehicle accidents (Keating, 2022; WISQAR). Gun violence-related healthcare spending surpasses \$1 billion dollars with the cost burden shouldered by the federally public-funded insurance programs (POLITICO, 2021).

While gun violence impacts a wide range of communities with diverse demographic characteristics, national-level data shows that African Americans have an increased risk of suffering from the most severe consequences such as loss of life, unintended physical injuries, compromised public safety, and psychological distress. These factors are very complex as they are also rooted in underlying issues of racial inequities in the areas of economic opportunities, health, and educational disparities. Given the high rates of poverty in African American communities, the lack of access to quality behavioral health care, coupled with the impact of COVID-19 and the illumination of structural and racial inequities has fueled the influx of gun violence and the availability of guns. The heightened threat of police brutality has led to an increase in the number of applications for conceal-and-carry permits among African Americans (Bailey et al, 2020). Some studies have shown when controlling for socioeconomic factors that African Americans are still at greater risk of gun violence when compared to whites with the same income capacity, level of education, and access to resources (Cheong et al, 2020).

Adding to the complexity of the impact of gun violence in African American communities is the availability of illicit and recreational drugs. Studies have shown that substance use has an influence on community gun violence and poses an increased risk for individuals engaged in substance use to be victims of gun violence (Hohl, 2021; Plough et al, 2021). Logan and Cole (2022) found that close to half of individuals that were enrolled in a drug treatment program reported experiencing gun violence. Not only substance use is associated with gun violence, but the sale and distribution of illicit substances is linked to gun violence. According to Docherty et al, 2020, certain types of drugs that are sold may be associated with the use of guns. The relationship between gun violence and substance misuse is also centered around the physiological and psychological experiences leading individuals to commit violent crimes to support their drug needs and engage in high-risk activities that make individuals

vulnerable to gun violence (Chen et al,2016); Goldstein,1986). Studies have even shown that when looking at substance use at a dose level, higher doses of use including binge and hazardous alcohol use was related to gun carrying and victimization of violent crimes. In the field of neuroscience, evidence shows that alcohol use can have an impact on one's prefrontal functions and illicit violent behavior (Sontate et al, 2021).

Challenges addressing gun violence are centered around structural health inequities in communities that are under-resourced and marginalized. In communities of color, there is a lack of sufficient behavioral health services and resources that are culturally specific in addressing mental distress that stems from the lack of and barriers to positive social determinants of health. Robert Merton explains the relationship between social and economic inequalities and violence through Anomie Theory which suggests that when communities are overwhelmed by the lack of equitable financial distribution it leads to psychological unrest which perpetuates violence (Cabrera, 2018).

Social workers have a unique opportunity to be the impetus for change to reduce and eliminate the high rates of gun violence that permeate in the African American community. Social workers are on the front lines of service delivery in a variety of practice settings often addressing social and structural issues that have an impact on the level of functioning among black families in terms of policies and institutional practices that perpetuate violence, community unrest, substance misuse, poor mental health, and coping mechanisms. As a key social work tenant, understanding individuals within the context of their environment affords social workers the ability to assess the risk factors for gun violence and to develop strategies to interrupt and prevent its occurrence.

As the underlying causes of gun violence in black communities are multi-factorial, social workers must understand that its impact affects every domain in the community, including children and families. While there has been an uptick in federal spending for research on gun violence prevention and evidence-based interventions it's imperative that black communities be able to leverage support to develop culturally appropriate methods to address systemic and structural factors that leave these communities vulnerable. Social workers should empower families and their communities to advocate for rapid policy change to federal, state, and local municipal laws that govern access to guns to improve public safety so that black communities can thrive and prevent unintended deaths, injuries, and compromised mental health.

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A woman lights candles as people participate in a "Black Lives Lost to Gun Violence" vigil in Brooklyn, New York, U.S., April 28, 2021. REUTERS/Eduardo Munoz <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-gun-deaths-surged-35-2020-higher-black-people-cdc-2022-05-10/>

## ***Dr. King's Response to Deaths from Gun Violence***

***Dr. JaNeen Cross, DSW, MSW, MBA, LICSW, LCSW-C***

This chapter provides an overview of gun violence impacting our nation. The social conditions underpinning gun violence are discussed with parallels drawn between current social conditions and those in 1963. Gun violence, specifically, is viewed from Dr. King's six principles of nonviolence. Although many of the social conditions that lead to violent responses have not changed, especially for minorities and individuals of low socioeconomic status, gun violence continues to rise over time. Dr. King's message continues to resonate today and have impactful meaning on the issue of gun violence. There are lessons to be learned from Dr. King's words and life.

### **Background**

According to the Pew Research Center, the United States had 45,222 people die from gun-related injuries in 2020 (Pew Research, 2022). Out of these overall deaths, 54% are suicide and 43% are murders (Pew Research, 2022). In our nation, there is an alarming rise in gun-related deaths with a 25% increase from 2019, a 43% increase in the past decade (Pew Research, 2022) and the highest rate of homicide caused by firearms in over 26 years (Reuters, 2022). The homicide rate, for African Americans, has seen a 40% increase (Reuters, 2022). In 2020, the approximate number of homicides reported is 19,350 with African American comprising 62% of these deaths. There are disparities related to race and poverty when it comes to gun violence and deaths. Systemic inequities and racial discrimination influence social determinants of health increasing the risk of gun violence (Reuters, 2022). Health disparities related to COVID-19 has also fueled the rise of gun violence and related deaths for African Americans (Reuters, 2022).

### **Reflections on Dr. King's Non-Violent Response to Injustice as it relates to Gun Violence**

In honor of the Martin Luther King holiday, observed on January 16, 2023, I have reflected on the "I have a dream speech" delivered sixty years ago. Dr. King demanded civil rights which guarantee equal social opportunities and protections under the law. Like disparities and social determinants, Dr. King identifies "segregation", "discrimination", and "exile" to describe the experience of African Americans during his speech (NPR, 2022). Dr. King's purpose was to "dramatize a shameful condition" traveling to D.C. seeking to "cash the check" of guaranteed rights (NPR, 2022). The rights Dr. King speaks of are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...freedom, and security of justice." (NPR, 2022).



Today, African American rights to life, liberty, freedom, security of justice, and pursuit of happiness continue to be threatened by gun violence and death. Dr. King's speech accurately depicted the inequalities and racism in society and the subsequent, often violent, responses of those victimized. Dr. King's dream of civil rights continues to be shared by African Americans. Gun violence and the burden of deaths to and by African Americans serve to underscore the relevance of King's dream of civil rights and bell hooks' belief in non-violence and love. Ross (2023) suggests that there are lessons to be learned from both for social work practice.

Although Dr. King was keenly aware of racial dynamics, racial unrest, and the complexities of political systems, he remained a steadfast proponent of peace. At the March for Jobs on Washington in 1963, Dr. King encouraged African Americans to continue to "rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force" (NPR, 2022). Dr. King urged those who desperately sought freedoms and equality, to NOT "satisfy our thirst" ... "by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred." (NPR, 2022). Dr. King implored those seeking equality and social justice, to not let their creative protest degenerate into physical violence" (NPR, 2022).

In 1964, the year after the "I have a dream speech", Dr. King received the Nobel Peace Prize. Although the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Martin Luther King, Jr. for his exceptional leadership skills in the principles of peace, nonviolence and direct action, Dr. King accepted the award stating, "I receive on behalf of that (civil rights) movement. His comment is a profound recognition that nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral question of our time. There continues to be the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to violence and oppression" (NPR, 2022). In Dr. King's speech, he declared that there can be no civilization with violence (NPR, 2022). Dr. King conveyed "nonviolence as a powerful moral force influencing social transformation" to not confuse it as "sterile passivity" (NPR, 2022). Dr. King challenges us all to find a "method to resolve conflict that rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation" (NPR, 2022). His responsive answer to these problems is a "foundation of love" (NPR, 2022).

### **Six Principles of Non-Violence**

Dr. King's six principles of non-violence include: "1) Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people; 2) nonviolence seeks to win friendships and understanding; 3) nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice not people; 4) nonviolence holds that suffering can education and transform; 5) nonviolence chooses love instead hate; and 6) nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice." (Center for Civic Education, n.d.) These principles provide a foundation in which to conceptualize policies and practice and combat gun violence. These principles can help social workers (and stakeholders) to draw upon the

courage to address gun violence developing nonviolent solutions. All stakeholders need to partner and develop collaboration to seek understanding about the sources of violent responses with specific evidence-based remedies. Combating gun violence involves research informed policies that target disparities and social injustices (i.e., mental health/substance, poverty, education, housing, firearm use & safety regulation to improve) and examining and implementing changes that protect groups such as African Americans from oppression related to Black-on-Black gun violence. African Americans are overrepresented in gun-violence fatalities. There are opportunities to learn and grow into a healthier, safer society through examining the existing data on gun violence, fatalities, and learning from the lessons of the past. The social work profession and stakeholders, who desire improved outcomes, must commit to practice, and develop solutions from a place of love not and hate. Through these efforts social workers must trust that their efforts will be supported by others, and a society that desires an end to gun violence and fatalities.

## **Lessons Learned**

Gun violence is a byproduct of social injustices and social determinants of health. Improving on strategies to end gun violence in our nation requires policy and practice approaches that involve social work. Focusing on the regulation of firearm use/safety in all fifty states, and enhanced protections for populations most affected by gun violence are realistic goals. This nation must also continue to make meaningful progress to improve inequitable education systems, employment/wage systems, housing environments, health, and wellness options. Similarly, racism, discrimination and impediment on civil rights are also social determinants that continue to lead to adverse societal outcomes. These social injustices yield to violent responses. The current increase of gun violence and related fatalities may be the reality check needed for our nation to do something. Our nation must prioritize and act now to address these challenges.

## **Conclusion**

Racial hate, by way of gun violence, killed Dr. King in a calculated, malicious assassination. The life of Dr. King was prematurely ended by violent means, but the broader target, the civil rights movement, endured. Civil rights endured like Dr. King's mission, messages, nonviolent principles and legacy. Dr. King's nonviolent values and strategies were indeed successful in improving outcomes for African Americans and bringing global awareness of discrimination, oppression, and inequalities in the U.S. Currently, during these violent times saturated with gun-related injuries and homicides, social workers should again look to Dr. King's demands for civil rights and equality, utilizing his nonviolent principles to bring about transformational change. We must examine again the reasons his message of non-violence still resonates as if it were spoken today. Dr. King famously stated, 'Only love can conquer

hate'. It is important that all social work efforts focus to decrease the rates of violence and improve social determinants of health. Better addressing inequality in our country stems from a nonviolent foundation which at its core requires love

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## *A Gun Violence Social Work Response*

***Shanell Kitt, LMSW, MFA***

**17-year-old Laquai Dash** “It's unclear what led up to the shooting or whether the teen was the intended target or a bystander”.

- News 12, The Bronx, New York

**35-year-old Obed Beltran-Sanchez** “Three teenagers have been indicted for allegedly killing an innocent bystander and wounding four others in a subway shooting in the Bronx in February, prosecutors said Tuesday”.

- PIX 11 News, New York

**11-year-old, unnamed** “Detectives said the boy was hanging out with a group of friends and his sister when, all of a sudden, a gun went off. It's still unclear whose gun it was and how it went off”.

- CBS News, New York

**19-year-old Christian Montrose** “Was shot and killed outside his home last week in what police believe may have been a case of mistaken identity”.

- CBS News, New York

**19-year-old, unnamed** “NYPD officers shot and killed a man in Queens after he allegedly came at the officers with a pair of scissors Wednesday afternoon”.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/nypd-officers-shoot-man-in-queens/>

- CBS News, New York

**37-year-old Nazim Berry** “Police are searching for a suspect in the fatal shooting of a Brooklyn deli worker on Monday afternoon. Family members told CBS New York the victim had been working at the Crown Heights business for years. They believe he was killed by a stranger who was trying to get a free cigar”.

- CBS News, New York

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Gun violence is an ongoing issue that affects communities across the United States. It takes a toll on families, friends, and entire neighborhoods, leaving a lasting impact on those who are affected. In cities like New York City, where I was born and raised, the rates of gun violence

are disproportionately high in certain areas, causing communities to bear the burden of loss, grief and cyclical trauma. The following information demonstrates the frequency of gun violence shootings

### **Number of Shootings by precinct in 2021 - New York City**

#### **Top 10 Precincts**

Brownsville (73rd) 79

East New York (75th) 71

Grand Concourse (44th) 70

Morrisania (42nd) 66

Mott Haven (40th) 63

Wakefield/Williamsbridge (47th) 59

Belmont/East Tremont (48th) 56

East Flatbush (67th) 55

Northeast Harlem (32nd) 50

Southeast Bronx (43rd) 49

Recent incidents in New York City have brought attention to the devastating effects of gun violence, taking the lives of individuals like 17-year-old Laquai Dash and 35-year-old Obed Beltran-Sanchez, among others. These tragic incidents are representative of the larger issue of gun violence in America, leaving behind heartbroken families and communities with questions. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Mississippi has the highest firearm mortality rate in the country, with 962 deaths in 2021. In that same year:

It is important to note active shooting in the United States has increased in recent years:

New York State currently has some of the strongest gun laws in the United States, which has contributed to the state having the second-lowest firearm death rate in the country. However, certain neighborhoods in New York City continue to experience the negative impact of gun

violence at alarming rates. Most of these communities are African American and Latin X residents. Gun violence continues to be an area of growing concern across the United States. One result of gun violence is the disproportionately short and long term negative effect gun violence has on disadvantaged communities that are too often communities of color (racial and ethnic minorities) (Center for American Progress [CAP], 2022).

*Commemorative memorial in honor of 15-Year-old Luke Williams, who was killed after a basketball game, The Bronx, New York.*

During my childhood, I frequently encountered memorials established in the vicinity of my home as tributes to departed members of our community. Culturally, I knew what they represented - I knew someone passed away - I knew this (the memorial) was one way my community honored a loved one. Upon relocating to Washington, D.C. for my graduate studies, I observed comparable commemorations close to my residence, prompting me to recognize the widespread reliance on cultural rituals for remembrance during times of sorrow. As a licensed Social Worker and visual artist, part of my work is to explore the implications of commemorative practices within communities and advocate for social justice.

*Vernacular memory study I created in honor of 26-Year-Old Breanna Taylor, who was killed by police gunfire in 2020.*

Citywide statistics show that while gun-related violence has decreased over a 30-year period, neighborhoods such as Brownsville, East New York, and Grand Concourse continue to be disproportionately affected by shootings. This highlights the need for continued efforts to address the root causes of gun violence and implement effective solutions. The disproportionate impact of gun violence on Black and Latinx communities in New York City underscores the urgent need for evidence-based solutions to prevent gun deaths and injuries.

The Center for Gun Violence Solutions recommends five key strategies, including: firearm purchaser licensing, extreme risk protection orders, safe and secure firearm storage practices, strong laws limiting public carry, and community violence intervention programs. In addition to these strategies, addressing the underlying factors that contribute to gun violence, such as access to safe housing, financial security, and healthcare, are critical components of a comprehensive approach to preventing gun violence.

*Protesting Near Central Park - They Will Hear Us, They Will See Us* (2020). Shanell Kitt

The prevalence of gun violence in cities like New York is an urgent public health crisis that demands thoughtful and evidence-based solutions. By addressing the root causes of gun violence and implementing effective policies and interventions, we can work towards creating safer communities for all residents. The lives lost to gun violence can be commemorated by taking strong and decisive action to prevent future tragedies. It is only through concerted efforts at the local, state, and national levels that we can hope to achieve meaningful progress in reducing gun violence and saving lives.

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*Visual artist and licensed therapist Shanell Kitt has used her drawings to amplify Black voices and build solidarity around critical issues.*

*“We understand that racial inequity – structural, institutional, and individual – is dangerous and undeserved. The subjects in my drawing are empowered and present, and the story of the Black experience is one of dignity, hope and resilience.”*



**“ Protest “ (2020)  
by Ms. Shanell Kitt.**

**Shanell Kitt** is a Licensed Clinician & Visual Artist who is a Howard University School of Social Work (MSW, 2016) and School of Fine Arts (MA, 2018) graduate. Ms. Kitt is from Bronx, NY and she works with Henry House Settlement and resides in Brooklyn, New York..



## *A Legacy of Gun Violence - Lessons Learned in Oklahoma*

*Joya Cleveland (and Robert Cosby)*

### **Imagining Oklahoma**

With a state tourism slogan like “Imagine that,” one would imagine all the amazement that awaits them in Oklahoma (Ellis, 2020). I would never have imagined that Oklahoma would be the 12<sup>th</sup> highest-ranked state in the U.S. for gun suicides and gun suicide attempts and the 10<sup>th</sup> highest overall gun deaths (Journal Record Staff, 2022). Arriving in Oklahoma, well into the twenty-first century, it was astounding to see a man on a horse going through the Sonic Fast-Food restaurant drive-through line. Looking out the passenger side car window in disbelief this was astounding to see a man picking up his food order on horseback. Oklahoma is horse and cattle country.

Before arriving in Oklahoma, I didn’t have any experience or expectations of the Midwest. Oklahoma has been recorded in history as the forty-sixth state to join the United States in 1907 by then U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt.

**(An Oklahoma Historical Society early statehood campaign photograph from 1903 shows a group of people standing next to a sign ‘let the people rule’ (Campaigning for statehood in Guymon, circa 1903**

**(10454, Leola Lehman Collection, OHS).(Wilson, 2010), Oklahoma Historical Society, <https://www.okhistory.org/>).**



Oklahoma has been recorded to be home to some great people with notable accomplishments. As a lover of history and culture, I eagerly anticipated learning more about Oklahoma. I desired to experience everything Oklahoma had to offer me. I began learning quickly that Oklahoma history is

filled with contrasts and context. Some of the learning involved understanding the way in which history is altered and told from the dominant group. Factual historical information is not always presented from a contextual lens needed to understand how pervasive gun violence was across the Oklahoma territory and later within the state. For example, the recent attention given to a book and movie about acts of systemic racism brought a spotlight using historical fiction to speak about a record of violence against the Osage Indians by White settlers. In the movie and in history a group of White settlers stole wealth from the oil-wealthy Osage Indian Nation. Oil was found on sovereign Indian land. The white settlers found dishonest and morally wrong ways of taking the land from the tribe by killing off the heirs.

A string of brutal crimes of murder occurred between 1921 and 1926 involving persons masquerading as people that cared about the Osage. This came to be known as the Reign of Terror.

### **Understanding Gun Violence and Historical Links**

In understanding gun violence in Oklahoma a great deal can be understood by examining implicit and explicit federal treaty authority that allowed Whites to take Indian resources and kill American Indians of several nations, simply because. For example, in 1838 U.S. President Martin Van Buren built upon the former U.S. President Andrew Jackson (1829 -1837) and his Indian Removal Policy. President Van Buren, a former U.S. Army General and Congressman tasked U.S. Army General Winfield Scott with the job of expediting the removal of Indians from the Southeastern states. Indians of several tribes under the Cherokee Nation amassed great wealth in terms of land and natural resources ownership White settlers and business people coveted the land and opportunities for amassing their own land ownership and wealth.

Large parcels of the land in the Southeastern part of the U.S. were ‘acquired’ by the U.S. government using then newly instituted laws and gun violence. Cherokee Nation Indians were rounded up and forcibly marched, as in forced to walk at gunpoint (guns with bayonets on the ends of the gun barrels) by U.S. Army Cavalry under General Winfield Scott and his troops. Indians forcefully were gathered from tribes in North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama. This brutal forced march was called “the trail of tears” (Ehle, 2011). Sixteen thousand Indians were divided and herded into smaller groups by 7,000 U.S. Army Cavalry who then ransacked the Indian homes and stole their belongings. Then the same Cavalry groups rode on horseback and marched the Cherokee Indians over the approximate 900 mile distance westward to Oklahoma. The trails or routes taken collectively covered over 3,000 miles over several routes through North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, and finally into Oklahoma. Between 1838

and 1839 during brutal winters over 5,000 Indians were marched without appropriate transportation, footwear or clothing. They died of exposure, starvation, typhus, dysentery and cholera. Between 1838 and 1926 the numbers of Indians dwindled as well as the sizes of the land masses designated as reservations. For example, some of these land masses were designated as Indian land in the U.S. Constitution. The treaties were signed by Whites and signed by Indian leaders under duress. Over time the sovereign Indian land treaties were violated by the U.S. government.

### **Systemic Racism and Links to Gun Violence**

The point here is that a history of systemic racism using gun violence by the dominant group maintained dominance using gun violence. Land treaties signed by Indian leaders under duress, at gun point sometimes, but recognized as ratified by U.S. government laws and representatives. It should be noted Indians were shepherded away from the East coast and their Indian land to what was believed by Whites to be largely barren land of little value (the Oklahoma Territory). Other tribes who were familiar with the land were also pushed into areas later called reservations, also west of the Mississippi River, into Oklahoma and many other Midwest and Western states. It was not until oil was discovered under Indian land in what is now the state of Oklahoma that Whites thought at all about Indians who survived and lived largely in poverty, without many resources on land that they were forcibly moved to... This appears to be another similarity to Blacks living in oppression. Despite the land grab of white government representatives White settlers and cattle ranchers encroached further on Indian land. Yet, there was renewed major interest in Indian land when oil was discovered under the land. The racist beliefs of Indians as less than human, or as “feeble minded” or other label fueled behaviors that included gun violence.

In a similar way as with Blacks there was great urgency for Whites to remove the resources and take whatever was of value. The theme of Indians being somehow unworthy of the ‘inherited riches’ under the flat lands is a recurring theme. Oil made landowners of oil rich land wealthy. Indians who acquired wealth as landowners were targets for Whites who wanted to legally or illegally take the Indian land. It was in Oklahoma that Whites “discovered” the rich commodity called oil on sovereign Indian land (Grann, 2018).

Another aspect of learning included being confronted with how Whites replaced the Indians with White settler communities. For example, it was as if Whites developed ‘selective amnesia’ about what happened to the Indians. Little in the Oklahoma literature mentioned how many Whites profited from the Osage murders. At the root of these acts of violence against Indians included particularly gun violence. The history of large segments of Oklahoma involves oppression of American Indians.

## Examples of Oppression

I thought about the similarities and examples of Black oppression and noted how Blacks were killed as slaves, as freed persons, and as members of a successful Black community called Greenwood in the twentieth century. The spoils of gun violence forced the redistribution of wealth and assets from this once thriving Greenwood community from successful Blacks to Whites. Many people did not know, like me at one time, that there were many all Black self sufficient towns and communities' nationwide between the 1838 period and the early 1920s. There were believed to be over fifty communities nationwide with similarities to Tulsa's Greenwood community but not as affluent. For example, the following largely all Black communities still exist in Oklahoma (Taft, Foley, Lima, Clearview, Red Bird, and some ten or twelve others). There still remain, in the twenty-first century, White Sundowner towns in Oklahoma where Blacks are not welcome. In fact, Blacks and forbidden from living, walking or driving in the Sundowner communities after dark. The violation of the sundowner mandates means you must not violate sundowner laws or practices. The punishment was severe. Being caught in these towns after sundown meant a Black person's life was under threat of gun violence, incarceration or worse.

The Greenwood community of Tulsa, Oklahoma is worthy of some further examination. This community received great interest in the lead up to the U.S. entering World War I. In 1916 this suburb of Tulsa, Oklahoma was growing in its independence and self-governing authority. The self-contained and independent community was home to lawyers, doctors, butchers, music and dance clubs, juke joints, grocers, farmers, bakers, theatres, and more. Greenwood had a small airport, a health clinic, a few laundries and cleaners. Greenwood was home to a seamstress and tailor establishments, restaurants, a municipal sheriff and jail and a growing automotive sales, repair and dealer ownership. Historic records and first-hand accounts of people familiar with Greenwood inside Oklahoma and outside recognized the community as the Black Wall Street (Luckerson, 2023).

Yet, in looking at Tulsa in the 2020s, many persons now living in Tulsa don't know the history of that thriving Greenwood community. They only know of the Tulsa they now see, recognized as being the poorest part of Tulsa, where crimes are plentiful and people do not think about generational wealth, (wealth passed down from generation to generation). Instead, they think about gun violence and survival on a daily basis. The successes and the horrors of the Greenwood District of Tulsa were conveniently "forgotten" by many Whites involved in the 1920's gun violence. The seizure of Black land and assets was similar to the seizure of Indian land and assets, but not on the same level. I thought again about how Blacks were outgunned and outlawed, meaning systemic racism made it possible for laws to be passed making discriminatory policies and practices legal.

Thus, it is an understatement to say discrimination and bias negatively impacted Blacks. Blacks were on the receiving end of gun violence. Over time, forced zoning laws, real estate agents and banks pushed many blacks out of ownership and in to rental properties. Black ownership dwindled as education and employment opportunities were rationed. Economically, blacks were segregated. Examples of Black on Black crimes are present and the more affluent sections of Tulsa point to the gun violence and poverty as systemic among Blacks. I learned about conceal and carry laws in Oklahoma. I reflected again on the many stories of oppression, jealousy and murder of the Cherokee and the Osage. I wondered if the lessons of the Greenwood Race Massacre and the Cherokee and the Osage offered lessons to be learned today.

The 1921 Race Massacre demolished a whole vibrant Black community of Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The reason for the Race Massacre was only in part due to the growing jealousy by Whites in Tulsa and neighboring communities. The facts of the Massacre were both simple and complex. In the late 1910s through early 1920s the North Tulsa, Oklahoma Greenwood community was a thriving upscale self-sufficient Black community. However, at the crux of the story before the gun violence and the demolishing of the community called the Black Wall Street of the U.S. was a community of Black men and women caring about a member of their community. The community came to the rescue of a young man who they believed was unjustly singled out and arrested for a crime that he did not commit. A vicious rumor told by a white man ignited a white community fueled by jealousy and hate and believed wrong doing by a young black man who needed to be punished. The story line is not new but it remains toxic.

A black male youth was rumored to have sexually attacked and beaten a white woman. The young male was arrested and held in the jail awaiting a magistrate to travel to Greenwood. A group of Black Greenwood neighbors gathered where some neighbors said they saw and heard about what happened. Among Black people the antenna are raised when such rumors are shared as Black people are sensitive to what negative rumors can do to a community. Black Greenwood residents spread the word about the incident that one in their community was unjustly taken. A group of Black men walked to the Greenwood jail to stand guard and make sure that the young male was not taken from the jail before a state magistrate gave the young person his day in court.

### **Creating Pragmatic Solutions to Curbing Gun Violence**

The Greenwood Massacre would suggest that creating pragmatic solutions to curbing unrest such as Gun Violence is not easy.



There are complexities and it is not simply finding the bad guys and locking them up. Gun violence creates different scenarios that prey upon the oppressed, and often it is Black families who are oppressed. The negative results of oppression can be calculated in economic, physical, psychological and spiritual terms.

Social Workers are familiar with bio-psycho-social and spiritual assessments of clients as well as meeting clients where they are. Gun violence has contributed to some catastrophic losses in terms of Black families having lost loved ones. The impact can be felt in terms of gun violence being responsible for lost family members, lost family stability, lost family wages and lost revenue for families and communities. These losses of family and community magnify individual losses by family members seeking revenge or disengaging and pulling away from others. There is an individual disassociation that suggests the onset of social isolation (Crewe and Cosby, 2024). Depression and anger is directed towards the gun violence perpetrators, and towards those whose lives will forever be changed. Gun violence and the political rhetoric associated with gun violence is again omnipresent. Whether it is in rural, urban, or suburban communities, the idea of needing protection often suggests a gun is required. Whether used in an offensive or defensive posture possessing a gun usually depends on who supposedly had reason to fire, who shot first, who shot in 'self defense', and who did not stop shooting.

### **How are individual and mass shootings different?**

The proliferation of mass shootings in the U.S. is increasing. Self defense may make the case for a gun being used. However, a mass shooting is different. A mass shooting is characterized as an event when more than four persons are killed or wounded (Gun Violence Archive, 2023). A Tulane University study concluded in a cross-sectional analysis that in over 900 mass shooting events in over 51 metropolitan cities in the United States Blacks were disproportionately affected by gun violence as victims or survivors. The study strongly suggests that there is evidence that structural racism (defined by the American Medical Association (AMA) as involving racial discrimination through mutually reinforcing systems of housing, education, employment, earnings, benefits, credit, media, health care and

criminal justice, (Bailey, 2017,) was involved in the mass shooting events (Ghio, et al., 2023). This strong evidence of structural racism shows that mass shootings may have deeper implications for the impact of gun violence and how gun violence affects Blacks in Black communities.

When examining the gun violence data one can see that the pendulum shift is related to gun laws. There is more legislation and more laws being enacted to loosen restrictions in gun violence laws, and other reduction regulations and mandates. These loosening of gun regulations and introducing new and looser regulations are fueled by lobbyists and a few major players like gun manufacturers, and gun trade associations. These two groups wield great power. They make campaign contributions and typically link with conservative groups intent on changing social mores and laws such that everyone who chooses can carry and conceal a weapon.

### **Concealed Weapons**

Communities are beginning to examine the reasons for gun violence in more detail. Some researchers are examining communities in different way. They are considering that leaders and communities count gun violence impact differently. This includes placing an economic value on community social assets as ways of deterring gun violence (Parsons et al., 2023; O'Rourke, T. W. (2023). This would suggest that as one looks at gun violence differently there appear to be some variables such as structural racism that continue to have a negative impact as they oppress Black people.

For example, the ability to carry a concealed weapon is another mechanism to instill fear as oppressors. This is not to say that structural racism implies only Whites embrace gun violence. There are many instances of Black-on-Black gun violence. However, the changing of laws and mandates such as the use of a concealed weapon allows people to act or react with lethal force. The data suggests that 'stand your ground' laws (such as in Florida, etc.) more often favor White men carrying guns. The Florida law which has been copied in many states supports gun violence as a political mandate to protect the person themselves from those who most often are not carrying. This shift in recognized as legitimate power. The

concealed carry laws legalize concealed weapons and have become a way of saying my carrying a concealed weapon for a deliberate killing may be necessary and justified (to protect myself) (Uzzi, et al., 2023) How and why this happens is something social workers can track more carefully, as we advocate for different changes to the legislation and regulation.

In Washington, DC, Grandfamilies is the name for a group of fifty families of grandparents raising grandchildren in a high rise housing complex. The Howard University Gerontology Center Director works through a facilitated support group on issues affecting their families. Many of the GrandFamilies, grandparents and grand children have witnessed gun violence first hand. In fact, some parents are dead, involved with drugs, or are incarcerated, in part because of gun violence. They have indicated that the grandparents and grandkids must support each other. This may lead to some additional lessons learned including an old one that appears to have new life with the grandparents. The grandparents say that it takes a village to raise a child, and protect them with knowledge and wisdom and support. Maybe this model of multigenerational support shines a light on the possibilities of ending gun-violence through more caring and engaging youth in speaking with elders and with another before the decision to fire occurs.

### **Opportunities to Make a Difference**

What if social workers linked arms to advocate and stand up for social justice and health as some like me do in Tulsa and in other cities and communities across the nation? What if we all do more to end gun violence? The machismo and the bravado associated with having a gun should not be to use it on other humans. And for those that want to own and use a gun the efforts should be extended to teach people about responsible gun ownership, to prevent guns from ending up in the wrong hands of youth. What if we could more quickly find those with different negative plans for the use of the weapons before they use them?

Successful policies regarding gun ownership, gun sales and sales of ammunition assist in providing systems of regulating and curtailing gun violence. Better policies may decrease efforts by extremists to mandate that ‘everyone should have and carry weapons’. This open

season for carrying guns in schools, in sporting areas, in health facilities, in cars and trucks makes it very easy for people to behave badly.

The responsibility of communities, municipalities, and states should extend from the individual to the system to include use of better tracking systems to ensure weapons are used appropriately. Too often, people lose sight of who has purchased, and has a license for the firearm. Instead, we try to say this episode of gun violence is a one off, an aberration, and we want to blame the loss of life on someone with mental health challenges.

Yes, there are mental health challenges born by people in communities where there is trauma and violence. Still, there are many examples of people in communities wanting fewer weapons in their neighborhoods because they have seen what types of havoc the guns can produce.. They often have witnessed that guns have killed or will kill their children or others. Mothers and fathers, like in the early Greenwood of 1921, want to stand up for youth and people who are unjustly singled out. However, we also need the healing and interpersonal help of social workers and others in helping professions to work with those who are left behind. We must curtail gun violence and reach out to those resorting to unhealthy coping mechanisms and feelings of desolation. That empty place that brings people to the point of taking their own life by suicide, or taking the life of another adds to the headlines of Oklahoma media outlets. Oklahoma remains in the top fifth of all states for gun violence. Passively continuing the cycle of gun violence should not be the only viable and identifiable solutions for individuals in our communities.

### **Reasons for Gun Violence Then and Now**

How often does gun violence today seem to involve similar stories, some with those who are guilty and others who are not.. The Greenwood Blacks were familiar with the practice of Whites ‘lynching’ Blacks. They found out that there was a vigilante group that was going to storm the jail and take the young black man and hang him. They were to be the judge, jury and executioner. The Greenwood men in short believed they were going to the courthouse to prevent the lynching of an accused Black youth. Many of these Black men were World War I veterans who were trained in the U.S. Army and had access to guns and ammunition. Further, they knew how to use the weapons.

I think about the aftermath of the Race Massacre and how the community never recovered. The riches were taken, the businesses closed or “possessed” and no record was offered. It was as if everyone had fallen and now had selective amnesia. No one, at least not white, could remember or recall the misinformation that started the gun violence. In 1967, the State of Oklahoma, built an Interstate highway through part of Tulsa separating and segregating Greenwood from other parts of Tulsa. This was similar to earlier efforts to ostracize communities by building the MK & T Railway. The Railway separated Black (North Tulsa) from White Tulsa. This further economically ostracized the North and Black part of Tulsa from downtown Tulsa (Luckerson, 2023). This is where I wondered if the systemic issues of racism were linked to past and current gun violence. The next point that got my attention involved Whites getting the U.S. Army (Air Corps) to send an airplane from a nearby military installation to drop an incendiary bomb on the Black Greenwood community of U.S. citizens, to “break up the fighting” (Biu, et al. 2021).

This type of chaos in the midst of communities happens frequently around the U.S. The area of town in Tulsa where this occurred, Greenwood has never reestablished its grandeur or prosperity. It is tragically now plagued with violence and poverty. The losses have caused me to imagine what could be a new Tulsa Oklahoma? What families would own the businesses, the real estate, and the generational wealth? Would Black entrepreneurs and business owners step forward and ensure that families were okay? Would Social Workers exercise their sense of social justice and step forward in the same way as those Black men in Greenwood stepped forward to help a young man believed to be falsely accused of talking and or doing something to a white woman? It would appear that this same level of rumor and innuendo has hurt Black communities for some time.

### **Gun Violence Prevention and Possible Solutions**

How many communities have stopped the violence by being more proactive?

Did anything like this stepping forward to make a change happen because someone had died because of gun violence?

I think the answer is yes. Families know more about reactive stances because someone they know has been incarcerated. Families have lost breadwinners, community contributors, everything. What if the Black Wall Street in Tulsa still existed? Could it have contributed to rebuilding communities, and the families while rechanneling young people to not be bitter about their mis-education of youth where

youth are killing each other? What if the annual five-billion-dollar State price tag that is spent to combat Oklahoma's gun violence were used in other ways?

Perhaps these new funds could help rebuild and revitalize communities. These types of funds could increase the numbers of doctors, and health professionals in health shortage areas. Existing health facilities could channel their energies in other ways to help impoverished people live longer and more economically and mindful productive lives. Some of the plaguing issues associated with the high rate of gun violence in Oklahoma are mental illness and substance use (Journal Record Staff, 2022).

What if Tulsa had that Greenwood increase or bump in the tax base because the wealth of that Black community could add to helping Greenwood but also helping all of Tulsa? Not only could prominent Black North Tulsa (where Greenwood is located) property owners contribute financially but also with well-trained health professionals and health facilities, more effort and resources could support Black community members.

What if social workers linked arms with other advocates as some like me do in Tulsa and in other cities and communities across the nation to show solidarity around important issues like gun violence and gun violence prevention? What if we all do more to end gun violence? The machismo and the bravado associated with having a gun should not be to use it on other humans. And for those that want to own and use a gun the efforts should be extended to teach people about responsible gun ownership, to prevent guns from ending up in the wrong hands of youth. What if we could more quickly find those with different negative plans for the use of the weapons before they use them?

Successful policies regarding gun ownership, gun sales and sales of ammunition assist in providing systems of regulating and curtailing gun violence. Better policies may decrease efforts by extremists to mandate that 'everyone should have and carry weapons'. This open season for carrying guns in schools, in sporting areas, in health facilities, in cars and trucks makes it very easy for people to behave badly.

## **Conclusion**

The responsibility of communities, municipalities, and states should extend from the individual to the system to include use of better tracking systems to ensure weapons are used appropriately. Too often, people lose sight of who has purchased, and has a license for the firearm. Instead, we try to say this is

a one off, an aberration, and we want to blame the loss of life on someone with mental health challenges.

Yes, there are mental health challenges born by people in communities, but there are many examples of people in communities wanting fewer weapons in their neighborhoods. They often have witnessed that guns have killed or will kill their children or others. Mothers and fathers, like in the early Greenwood of 1921, want to stand up for youth and people who are unjustly singled out. However, we also need the healing and interpersonal help of social workers and others in helping professions to work with those who are left behind. We must curtail and reach out to those resorting to unhealthy coping mechanisms and feelings of desolation.

That empty place that brings people to the point of taking their own life, or taking the life of another adds to the headlines of Oklahoma being at the top fifth of all states for gun violence. Continuing the cycle of gun violence should not be the only viable and identifiable solution for individuals in our communities.

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**Through the Passage (2020)**

**Shanell Kitt**

**Acrylic paint on canvas**

*Visual artist and licensed therapist Shanell Kitt has used her drawings to amplify Black voices and build solidarity around critical issues.*

*"We understand that racial inequity – structural, institutional, and individual – is dangerous and undeserved. The subjects in my drawing are empowered and present, and the story of the Black experience is one of dignity, hope and resilience."*

## ***Gun Violence and Youth in America—A Call for Action***

***Dr. Cudore Snell, DSW, MSW***

We are confronted daily by senseless killings of young children in drive-by shootings and children carrying guns to schools! Below are brief statistics. In early January 2023, eight people, including three teens, were injured in separate shootings over four hours in Washington, DC (Cremen, 2023). The District of Columbia is not alone. Across the U.S., over 300 mass shootings occurred between January and July 2022. This included the shooting at Robb Elementary School, a rural school district in Uvalde, Texas.

Black Americans experience 10 times the gun homicides, 18 times the gun assault injuries, and nearly 3 times the fatal shootings by police of white Americans; 30 Black Americans are killed by guns and more than 110 experience non-fatal injuries daily; and every two days, a Black person is shot and killed by police (Everytown, 2023). Gun homicides and assaults have a disproportionate impact in historically underfunded neighborhoods.

Gun violence is a huge issue in many other countries, but among developed economies, the U.S. has the most violent firearm deaths. Martin Luther King Jr., wisely observed many years ago, “By our readiness to allow arms to be purchased at will and fired at whim; by allowing our movie and television screens to teach our children that the hero is the one who masters the art of shooting and the technique of killing...we have created an atmosphere in which violence and hatred have become popular pastimes.”

For decades, residents have come together to ensure public safety within their communities through street outreach and other means. However, lawmakers and other helping professionals must prioritize community- and evidence-based solutions to gun violence, assess its racial impacts, and develop systems to end and ensure accountability for police shootings.

In the United States gun violence remains a leading cause of injuries and deaths for children and youth under the age of 19 years (Panchal, 2022). In 2020, even during the COVID-19 Pandemic firearms became the leading cause of death among children and youth under age 19.

Put into a different context, approximately 3 million people are directly impacted and are exposed to gun violence annually. Children and teens in the U.S. are impacted by gun violence in all its forms. Behavioral Health Mental Health needs have also escalated because of gun violence. Every year, 19,000 children and teens are shot and killed or wounded. The District of Columbia Mayor, Muriel Bowser, invested at least \$139 million into non-police efforts to combat gun violence in the past two fiscal years, including violence interrupters, people immersed in under-resourced neighborhoods attempting to keep

grievances from escalating to gunfire (Hermann et al., 2022). Groups such as Don't Mute DC and Anacostia Coordinating Council are two examples directed at decreasing youth violence.

**Below, are some other potential solutions:**

Violence Intervention Programs provide community-informed, comprehensive support to individuals at greatest risk of gunshot victimization, thus reducing gun shootings and deaths in neighborhoods most impacted by gun violence. City leaders, local groups, and residents are driving solutions to reduce gun violence and increase safety in their communities.

Legislators must also invest in community-driven, evidence-based interventions.

Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) victim assistance funds are federal funds that can be used to reduce gun violence and to support services for survivors of gun violence.

Prevent Gun Trafficking. The US lacks strong federal gun trafficking laws to quell illegal gun trafficking networks. Congress should pass robust gun trafficking and purchasing laws to keep guns off our streets and close a loophole that enables unlicensed sellers to sell high volumes of guns without background checks. States can help prevent gun trafficking by requiring gun owners to report lost and stolen guns to law enforcement.

Repeal Stand Your Ground Laws allow people to shoot to kill in public even when they can safely walk away from the danger. These laws threaten public safety by encouraging armed vigilantism.

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## ***Thoughts on Gun Violence in Washington, D.C, the Male Ego, and Attachment.***

***Dr. Kendall Moody, Ph.D., LCSW***

### **Introduction**

Since 2015, gun violence in America has steadily increased and its toll has reached 13.6 gun-related deaths per 100,000 people – the highest since the 1990's (Gramlich, 2020).

Washington, D.C. has one of the higher rates of gun violence in the country, which cost approximately \$2.0B each year for the district (Washington DC, n.d.). While examining this further I discovered that, according to the Criminal Justice Coordination Council's National Institute of Criminal Justice Reform ([CJCC], 2021), 92% of homicide and 86% of nonfatal shooting victims and/or suspects are males despite representing 45% of the population in Washington, D.C. In addition, 49 % of the gun violence was due to personal disputes and 31% due to instant conflicts (CJCC, 2021). Essentially, men are resorting to gun violence as an avenue for solving disputes, which is an extreme measure for conflict resolution. Some may consider this type of decision making to be aligned with a sense of masculinity. You may see examples of this displayed on social media, for example, where men are seen proudly toting firearms while taunting and daring others to engage in conflict (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=6NsE-2qRSUk>). One may ponder, “what makes men, specifically Black men, resort to using firearms as a way to resolve conflict?” My thoughts on the interrelationship between gun violence, the [Black] male ego, and attachment are below.

### **Male Ego**

Ego is defined as the sense of pride an individual has that makes them feel good about who they are internally. This concept has been studied for many years and researchers determined that ego is largely shaped during childhood, and it is based on several sociocultural factors (e.g., age, family systems, traditions, etc.). In males specifically, this sense of self or self-esteem, is influenced by factors such as whether men believe they are strong enough, wealthy, attractive, and/or if they meet the traditional definition of masculinity. When these characteristics in men are threatened, it may impact their psychological wellbeing. For

example, in a study by Ratliff & Oishi (2013) researchers evaluated influences of self-esteem among romantic partners and found self-esteem among men decreased as their romantic partner's success increased. Somehow, men in this study felt their sense of self was threatened based on their partner's success. This highlights faulty beliefs in how men view masculinity and the possible fragility of the male ego. So, how does diminished self-esteem impact men overall, and how does this relate to gun violence? In a recent study, researchers found that those who experience low self-esteem experienced higher rates of anger and dysregulation (Stefanile et al., 2021) – both may impact the ability to make proper and rational decisions. While this may substantiate a plausible explanation for connecting self-esteem, anger, dysregulation, poor decision making, and gun violence, the fragility of the [Black] male ego may be explained through attachment.

### **Attachment**

Although gun violence in Washington, D.C. is mostly associated with adults ages 18-34 (CJCC, 2021), risk factors may be present long before any trigger is pulled. Attachment describes the bond between two people, in this case the parent and child. The attachment theory posits that, if there is a disruption in the attachment or bond between the child and caregiver (e.g., insecure attachment), the child is at higher risk of becoming dys-regulated and developing emotional/behavioral issues later in life (Gross et al., 2023). There is no one key cause of insecure attachment styles. In fact, there are numerous factors that may lead to the fragmented bond between the caregiver and child at the individual, family, and systemic levels. For example, poor psychological health among parents (individual), low-income (family), and racism (systemic) play a significant role in impeding on the bond between caregivers and children. Concerning specific areas of Washington, D.C. where gun violence is prevalent, these are real circumstances for the community. This is not intended to blame residents of these communities for issues related to gun violence. Indeed, there are external and systemic factors at play, which must be considered. However, exploring factors that disrupt the bond between parents and child at the individual, family, and systems level may fill gaps in our understanding of what places someone at risk of developing ineffective conflict resolution strategies (e.g., gun violence).

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## ***How Psychoanalytic Thinking Helps Practitioners Understand the Impact of Gun Violence on the Descendants of Slaves***

***Dr. Janice Berry-Edwards, Ph.D., LICSW, LCSW-C, BCD***

Secondary and vicarious exposure to gun violence and the associated fatality is widespread, and exposure to gun violence may also trigger or aggravate mental health issues (Rubin, 2022). Exposure to the experience of gun violence is disproportionately experienced by African Americans and is related to a higher prevalence of mental health symptoms (Kravitz-Wirtz et al., 2022). There are neuro-behavioral outcomes and biological processes for those experiencing chronic exposure (Gard et al., 2022). Exposure can affect physical health and emotional well-being, with psychological symptoms encompassing acute anxiety, depression, paranoia, substance abuse, hypervigilance, and intense feelings of hopelessness. Physiological responses can be reflected in chronic pain syndromes, such as cardiovascular responses and gastrointestinal irritation, and can exacerbate diabetic symptoms (Smith et al., 2022).

### **Traumatic Experiences and Gun Violence**

The history of African Americans in America is heavily marked by the traumatic experiences related to the human evil of gun violence. Since the legacy of slavery, they continue to live with this daily and chronic exposure to gun violence. Little research has focused on how gun violence overlaps with other victimizations on the psychological impact of the descendants of slaves. The hellish reality is that since slavery, African Americans have experienced the constant threat of guns and the associated victimization. In fact, it is thought that African Americans carry horrendous experience genetically in their DNA, like those descendants of the survivors of the Holocaust (Yehuda et al., 1998). Yehuda's research provides some of the empirical and theoretical underpinning of the genetic transmission of the psychological impact of the atrocities of the Holocaust and slavery.

With the ongoing prevalence of gun violence, it is increasingly necessary to develop an understanding of the intrapsychic impact of the experience of direct gun violence, the witnessing of gun violence, the hearing of gunshots in public, and other forms of



victimization, including indirect victimization, poly-victimization, and the cumulative and pervasive exposure. Practitioners must understand the mental lives of the descendants of slaves who experience the direct and indirect effects of the insidious and aggressive manner of gun violence to engage with and work through the difficult emotional content related to these experiences.

### **Psychoanalytic and psychodynamic thinking**

Psychoanalytic and psychodynamic thinking as a useful lens for examining emotional and behavioral health can guide practitioners on how to engage with and work through difficult emotional content related to the experience and horrors of gun violence. This approach can assist mental health professionals in conceptualization, assessment, intervention, and formulation of an understanding of how these horrific events and continuous acts of victimization impact the psyche of an individual, a culture, and a society.

From this lens the social worker practitioner is guided to explore the underlying response and behavior to direct and indirect exposure to gun violence that manifest in the psychological symptoms of anxiety, depression, hyper-vigilance, paranoia, substance abuse, and intense feelings of hopelessness. Focusing on the internal world and analyzing the unconscious feelings, motivations, desires, and hidden drives can illuminate an understanding of how the client's unconscious feelings, motivations, and desires influence the emergence of the symptoms and behavioral responses to chronic exposure of gun violence. This introspective investigation of the internal world and developing an understanding of the dynamic unconscious can guide the social work clinician to a deeper understanding of not only internal processes but also external processes. Practitioners are encouraged to look beyond the apparent symptoms a client presents to conducting an introspective inquiry by exploring underlying causes of intense psychological response and feelings and the internal world of the client. With the framework of psychoanalytic theory, this inquiry requires a process of listening and deeply understanding the individual. This framework can also lead to insights for understanding the dynamics of the mental lives of the descendants of slaves who experience the collective trauma of historical trauma and the daily vicarious, secondary, or direct experience of gun violence.

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## ***Faith Communities: A Natural Partner for Organizing on Gun Reform***

***Dr. Altaf Husain, Ph.D., MSW***

The rise in gun violence in the United States has resulted in everyone expressing thoughts and prayers for the victims of the gun violence. However, when one looks deeper, the issue is increasingly becoming politicized. Each instance of mass killings results in calls for gun reform on the one side and for expressions of thoughts and prayers only with no desire to address gun reform, on the other side. The profession of social work is more recently addressing gun reform, with only 82 results being returned on Google Scholar using keywords “social work” and “gun reform”. We must do more as a profession because, social work may be the ONLY profession that can truly move the needle on this gun reform. One option to do so is within reach, and it involves the faith-inspired communities who are actively advocating for gun reform.

The faith-based roots of the social work profession are well-known. However, over time, we have moved further and further away, sometimes even actively rejecting the mention of religion and spirituality (R/S) within social work interventions. Over the last few decades, there has been a renewal of interest in R/S within mostly the micro/mezzo levels of social work practice. What is less common is the connection between social work and R/S at the macro level of social work practice. And it is high time that the profession explores the importance of R/S in various aspects of macro practice, but particularly within the realm of advocacy for social justice issues. Protection of life from gun violence is a social justice issue that intersects well with the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim ideals to uphold the sanctity of life. As the Center for American Progress (CAP) notes faith leaders and communities are natural partners in gun reform efforts because “[T]heir work is driven by both a sense of ethical obligation and concern for the safety of their communities.” Whether the focus is on community organizing or crafting gun reform legislation, there is a substantive contribution that faith leaders and faith communities can make towards realizing actual gun reforms.

Consider how social workers could enhance community organizing efforts by collaborating with faith leaders and faith communities. Such efforts could raise awareness of the toll of gun violence and mobilize support for rallies, protests, fundraising to support nonprofits working

on gun reform, registering voters and educating them on political advocacy to achieve gun reform. There may also be opportunities to collaborate to promote healing within communities following different types of mass shootings, particularly school shootings. Alexander (2020) notes that “[R]esponses regarding the incorporation of faith in managing trauma after a school shooting have been recorded by various news and media outlets” (Alexander, p. 67). Charismatic and grounded faith leaders wield tremendous influence over their respective congregations. Community organizers could start by having meetings with a few faith leaders and seeking their endorsement of the larger organizing efforts. These faith leaders will be instrumental in allowing access to their congregations, and potentially even sharing names and contact information of individuals within their congregation with various levels of skills and expertise, and funds, to support the community organizing efforts. The struggle to achieve meaningful, lasting gun reforms is real, and the reform efforts can be bolstered by including faith leaders and communities. The Center for American Progress (CAP) notes that “[F]or many religious Americans, advocacy is not just a matter of protecting their communities; it is an act of worship or an expression of their religious beliefs.” What better way for social workers to honor local, regional, and national faith communities, while also collaborating with them to tackle gun reform.

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## ***Preventing Gun Violence Among Black Youth in Washington, DC***

***Dr. Sandra Jeter, Ph.D., LMSW***

### **Gun Violence Prevalence**

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) classifies gun violence as a significant and growing public health crisis. In 2021, there were almost 21,000 firearm homicides and about 26,000 firearm suicides in the United States (Simon et al., 2022). Gun violence is also rising in Washington, DC (DC). During the first week of this year, 2023, there were six homicides reported twice the number of homicides during the first week of 2022 (Ward & More, 2023). Gun-related deaths are more prevalent among Black adolescents and young adults between the ages of 15 and 34. Although Black people make up only 46% of the District of Columbia's population, about 96% of homicide victims and suspects in Washington, DC, are Black (NICJR, 2021). It is important to note that this high percentage of Black-related gun violence may be due to the historical under-resourcing and over-policing of Black neighborhoods. Although gun violence in DC has primarily arisen in Wards 7 and 8, which are predominately Black wards, which are poorer and have fewer community resources, homicides in Ward 1, which is almost 60% White and 20% Black (DC Health Matters, 2022), have increased by 166% this year (Dugger, 2022). These numbers expose the fact that gun violence is not a Black neighborhood issue, but a city-wide issue and a national issue that needs to be addressed.

### **Impact of Gun Violence**

There are many people directly and indirectly impacted by gun violence. Those who directly experience gun-related injuries may experience long-term cognitive, physical, and psychological consequences such as complications with memory and thinking, physical disability from injury to the brain, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (CDC, 2022). People surviving the death of a loved one may experience prolonged grief, PTSD, and depression, lasting anywhere from six months to more than two years after the death (Smith et al., 2020). Racial disparities are present in mental health outcomes among those impacted by the violent death of a loved one. For example, Goldsmith et al. (2008) found that Black

people experience more frequent loss of a loved one, more acute symptoms of PTSD, and higher levels of complicated or prolonged grief than white people. Also, children exposed to gun violence may experience psychological effects such as anger and desensitization to violence, which can lead to future violent behavior (Garbarino et al., 2002). Further, youth who witness violence may experience higher rates of school absenteeism, lower high school and college completion rates, and lower incomes in adulthood compared to youth who do not witness violence (Cabral, 2021).

Black residents of DC Wards 7 and 8 experience the greatest level of mental health disparities related to violent loss, including depression and PTSD, which can further perpetuate a cycle of violence. On top of this, these Black communities like many Black communities nationwide experience cultural trauma that has been associated with psychosocial outcomes related to factors undergirding the cultural wounds that have endured during and since the enslavement of Black people in America. DeGruy (2005) referred to this phenomenon as post-traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS). The key behavioral patterns associated with PTSS include violence, low self-esteem, hopelessness and depression, extreme feelings of suspicion, and internalized racism (DeGruy, 2005). The symptoms of cultural trauma are more distinct in Black individuals who lack the factors needed to protect against the adverse effects of enslavement and oppression (Vontress et al., 2007).

### **Lack of Resources**

Unfortunately, due to a lack of community and school resources in the District's Wards 7 and 8, Black youth often lack the opportunity to develop factors that protect against PTSS. Only 12% of DC public schools strongly agree that they can provide effective mental health services to disenfranchised students. Further, there are significant mental health disparities in DC communities when disaggregated by ward, leaving some youth without access to mental health support, including therapy (Kwarciany, 2016). Wards were designed to separate communities based on political and geographic representation somewhat like Detroit and New Orleans. In addition, in DC Public Schools there is a lack of effective, evidence-based psychosocial programs and interventions driven by culturally responsive practices that support positive youth development. The absence of programs and services available to

address developmental and mental health needs contribute to adverse life outcomes among Black youth, including poor academic success, fear, depression, anxiety, and relationship problems (DC Health Matters, 2020), factors that lead to violent behavior.

### **Racial Discrimination and Gun Violence**

Along with a lack of mental health support, gun violence among Black individuals may also be influenced by experiences of racism. The Theory of African American Offending (Unnever and Gabbidon, 2011) suggests that Black offending can only truly be understood if it is recognized from the viewpoint of most Black people. This viewpoint includes the belief that the United States is and has historically been an anti-Black, racist society and that Black people will directly or indirectly experience racial injustice at some point in their lives. The theory posits that the greater the perceived likelihood that a Black person will experience racial injustice, the more likely the Black individual is to offend. Unnever and Gabbidon (2011) propose two ways that racial discrimination increases the probability that a Black person will offend: 1.) racial discrimination impacts the ability of Black people to develop strong bonds with conventional institutions, and 2.) Black people who experience racial discrimination should be more likely to show negative emotions- anger, defiance, hopelessness, and depression – all associated with offending. Perhaps radical in concept, Unnever and Gabbidon (2011) present a theoretical construct that may be worthy of further examination.

Black youth in Washington, DC, experience racial discrimination and harassment each day, either personally or vicariously online, in their communities by law enforcement, and in their schools at the hands of educators and school leadership, peers, etc. (English et al., 2020). This racial discrimination leads to low school bonding, high school suspension rates, expulsion, truancy, social exclusion, a decline in grades, and school problem behaviors (Leath et al., 2019). All of these factors are connected to delinquent behavior, including gun violence. However, there remains a lack of training programs for educators, law enforcement, and community members. The need requires more training that extends past traditional teaching to identify racial bias and empower these individuals to dismantle patterns of racism and injustice in schools, the juvenile, and criminal justice systems, and communities. Also, there is a lack of available programming that engages families to build upon the strengths of

present caregiver racial socialization processes. This type of programming for Black youth may help them to build the skills to not only cope with but resist and overcome the effects of directly or vicariously experienced racial discrimination. The result may be that more Black youth live to resist gun violence. Further, there is a need for more community programming that allows Black youth to connect and develop strong, positive bonds with prosocial peers and community members.

## **Recommendations**

The Social-Ecological model highlights the importance of acknowledging the complex intersections between individual, relational, community, and societal factors related to increasing the risk of or preventing violence. The model suggests that preventing violence and sustaining prevention efforts over time requires simultaneous action across multiple levels. Using the Social-Ecological model as a framework, the following practices are recommended to be enacted in concurrence to prevent gun violence among Black youth in DC.

1. Increase the engagement of community members, leaders, and agencies in embracing, developing, and implementing violence prevention programs and approaches in Washington, DC, specifically for residents of Wards 7 and 8.
2. Enhance caregivers' racial socialization skills by engaging parents in evidence-based therapeutic interventions that address race, cultural pride, discrimination, and stress management
3. Increase Black youth's knowledge and use of strategies (e.g., emotional regulation, conflict resolution, non-violent resistance, etc.) when encountering racial bias on multiple levels (structural, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized).
4. Enhance youth's opportunity to develop and sustain positive social bonds with prosocial peers, family, and community members.
5. Increase the capacity of the local school district staff to provide high-risk Black youth access to trauma-informed, culturally responsive mental health services and programs.
6. Improve the school climate in local schools to ensure that all students feel safe, supported, and accepted.



7. Improve the relationship and trust between community members, community agencies, and law enforcement officers.
8. Develop a plan to educate members of U.S. Congress and other behavioral health and justice-based policymakers on issues related to trauma-informed care for low-income communities.

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## ***America Is in Crisis with Gun Violence***

***Tamieka Welsh, MSW***

America is in a crisis with Gun Violence. As an American citizen, it is hard to live your day-to-day routine without the constant fear of wondering if you will encounter a mass shooting. Mass shootings can happen anywhere, in schools, grocery stores and even your neighborhood. With access to social media, there is no way to escape the visuals including weekly or monthly headline news statements such as: "another mass shooting."

Unfortunately, gun violence is a part of American citizens life stories.

According to the Gun Violence Archive (2023) there have been 131 mass shootings with four or more people wounded or killed. This is in comparison to 2022. The United States has faced at least 202 mass shootings so far this year. There have been more mass shootings than days in 2023.

Plenty of mass shootings that have taken place in school settings. Guns are the leading cause of death among American children and teens. 1 out of 10-gun deaths are between the ages of 19 and younger (Langford et al. 2021; Agrawal et al.2021). Schools are supposed to be safe places for children, yet students, parents, and educators live in fear due to the increase in mass shootings and worry if a shooter will enter the school buildings and change their lives. What once felt like a joyful place, now feels terrifying due to fearing the unknown of what a school day may bring them. When it comes to gun violence, it can not only impact the families, but the communities that the victim lived in. Mass shootings create trauma that unfortunately impacts generations to come. Imagine the opportunity to return home safely has been taken away from your child, loved-on or family member forever.

How do you explain to children what is happening in America?

Gun violence can leave you in disbelief, with long-lasting impact on your mental health. Researchers have studied aspects of Gun violence and gun violence prevention. Findings suggest that the effects of mass shootings, both indirectly or directly, could have lasting effects on your mental health. Common diagnoses of gun violence survivors are post-

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety. Nearly 30% of adults experience anxiety in their lifetime and a small percentage of that is due to violence (Harvard Medical School, 2007)

One thing we can admit to is that the numbers of Gun violence incidents are disturbing. . Gun violence often disproportionately impacts underserved communities (Smith, et al.2020). In many Black communities the main reason for gun violence, is primarily linked to a direct cause or consequence of systemic racism (Hilaire, et al. 2022). Systemic inequities create, expose and heighten systematic disadvantages to the population of which gun violence is a product. Gun violence is a racial justice issue. The data shows Black people are twice as likely as white people to die from gun violence(Hilaire, et al.2022). Each day, about 26 Black Americans are killed by guns and 104 experience non-fatal injuries (Gun Violence Archive (2023).

Mass shootings can happen anywhere, at any time, so there is no way to prepare yourself. So, what needs to happen? We as citizens need to use our voices. We need more gun prevention programs in our communities, especially in Black communities. We need to provide education on the detrimental causes Gun violence causes especially for our children (Masi & Heinze, 2021; Agrawal et al. 2021). We must start at home, within our communities, to ensure that we are doing our part. We cannot be quiet about this issue anymore. Gun Violence has created a crisis that needs to end. My hope is that one day soon, America can put the guns down.

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## ***Gun Violence: The Next Chapter***

***Dr. Robert Cosby, Ph.D., MSW, MPhil.***

### **Introduction**

Great Civilizations are remembered for their humanity, their organization, their rules and regulations and the adherence to the values and cultures of the time. The idea of gun violence as an aberration in our U.S. society is not consistent with this idea of civil western civilization. In fact, it is more aligned with ‘when great powers fall’ (Kennedy, 2010). Great powers tend to fall when there is internal decay and external attack.

Gun Violence is a non-healing sore in our patriarchal U.S. Society. Gun violence, like discrimination, can be a product of racism, in that it is dependent upon the interpretation of people, to decide how people are to be treated (Gifford Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 2020). Firearms were created in China, refined in Europe and further refined in the United States by gunsmiths like Colt, Smith, Wesson and Winchester (Wills, 2017). The Framers of the U.S. Constitution felt that the right to bear arms was important enough to identify that right in the Second Amendment “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed” (p. 1 Congress.gov, 2024). The context of protecting people and property in 1776 was different then from now. In the *Heller v. District of Columbia* decision in 2008 (Larson, 2008) the Supreme Court affirmed the defense of hearth and home, superseding the mandated law of the District of Columbia government that outlawed all firearms in the District (except for law enforcement officers). The ability to protect the safety of citizens in its urban jurisdiction is no longer as strong provided one has a permit to carry a weapon, particularly a concealed weapon. The original purpose for the Constitution’s second amendment was for citizens to have the right to bear arms so that men could serve in active Militias. Militias were necessary because the newly formed United States could not afford a larger Army. Secondly, the right to bear arms was believed to be understood as the right to protect oneself and home. This secondary position has morphed into the right to carry a weapon, concealed or not, and for the gun bearer to make the case for using their judgment about when and where they can use their weapon. Resultantly, violence related blight has erupted, forming lesions in our

communities that have destroyed economic, social and psychological well-being of its residents and stakeholders, particularly in African American communities.

### **What Can Social Workers Learn From Gun Violence and Pro Gun Lobbyists?**

‘Stand your ground’ legislation has been very successful, passing in 27 states due to successful lobbying of pro gun lobbyists (Hall, 2013). The new laws are relaxed enough to allow concealed weapons to be used except by known felons and the mentally ill. Based on the Heller v. District of Columbia Supreme Court decision, gun violence may indeed be more frequent going forward.

First, the same concealed carry template promoted by the NRA and shared with each of the 27 States suggests an agenda that has been vigorously spread by the Lobbyists of the NRA. The Gifford Law Center suggests that the agenda is a racist one (Gifford Law Center, 2020). There is a common interpretation of concealing a firearm for ‘protection’ and standing one’s ground that is not about protecting hearth and home. The decision exercised by these 27 states suggests that public safety and civil rights take a back seat to racism. People learn racism and people learn violence. People that learn racism also learn to hate. The ability to carry a concealed weapon creates a surprise factor in which people will not know whether a person carries a concealed weapon. The ability to carry and use weapons, like pistols in a concealed manner, builds upon the ‘free will and ‘freedom’ of some people (Winkler, 2021), but not others. On the one hand, if one party has a weapon and the other does not, the potential surprise factor for the other party to want to escalate and purchase a weapon increases the stakes, and the likelihood of gun violence. Individuals that choose to use and misuse weapons are not helping our society to embrace one another in friendship or civil discourse. Instead, the actions perpetuate meeting violence with more violence. Social Workers are tasked with helping grieving individuals and families cope after losing loved ones. This can be done in many ways. Social Workers may use many techniques, models, and therapies to assist individuals and families. A couple of examples may include assisting with school and after school or community-based programs, or helping individuals and families with trauma to decompress,

to de-escalate, and to find workable gun violence prevention efforts. Such solutions may promote safety, peace and peace of mind.

### **So, how should this be done?**

Social Workers need to gain the trust of intergenerational community members by entering into dialogue in safe spaces. In so doing they can speak openly in a confidential manner. These suggested behaviors may help create an atmosphere that validates trust and affirms relational connections. Gun violence for community elders and for other community members has become a wedge issue. In many communities, predominantly minority urban communities, older adults are often primary caregivers of their grandchildren. These older adults are more vigilant about recognizing when communities are unsafe. Often, they see the signs of stress in their community around them, in their neighbors, in their grandchildren that are stressed or traumatized by the myriad of emotions and actions triggered by gun violence. In Washington, DC and other metropolitan areas grandparents often see gun violence and its aftermath through the lens of heads of households. In particular, “Grand Families”, is a housing program in several communities in the United States including Dorchester, Massachusetts, New York City, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Washington, DC. For example, District of Columbia government offers a separate subsidized living program for grandparents raising grandchildren. This partnership program with Mission First Housing Corporation includes a support group run by Howard University School of Social Work, Multidisciplinary Gerontology Center. The Grand Families collective includes fifty families who are grandparents raising grandchildren in a Northwest Washington high rise building. The priority for the District grand families includes trying to keep families safe and together. Some grandparents must consider gun violence from a perspective of knowing extended family members. The extended family members may be involved in gun violence as victims, and or participants. Many grandparents know their grandchildren come by their fears honestly. The grandchildren may have witnessed the death of their parents or know that their parents are absent due to gun violence, resulting in death, substance dependence and or incarceration. The perpetuation of gun violence continues to take an emotional, physical,



economic, and psychological toll on the grandchildren and the grandparents within communities.

Some community members blame youth and suggest scapegoating Black families because gun violence is inevitable in these communities. The point being that gun violence can exist, anywhere else, but just not in my community. This makes the case for more segregation based on economics, real estate and businesses that leave communities creating food deserts (where grocery stores and supermarkets do not exist so there are limited fresh fruit and produce options). This also creates lack of community cohesion and induces fear due to rising crime often involving gun violence.

### **Gun Violence Polarizes Our Society.**

Gun Violence polarizes our communities and our society. People that don't typically carry weapons, as opposed to people who do carry them, express that without a weapon they feel naked. In discussing intergenerational linkages, communities are affected across many walks of life. These issues can create anxiety. This gun violence anxiety can spread and affect many types of communities, even less expected communities, such as on college campuses. College administrators have capitulated to gun rights groups. When this has occurred issues of conflict, safety, and the rights of some vs. the rights of many become clouded. On the other hand, college administrators have reacted to student complaints of feeling unsafe on campus when they know others have guns and they do not (Patten, Thomas, & Wada, 2013). This creates some interesting dynamics such as when individuals without a weapon sit in a room of persons "packing" weapons they feel at the least uncomfortable. This may cause a cycle of escalating gun violence. Untrained community members with guns, impetuous and not thinking, may exhibit reactionary behavior to feel safe. In cities incidences of underage youth borrowing weapons from friends or adults are also increasing. This whole milieu is closely linked to racism and racial subjugation which causes people to easily rise to anger and escalate to gun violence. Because of the strength of gun manufacturers, and the way in which racism and people romanticize the use of weapons, the gun violence issue becomes more complex and clouds our judgment (Culyba et al., 2023).

## **Increasing Gun Sales and Gun Violence**

Many American citizens, particularly males, have come to see carrying a weapon as a measure of strength, and not carrying a weapon as exposing weaknesses (Wiser, et al., 2021). Because they often feel unsafe in areas of gun violence, most often males more than females find ways to buy or borrow weapons. This can result in escalating violence which can lead to many negative outcomes such as injuries, people being introduced to the criminal justice system, and or death. This can be extremely stressful for families who may seek out social workers to help family members figure out how to support and or counsel returning citizens (family members incarcerated for gun related offenses such as carrying or using a concealed weapon without a permit). Families need help to pay for funerals and or burial expenses. Social workers may help address areas of family need such as grief counseling or find ways to support families that may show signs of distress and dysfunction. Some family members may believe that justice can be taken into their own hands. Emotions may sway family members and friends into wanting to retaliate. In short, they want to be a judge and executioner.

Social Workers see the aftermath of gun violence in their clients' trauma. Sometimes the traumas appear in grieving family members, friends and loved ones of those who have died. The economics of gun violence is linked to the availability of weapons. This can contribute to the trauma and impulsivity of wanting to purchase and obtain a gun to retaliate or protect oneself, particularly after a previous gun violence incident or incidents.

The sale of guns ebbs and flows and is related to the cost and easy access to guns. The use of personal background checks is required for gun shop owners and prospective gun owners necessary to meet government legal compliance laws. However, for individuals that don't want to be identified they can still purchase weapons. This can be done through gun swap shows or private sales or gifts. Still others can obtain weapons illegally, such as those individuals that don't want the gun or themselves to be identified. Such weapons include guns with filed off gun serial numbers, stolen guns or ghost guns made using three dimensional printers. These types of ghost weapons are almost untraceable. The gun serial

number is a unique identifier assigned to a singular firearm by the manufacturer. There is one universal serial number system for all manufacturers; however, the serial numbers are not easily identified by weapon type among different manufacturers. This makes identifying a weapon much more difficult.

Gun violence is not simply about removing guns from youth. Gun manufacturers seek communities that are sympathetic to their work. In turn gun manufacturers build plants often in rural communities that can offer quality and higher paying gun manufacturing jobs. These are welcome employment opportunities for family members that can support their families working in gun plants. The culture is appreciated and fits with whole families where each member has grown up learning to shoot. Obtaining a weapon can also provide a cultural link. For example, in some communities' families pride themselves in their hunting and shooting prowess. Consequently, most every member of the family owns and knows how to shoot a weapon from an early age.

Learning to fire a weapon has often been a rite of passage. So, gun violence is not connected with the age of the shooter, but on the contrary, is connected to knowing that they have a reason to fire the weapon. Learning to handle a weapon and having reason for violence are not always unconnected.

### **A Social Work Response**

In social work experienced social workers can and do assist in promoting positive change in communities affected by gun violence. This suggests opportunities for social workers to collaboratively work to de-escalate gun violence in these communities with trust, shared vision and by identifying strategies that include the community members' ownership of workable solutions, not the social workers. In this way de-escalation of gun violence can occur. This de-escalation typically occurs in communities where gun violence has hurt the community. De-escalation occurs with good communication, a will to change and catalysts for change, such as residents affected by gun violence who want positive change. Catalyst members of communities can empower fellow residents. Social workers may assist

community members so that the community can seek and access resources for change. Examples of such catalyst efforts can include positive incentives like gun buyback programs and other alternatives to gun violence. These catalysts for change can help foster better outcomes for clients, for communities, and for interaction with judicial systems by reducing the use of weapons and decreasing deaths and those injured. The message is one of being the change you want to see.

The recent increase in gun violence in the U.S. is not an aberration, nor is it simply a few bad actors, or something that will change with more “law and order” in disparate communities somewhere else. These changes will require that social workers adapt to what is happening in communities. Some challenges in communities include residents witnessing violence against women. Increases in the incidences of domestic violence related to power and control need more mental health support. There are other aspects of gun-violence that are linked to community violence. These may include having to pay gang members for protection, and other financial dis-incentives involving substance use and sales of drugs. Often these issues are closely linked to gun violence. Too often, they result in fear, silence and more gun violence injuries and death. It is in this work that social workers can and do seek to make a difference.

Increasingly, in communities where there are high levels of gun violence non-profit organizations with social workers are recognized as places that can help. This may be because its staff members are accepted as honest brokers, and mediators, providing information, and support through their social work networks. Social workers may assist with safe talk, therapy, to trauma services, or respite and case management. These types of agencies that employ Social Workers can assist across a range of services and activities. Social Workers work in communities on a daily basis helping people like Miriam and her daughter. Other examples of social workers helping people in communities include youth referrals and referring clients and their relatives to adult protective services, for those that are abused, neglected or exploited, as needed.

## Ongoing Challenges

Social Workers who work their cases in the community, used to travel to visit clients in many diverse neighborhoods. This approach has changed as more social workers encourage clients to come to them in agency-based settings, not just for therapy but for case management, service provision, referrals and coordination of care. These practices were largely curtailed during the COVID-19: Pandemic due to safety issues for Social Workers and to reduce virus spread. Many Social Workers have not returned to the same level of community (shoe leather) social work since, where social workers travel to and walk throughout communities. The missed social workers in the community during COVID may have contributed to former clients and youth not feeling as connected. Several cohorts of youth in Washington, DC and other settings made their own rules during COVID as law enforcement officers were ordered not to enforce laws as jails and prisons did not have appropriate COVID safeguards in place and officers, too, were at risk. As part of a Social Workers job, they may call police officers to accompany them or coordinate with a police officer for a wellness or welfare check of a client.

A Welfare check –is a service offered by many police departments around the country. In Washington, D.C. a welfare check is requested of the (District of Columbia) Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). This welfare or wellness check service is offered by the MPD. A MPD police officer responds to the phone request of a social worker. Oftentimes this is an adult protective service (APS) social worker or Child and Family Service Agency (CFSA) social worker trying to locate and assist a specific client or clients. As part of the wellness service the police officer visually inspects the entrance and surrounding location provided by the social worker. The officer knocks on the door, identifying themselves. If no contact is made, they may often leave some identification card, to determine the well-being or safety of one or more persons at the given address. In instances where the Social Worker meets the officer or the police officer accompanies the Social Worker, the welfare of the client is at issue. If domestic gun violence is suspected the police officer coordinates with the social worker to determine if a gun is present in the residence. The officer asks if a weapon is present. If a weapon or weapons are identified, present and visible, the efforts to de-escalate a potential situation are paramount. Often no one answers the door when the officer knocks.

This information is then recorded in the Police database. The social worker can follow up with the specific police officer and add the appropriate information to their case file notes, etc.

## **Gun Violence Segmentation**

Gun violence can be segmented into several groups. It can be group related, domestic relational disturbances, positionality related, as in ‘protecting one’s turf, and dealing with folks that just don’t get along, like the Hatfield’s and McCoy’s, two West Virginia and Kentucky feuding families from the mid 1800s with generations of disagreements to fuel almost Internecine religious style family feuds made worse by gun violence. If we look over time at the types of gun violence in current settings in Washington, DC and other urban settings we see there are children, youth, and adults all involved in gun violence as both victims of gun violence and perpetrators of gun violence.

According to the Gun Violence Archive, 2020 was a record-breaking year with 43,551 deaths attributed to gun violence in the U.S., with almost 20,000 classified as murder/unintentional death and more than 24,000 classified as suicide (Gun Violence Archive, 2023). It is also of interest to note that Black men are 10 times more likely to die from gun violence than are white men (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020c).

Social workers work to meet the needs of clients that are caught in a mutual garment of pain and suffering, in small or large parts due to gun violence. Many feel they do not understand their complicity in gun violence, whether it is due to silence, lending consent, or fear of reprisals or violence against those of their family members that talk or provide information about persons involved in gun violence. Some individuals are victims of circumstance. Some families and individuals note that their neighborhood has changed and is more dangerous due to gun violence. The idea of gun violence as a reality and consequence of simply living in the neighborhood can be unsettling. Others, like gang affiliated members may see their affiliation and strapping on a weapon, as keys to their survival.

In some communities the higher the levels of rancor and discord the more gun violence that kills and maims. The perspective offered by Mahatma Gandhi of “an eye for an eye (left over from the Hammurabi Code)” soon leaves everyone blind”. With gun violence in urban and increasingly in suburban and some rural settings, gun violence may leave many people injured and dead as with mass shootings. People are now looking at racial disparities in cities and their linkages to gun violence (Stansfield & Semenza, 2023). In 2022 there were over 20,200 deaths. These deaths are grouped as willful, malicious, or accidental (Gun Violence Archive, 2023). Every day in the U.S. 28 youth die due to gun violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022).

Since the beginning of 2023 in Washington, DC there have been 72 homicides and 257 shootings (Metropolitan Police Department, May 2023; Gun Violence Archive, 2023). There have been many shootings that may be seemingly random, but some health care workers may in fact see that there are some shootings that are related to mental illness. However, gun violence is not totally random. On the contrary, increasing amounts of shootings appear to be across demographic lines. These related shootings point to a reality that is different from some conservative groups that suggest that guns don't kill people, people do. The implicit message is that unsafe and dangerous gun violence events are random and conducted by many random shooters that *may* have mental illness. The data shows that that assumption is not correct. There are individuals filled with fear, with bitterness and hatred that fuel disagreements that are settled with gun violence. There are others involved in the drug trade and substance misusers and abusers, and those involved in human trafficking that resort to gun violence.

### **Conclusion – What is the next chapter for Gun Violence Prevention?**

The point is that the next chapter for gun violence and gun violence prevention will always include firearms. Gun and ammunition manufacturers will sell and make profits from gun and ammunition sales. People justify the use of guns to protect, to enforce, or to follow the law. However, in many African American communities the result of gun violence is steep losses in economic and psychological terms. The U.S. Gun violence costs communities

millions, if not billions of dollars, over time. In several states gun violence and gun violence prevention are financially expensive. As shared in the Cosby/Cleveland chapter, gun violence in the state of Oklahoma requires \$5 Billion dollars in 2024 to provide supports to communities affected by gun violence. This expense costs communities more than money. Gun Violence represents lost income for individuals and families. Over time this could represent losses that are shared or passed down to future generations in terms of lost generational wealth. The losses include lost opportunities to generate family well-being, support for families to maintain and pay forward future wealth. This means having discretionary income to help your family. For example, in Washington, DC where disparities are great, Black families have approximately \$2,300 in discretionary income and White families have approximately \$63,000 dollars in discretionary income (Golash-Boza, 2023); Cosby, 2023). Think in terms of being able to buy property, make a down payment, pay for medical bills, insurance, etc. and then must find work, purchase goods and services, obtain adequate housing, and adequate education that will assume the opportunity to pursue higher education, if interested and able. For those victimized by gun violence the need for mental health counseling and therapy to address trauma may be years, if not lifelong costs. Trauma does not know time. One result of gun violence is guns can take what cannot be returned. Guns never give life. Social workers are sometimes asked to help families recover from domestic gun violence that takes the life of a loved one. Families understand what it means to know a loved one is no longer in the household or no longer in the community because they are dead or behind bars.

Gun violence may start out in a rational manner. I must protect myself, or I must return fire, or my goal is simple, to shoot to kill. It is at this point that firing a weapon can supersede rational thought. There are consequences of gun use. As a result, communities are broken down and torn apart by gun violence.

What if more people recognized the role of older adults as role models or as repositories of history and experience? Would this foster more wisdom and forbearance before the shooting? The respect for human life is taught. And many people have not remembered the lessons of respect and do unto others how you would like to be treated. Doing unto others before they do unto you gets us into a trap of shoot first. This creates scenarios that we cannot escape. Gun use perpetuates the idea that life and death are closely intertwined because when a



person shoots and hits their human target, the result is injury or death. It is free will and personal judgment that makes the case for an opportunity to use or not use a weapon.

The fact that there are fewer community leaders in Black communities across the U.S. is not an aberration. For years there has been a steady decline in communities where there is discord due to the breakdown of families, exacerbated by the schools to prison pipeline. The deterioration of role models and people willing to step up are concerns that Social Workers and families must wrestle with. Communities in urban settings may long for some community interaction and more civil cohesion.

The reality is in this post COVID-19 Pandemic period many people do not know their neighbors. They do not know community members and do not know their community history. The use of firearms and identifying ways to de-escalate the gun violence affecting communities is an important part of the work of a social worker. The Grand Challenges in Social Work are asking social workers across the discipline to embrace the community responses. Social workers are asked to work within communities to help them heal from the disfigurement of communities torn apart from loss. It is this important work that will help to change the way gun violence is perceived. Social Workers and other helping professions can collaborate to make a difference and collectively work to curb gun violence and perhaps add to the gun violence prevention processes.

Among the many changes suggested must be better ways to build up the community, build up the residents to be catalysts for change, and help residents to own the potential solutions. This is where social workers can work with older adults, work with adults, work with youth and children, to encourage the intergenerational interactions that help to build and cement multigenerational relationships of trust, of safety, and of caring. Some of this work is being done in Washington, DC with Grandfamilies, grandparents raising grandchildren. These Grandfamilies have lost parents and children due to gun-violence. This multigenerational GrandFamilies model of communities relies on the wisdom of the elders, with the mentoring and support for grandchildren. Grandfamilies may offer a model of caring that supports

communities in ways that can build trust and build more lasting relationships. Social Workers can and should contribute to this important work.

There is much to do for all that want to make a difference in addressing gun violence. There is important work ahead as members that live in, work in, socialize in and have history in these communities. Changing the way communities see solutions to gun violence can lead to more gun violence prevention efforts.

### **What Change Is Needed and What Is the Next Chapter**

In asking what change is needed and what is the next chapter? There are no easy answers.

The types of answers required to diminish and prevent gun violence have some complexity. It is not simply finding the bad guys and locking them up. Gun violence creates different scenarios that prey upon the oppressed, and the communities that are not vigilant and able to combat gun violence. In the metropolitan Washington, DC area gun violence has increased as guns and cars are used to go to meet or surprise individuals in their homes, after school, on school grounds or other public spaces. These are not aberrant instances. They often involve someone that knows someone. Often Black families see the gun violence results. The results can be calculated in economic, physical, psychological, and spiritual terms. Social Workers are familiar with bio-psycho-social and spiritual assessments of clients. Meeting clients where they are is a fundamental part of assessment. Gun violence has contributed to some catastrophic losses in terms of lost loved ones creating lost family members, lost family stability, lost family wages and lost revenue for families and communities. These losses of family and community often include families and individuals disengaging and pulling away from others because of the gun violence. There is an individual disassociation and lack of cohesiveness because of gun violence for some individuals that suggest the onset of social isolation (Crewe and Cosby, 2023). Depression and anger is directed towards the gun violence perpetrators and those whose lives will forever be changed because of injury, incarceration or death. Gun violence and the political rhetoric associated with it are again ramping up. Whether it is in rural, urban, or suburban communities, the idea of needing

protection often suggests a gun is required. Whether used in an offensive or defensive posture usually depends on who supposedly had reason to fire, who shot first, and who did not stop shooting.

The proliferations of mass shootings in the U.S. are characterized as those when more than four persons are killed or wounded (Gun Violence Archive, 2023). When examining the gun violence data one can see that there are more laws being enacted to loosen restrictions in gun violence laws, and other reduction regulations and mandates. These loosening of regulations and introducing new looser regulations are fueled by lobbyists and a few major players like gun manufacturers, and gun trade associations who make campaign contributions, and conservative groups intent on changing social mores and laws such that everyone who chooses can carry and conceal a weapon.

Communities are examining the reasons for gun violence in more detail or considering community social assets as ways of deterring gun violence (Parsons et al., 2023; O'Rourke, T. W. (2023). This would suggest that structural racism continues to oppress Black people and the ability to carry a concealed weapon is but another mechanism to instill fear as oppressors or retaliatory responses to oppressors. This is not to say that structural racism implies only Whites embrace gun violence. There are many instances of Black-on-Black gun violence. However, the nature of changing of laws and mandates such as the use of a concealed weapon allows people to act or react with lethal force. The data suggests that stand your ground laws (such as in Florida, etc.) more often favor White men carrying guns that support gun violence as a political mandate. The rationale used is that they want to strike first to protect themselves. There is some irony in that this protective offense is to shoot first those who most often are not carrying a weapon. This has escalated into ways of rationalizing the killing as necessary and justified (Uzzi, et al., 2023) How and why this happens is something social workers can track more carefully, as we advocate for different changes to federal, state and local legislation and regulation. Grand families have shown that it takes a village to raise a child. Grandparents seek to sustain and protect their families with knowledge, support, and wisdom. Maybe this model of multigenerational support shines a light on the possibilities of ending gun-violence through more caring, speaking with one another more, and less shooting.

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## **Vulnerable Scars**

I never understood  
how you see my deeps  
when I am afraid to go outside

you protect me as your child  
provide light and life  
accept me

help me to listen carefully  
I hear 'be still'  
even on the darkest day

please bring me understanding  
teach me to not fear the night  
help me see peace in others

accept my fervent prayers  
wishes for a calm within  
that rolls and settles like the sea

accept and know  
to forgive starts with self  
you offer a multitude of mercies

help me to see your inner light  
find beauty inside  
where knowing compassion reigns

with love  
and empathy remembered like thorns  
help me tell my story

I need to accept what happened to them and me  
so I memorize  
how I trace with fingers in the dark

feel the vulnerable scars  
of violence  
and still seek love

**Robert Cosby**





## ***Case Studies***

### **The Case of Zakia**

1. An African American Grandmother, Ms. M, age 70 is raising two grandchildren in Washington, DC in a marginalized community that is riddled by gun violence. Her granddaughter, Zakia, is attending her first year of college and has come home for Spring break. Her brother, age 15, the other grandchild attends a local charter school. Her granddaughter's best friend, Dana, who is just finishing high school, has come over to visit and catch up. The two, Zakia and Dana, decide to walk three blocks to get some pizza. On the way they encounter an old classmate, one of their old basketball court opponents. Zakia remembered Flo was a player who had no game but had a big temper. The old classmate Flo looks bigger now than when Zakia remembers her. Zakia is struck by the anxiousness displayed by the old classmate. As they approach each other the old classmate stops Zakia and Dana. Flo said she just wanted to say hello. They begin talking, and before long the old classmate says she heard that one of them 'was trying to make time with her man'. They tell Flo, the classmate, 'that is so random'. They say 'we don't know what you are talking about'. They start to walk past the old classmate. The old classmate says loudly 'now you're disrespecting me?!' Two other young teen women step from behind a parked van, and now are in front of the two girls, Zakia and Dana. The old classmate is behind them. Zakia and Dana are surrounded. The three girls, Flo and her posse close in and walk up on the two girls, Zakia and Dana who turn so they are back-to-back and can see the three aggressive teens better. Flo, the old classmate starts talking about "what she is gonna do if she even hears they trying to mess with her man'. Dana steps toward the old classmate and yells loud enough for the two young women and the old classmate to 'back up!' Tells them 'We don't want no problems'. The classmate tells Dana and Zakia that they will cut them down right now if they don't act right. She pulls up her athletic jacket to show a pistol in her waistband. She goes on...or would they 'prefer she make them strip and take off their clothes right now before they get their a----es kicked'. A black and white police car that cruises the neighborhood occasionally slows. Two Police Officers in the car see the five females apparently ready to fight. The Black and White police car slows further as if to let the teens know they are about

to stop to get a better look. One of Flo's girls yells 5-O and they all look up. Flo, the old classmate, slides by Zakia and whispers before the three run off 'this ain't over...'

The Metropolitan Police Cruiser stops in the middle of the street. Zakia wonders what she and Dana should do. Dana whispers don't run. After about 30 seconds which seemed like forever the Police car with the two male Officers moves off slowly. Zakia thinks she can't wait to get back to college, get to her books and past this drama. She also decides not to tell her grandmother.

A week later, the day before she is to leave to back to school Zakia receives a phone call to come out of the grandmother's apartment. There is someone that wants to meet her. Zakia knows the voice but cannot place it at that moment. It is Flo, the old classmate. Zakia opens the apartment door and there stands Flo in a long plaid shirt and jeans. The old classmate says, "why don't we go to the laundry room and talk this out". Zakia can feel her hair on the back of her neck start to raise. Still, she reluctantly follows behind the girl towards the laundry room. She opens the door and wonders 'how could this have happened?'. She has second thoughts. She thinks to herself...'why didn't she just go back inside her grandmother's apartment?' This was a bad idea. She figures somehow, she can talk her way out of this. A minute later, amidst the washer and dryer noises, there is a popping sound. Three girls are seen running down the hall to the back stairwell and are gone. Another grandparent opens the door to check her laundry and sees Zakia lying on the floor with blood coming out of a wound in the mid-section of her body. The grandparent starts yelling to find Zakia's grandmother. She pulls out her cell phone and dials 911.

### **Sample Questions:**

Who is hurt in this case study?

What is the real reason for the violence?

What are the lessons learned from this case?

How might the violence have been avoided?

Are there any winners or losers in this case?

As a Social Worker how might you have intervened?

There is a link between vicarious secondary trauma and actual trauma.

Do you think Zakia has experienced either of these?

If she survives, how would you treat Zakia?

What would her treatment entail?

What two states sell the most guns in the U.S.?

### **The Case of Bony and John**

1. An African American mother, Mrs. S, age 32 suspects her son, Bony, age 13, her only child, is being recruited to run with the wrong crowd. Bony is her only child. Mrs. S works until 2 AM six days a week in a bar, and when she gets home, she can hardly stand. She wishes her son would do right, but she thinks he appears to be a lot like his father. Always smiling and doing the wrong thing. She can't deal with this now. She brushes her teeth, uses the toilet, and washes her face and hands. It is all she can do to find her bed. Bony's dad left for a job in California. Bony and his mother live in a two-story garden apartment in the NE section of Washington, DC. It was a quiet neighborhood until about five years ago. Now it has a mix of Native Washingtonians, working class Blacks, Hispanic and White families. More recently the community has had some more poor people move in as adjoining communities appear to be changing because of gentrification. Bony's mother, Mrs. S., said they would consider moving after Mr. S got settled, but he has not been in touch in over eight months and that was before Mrs. S' mother took ill and died six months ago. Mrs. S. seems to have trouble just getting through each day. Bony has been seen with a group of older teens between 17 and 20 years old that have been stealing cars. Bony has always wanted to appear tough, but really is a follower, just wanting to fit in with a fast crowd. He is well liked and funny and the kids at his school think he likes clowning. Bony has been seen working with a group of older teens and some known ex-offenders. The teens bring cars to the ex-offenders who have a chop shop, where cars are dis-assembled and sold as parts for other cars that are then reassembled and sold with pieces from several stolen cars in other states. The teens are glad to help as the ex-offenders congratulate each of them, making them feel good. And best of all, they get paid on the spot. Each youth can make two – three hundred dollars a night for a couple of cars. And then they all got money to celebrate because they get paid on the spot. This 'boosting cars' is good quick money, or so they think. The teens have decided to hit one neighborhood that has lots of good cars all up and down the alley.

One morning in the middle of the week at 3:30 AM a neighbor, John, a man in his early 40s hears car alarms going off in the alley behind his row house. He has heard this too many times, and before he got this new car, by kids or junkies more than once. He had a nice styled vintage car which had broken windows. He does not have money right now to cover the insurance deductible if somebody breaks his new car windows. He is already paying child support, and with his mortgage, car note and other expenses he can't handle too many more unexpected expenses. He knows he can't take any time away from his job with the Motor Vehicle Department. He is in hot water from having to recently take off for court too many times. This custody and visitation fight with his ex-wife, paying lawyers just to be able to see his own three kids is going to kill him. He doesn't have any more leave. He looks out the window and scans hard up and down the alley. He sees two or three young boys with what look like tire irons breaking windows and climbing in cars. He thinks they are trying to steal the cars. His adrenaline starts pumping. Not tonight. He thinks to himself as he mumbles "They are not stealing my ride tonight!" John grabs his 9mm pistol from his bedroom side table. In a fit of anger, he slams the ammunition magazine in the heel butt end of his semi-automatic pistol, racks the slide and loads a bullet in the pistol chamber. He then heads stealthily for the alley. He intends to stop what is going on and catch those boys in the act. He looks first to check whether his car is one that has been or is being broken into. He decides he will get between the boys and his car, and then plans to surprise them with a show of force by standing in the middle of the alley with his gun showing under the lone pole light. Bony hears a noise like an outside door opening in one of the houses. The other youth also hear the same. They each scatter as they have many times before running fast and circling back to the getaway car. Bony starts running but is so busy looking up to see exactly where the noise came from that he trips on his big boy jean leg and falls. When he stands up the man with the pistol is about ten to fifteen feet away from him. The other boys now in the getaway car wait and watch as they yell at Bony to run. Only the man, John, is between Bony and the getaway car. The getaway car with lights off is slowly backing up towards John and Bony but is more than thirty yards away. They try to make it easier for Bony to get to the car. They fire from another handgun at John hoping to distract him so Bony can get by John still holding his pistol with both hands. The man, John, turns to fire back in the direction of the getaway car. Bony sees his chance and instead of running the other way tries to run past

John. When John whips back around to point his gun again at Bony he is surprised to see Bony in the semi dark is less than five feet from him. With adrenaline still pumping John fires almost instinctively from almost arm's distance from Bony hitting him several times in the chest, arm, and stomach. Bony goes down like a sack of potatoes. The boys in the getaway car see this too and take off without Bony. One of the neighbors has called the Police and now several lights from houses near John's row house are now on. The man, John, sees Bony on the alley ground not moving. He drops the 9 MM and crouches over Bony. He sees it is a young boy. He begins talking to the boy. He asks him, 'why did you come up on me like that. Why didn't you just wait and not try to run?' John's head is stacking up thoughts as he starts to cool down. He begins to assess the gravity of the situation. He has shot a young boy. He crouches on his knees now talking to the young teen, almost like in prayer. He tells Bony, 'hold on boy'. 'Hold on, help will be here soon. Just hold on'. He watches Bony's youthful face grimacing. He holds Boy's hand as the life in Bony's eyes appears to leave. Bony's eyes stare at him as if he is looking through him. In a few moments, the eyes become dull and lifeless. The ambulance has not arrived. Yet John stays with the boy until someone tells John to stand up slowly. He sees a Police Officer a few feet from him and sees the ambulance with lights flashing coming down the alley.

**Sample Questions:**

Is there anyone at fault here? Yes or no and why or why not?

What is the real reason for the violence?

What are the lessons learned from this case?

How does the absence/ abandonment of his father factor into his male attachment needs?

Does this factor into his vulnerability to being recruited by a crew?

Does Bony have attachment issues? Why or why not?

Should the police hold John at fault?

How might the violence have been avoided?

Are there any winners or losers in this case?

Why is quick money not good money?

As a Social Worker how might you have intervened?

### **The Case of Gill Protects His Sister.**

3. A younger sister, Chatrese, age 16, is a popular teen at her California high school. Her brother, Gill, age 17, is a nationally recognized wide receiver on his State Championship High School football team. They live in a black and Hispanic section of the city in a small-detached house. The mother is Puerto Ricana and is house bound with a bad back from lifting an obese patient. She was a licensed practical Nurse (LPN) studying for her RN before her back accident. The father is African American, a transit worker, is raising the two teens and working two jobs to make ends meet. Chatrese is being harassed by many of the young men in the neighborhood and at the high school because she is cute. One of the local gangbangers boasts that he wants Chatrese to be his girlfriend. Gill, the brother, is being heavily recruited by several colleges to play football. Gill finds out that his sister may be in trouble, because several of his classmates at school say she was seen talking and maybe flirting with a gangbanger. Gill knows gangbanger girlfriends get used by many of the gangbangers and they can never leave because they know and can recognize all the gang members. Gill's best friend tells Gill he better step to the sister and to the gangbanger fast before anything gets wild. Gill is seriously worried. He can't tell his mother. She already has a lot on her and with her pain and pain meds she explodes with anger and long tantrums sometimes. He doesn't want to put any more on his dad. He knows his father will come down hard on both he and his sister. Gill tells his football coach he won't be at Spring Weight Room or Spring drills for the next couple of days because of a family issue. He confronts his sister and tells her to stay away from the gangbanger because the young man is a known hustler and runs with some rough dudes. His sister says she wasn't doing anything. She tells her brother, Gill the gangbanger boy and his friends just keep following her and harassing her. The brother, Gill, is thinking about telling the gangbanger to stay away from his sister. He thinks about it some more and thinks he better have some back up in case the gangbanger is packing a weapon, as most of those dudes always got something. He asks one of his friends who has an older brother in jail that had several guns. He heard him talk about how he used to shoot at cans and bottles for targets with a Glock handgun. Gill asks if he can borrow it. He says he doesn't want to shoot anybody just let this gangbanger know he is serious about leaving his sister alone. The friend asks him if he is sure he wants to take that step. What if the gangbanger got more back up than him? What if? Gill is pretty sure it won't

come to that. He takes the gun puts it in the back of his pants, pulls his sweatshirt over it and says he will see his friend tomorrow, return the gun, and tell him the story. He jogs easily for the bus stop and heads across part of the city. After sitting a while, as he gets off the bus his adrenaline is starting to fade. He realizes it is now late afternoon. He wonders if his plan has holes in it. He took the bus and doesn't know the bus schedule...and he doesn't know much about being this far from his neighborhood. It will soon be dark. He doesn't want any trouble but figures this will never end for his sister unless he does something now.

#### Sample Questions:

What are the issues of this case?

What would you do and why?

What should Chatrese do or have done?

What do you think Gill is planning to do and how do you think it will end?

What were some of the warning signs that something bad might be brewing?

What might be a different scenario with a positive conclusion?

#### **The Case of 'What the Older Man Saw'**

4. An Older Black man, Mr. G. age 67 lives in a townhouse next to a church in a Southern City, Atlanta, Georgia. Mr. G. is a retired utility worker due to an accident that made him a paraplegic. So, he now spends most of his days looking out the windows when he is not in front of his computer. He has a personal care aide come to help him in the afternoons with shopping and to help him bathe and make dinner for him. Mr. G looks out his window to see something frightening. He thought it was unusual to see these two Black men who seemed to be leaning into each other as if sharing a secret. They talked while they were looking over across the street at the people waiting for the bus. It is Saturday and things are quiet. The church is closed, and most people are not doing much this morning. He remembers seeing the two young men putting on ski masks behind some bushes next to the church. He then watches them move quickly just before he saw them go around a corner and step in front of four people waiting for a bus. He says 'God d\_\_n!' under his breath. He was witnessing some people being robbed at gunpoint. One of the women being robbed grabs for

her gold necklace as one of the men tried to yank it off her neck. The other man sees her grab at something. He thinks she is grabbing for his partner's gun and fires. The bullet hits the woman in the chest, and she falls back and slumps over. Someone behind the woman starts screaming. The two robbers appear to panic and turn to run. Mr. G clearly sees both robbers run past his townhouse. He thinks 'They must be 'young bucks'. As he watches he sees one of the robbers look up at him and their eyes meet for a second. One of the robbers jumps on a dirt bike style motorcycle, and the other one leaves in a solid dark blue or black Honda Accord. Mr. G hears the squeal of tires. Both robbers speed off in opposite directions. Mr. G. sees the fire department paramedics arrive by ambulance and come to a quick stop. The paramedics jump out and one gets the stretcher while the other runs with her bag to the woman now lying on the ground. The woman with an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) fire department jacket starts working on the shot woman. The other man with the stretcher leaves the stretcher and the two of them appear to be hovering over the woman with the bullet wound. The EMT man runs back to the ambulance for more supplies. The EMT woman works rapidly. She has her crash cart bag open and continues to work on the injured Black woman. A small pool of blood can be seen next to the injured woman. Two Police cars arrive as do other on-lookers. Several people gather to offer information to one Police Officer who appears to be taking notes. The older man, Mr. G. saw both faces of the robbers before they put on their ski masks behind the bushes. He is sure of that.

Mr. G is getting that cold feeling when he was in the military like just before he was about to go into battle. He is afraid, but sort of feels that shot of adrenaline before everything starts to slow down in his mind and he sees very clearly, in sharp focus. He thinks about what he saw growing up in his rural community needing to protect yourself and your family. He reflects on what he saw during military operations. He sees this robbery issue is becoming more complicated. This issue with the two robbers was easy until the one robber saw him. He also thinks about how he can help, without stepping forward and telling the Police everything he saw. He does not want any trouble. He wonders if the one robber who saw him talked to the other robber. Do they know he is wheelchair bound? Did they see the back of his chair? If the robbers talked about him, they might start surveying his place. They might be watching and waiting to see who goes in and out of the townhouse. Someone might see the ramp and



eventually figure it was him because of his personal care aide. Would they hurt his aide or pump her for information about him? Would they come to visit him? His breathing is getting faster as his heart races. He still has a pistol from his Army days. What should he do? If they came for him, he is pretty sure; they would have to kill him. He would not go down alone. He is not sure what he will do. Should he tell his personal care aide and/ or tell the Police what he saw. Now, he must worry for his own life.

### **Sample Questions:**

What are the issues in this case?

What should the older man, Mr. G. do?

Should he be treated differently as a witness knowing he has a disability?

How has his disability and his past experiences impacted him and what he has witnessed?

Is he right to be worried about his life having witnessed a robbery and shooting?

Should he talk with the Police? If yes, why? Or, if not, Why not?

How might a Social Worker help with this case?

### **The Case of Lucy**

5. An Afro-Latina woman, Mrs. O is 28 and works at home using her computer and phone. She is a telemarketer. They live in East Los Angeles. Her daughter Lucy is age six. Lucy's dad was deported and moved back to Colombia. They live in a three-story walk-up tenement apartment in a community that used to be very safe. The neighborhood has now lapsed into a changing marginalized community. A bus transfer station is in the next block, so Lucy's asthma is sometimes triggered by vehicle exhaust, diesel smoke and particulate matter in the air. There are a series of pops and bangs every night and people rush to get off the streets by nightfall. Many people worry about drive-by shootings. The Mom, Mrs. O instructs her daughter to hide under the bed when she tells her to go or run and jump in the empty bathtub and go to sleep until she comes to get her. Two days later, the same popping sounds rang out shortly after dark. The Mom, Mrs. O tells her daughter to go and climb under the bed and wait. Her daughter obeys and does as she is instructed. The mother, Mrs. O, believes this is madness and she will move them to someplace safer by the summer, but that

is more than four months away. This is a lot to deal with. After an hour the noise of shots fired has stopped. She calls her daughter. Her daughter Lucy does not answer. Mrs. O checks the bathtub figuring Lucy has already gone to sleep. Lucy is not there. She is so anxious. She remembers she told Lucy to go hide under her bed. Mrs. O goes to Lucy's bed which is across from the window. Lucy is under the bed and looks to be fast asleep. She reaches under the bed to pull her out and her arm encounters something wet. She pulls back her arm. Mrs. O knows Lucy doesn't drink anything while under the bed. She looks at her arm and starts screaming. Her arm is covered on one side with blood. She reaches again under the bed and pulls her daughter's limp body to her. She looks around frantically. She feels her arm and then her neck. Her daughter has no pulse. Mrs. O figures out somehow a bullet went through the wall of the building and hit her Lucy. Her world is broken.

### **Sample Questions:**

What are the issues in this case?

What should Mrs. O do?

What would you do?

What might you do as a Social Worker to help Mrs. O?

What might be the role of community members?

If you had to write a logic model for this case based on decision points,

What would the model look like?

Is there a role for the Police and or local officials?

If yes, what is it and if no, why not?

### **The Case of Trio, Therapy and Justice**

6. An African American gay man, age 34, Trio, is traumatized by the death of his partner Clem, age 31, due to gun violence. Trio and Clem lived in a beautiful apartment in a changing neighborhood that was becoming more gentrified. Trio, and Clem, traveled that fateful evening to their favorite bar after a romantic dinner where they danced and laughed. Clem went outside to smoke and was accosted by a group of young persons who took Clem's watch and ring and began beating him. Trio said he could see it vividly in his head. Since that

night he has been unable to sleep soundly. He is fearful and anxious every night he goes to bed. He has so many emotions, guilt, fear, anger, grief, and some stuff he cannot articulate. Trio remembers seeing how Clem tried to fight back. Clem was a little overweight, but Trio knew he worked out and was not afraid to fight if he had to. Trio now relives seeing his partner getting pistol whipped, beaten, and then shot at close range. Trio drove back to the scene of Clem's death over several days to work through what happened. He thought repeatedly about what he might have done differently. He examined what happened after he called the Police. It seemed like they did not rush. The ambulance came with a Police car; both arriving at the same time about fifteen or twenty minutes after his 911 call. Trio remembered he was locked behind a gate where he could see but not help Clem. One of the young boys stood watch with his gun pointed at Trio. All the males in the crew looked like they were in their mid to late teens. Trio remembers how they pistol whipped Clem. Trio felt sick to his stomach. He felt so weak and vulnerable at the time. All Trio could do was watch. He felt helpless that Clem tried to fight but the ultimate insult was seeing Clem struggling to get up as the one boy squeezed a round into Clem's head and then laughed. Clem was Trio's heart and now he was gone. Trio remembered his partner's stories about growing up on a Caribbean Island where the island men are homophobic and frowned on gay people. Trio knew Clem was estranged from his family. Trio did not know how he got the strength to call Clem's family and tell them Clem was dead. It was horrible. He remembers waiting with his ear to his smartphone to hear sobs, or for someone to ask how it happened. All he heard was silence. Then, Clem's brother asked to tell them exactly what happened. He told them and then more silence. No 'are you okay', no 'have funeral plans been made?' Nothing. Trio thinks often, almost every day, about how he will get justice for Clem. He can't sleep. Trio tried sleeping aids and nothing seems to work. He has gone to see a psychiatric social worker who is a Psychoanalyst, to address his long-term trauma and anger. He has a hard time controlling his feelings. Mostly he is consumed with grief even though it has been almost a year. He has continued to seek therapy for his trauma. He has some insurance but must pay for therapy out of pocket as he and Clem were not married. He is so angry right now. Why Clem? Clem was a good man. Why must he, Trio endure all of this? He reflects on how he and Clem first met. They were so good together. Their six years of living together are gone.

Without Clem's check his job as a data analyst is not enough. Trio has burned up their savings and no longer can afford their apartment. Where will Trio go? Now what?

**Sample Questions:**

What are the issues in this case?

What did Trio do to get help for himself?

What is it about Caribbean culture that must be understood?

Are there other cultures that may have bias and why?

Is bias or xenophobia an issue here, and if so, what should be done?

Is this murder, or hate crime, or both?

What might Trio consider or do to get justice in this case?

What is the role of the Social Worker and who should be contacted?

**The Case of Ahmad and the Older Woman**

7. An African American youth, aged 18, Ahmad, is a senior in regional High School who lives with his mother and his uncle in a modest duplex house in Columbus, Ohio. They have lived there for the past two years. Ahmad's mother works as a clearinghouse operator and his uncle is retired. Amad drives his uncle's old Chevy to see a couple of friends. The car is low on gas and has something wrong with the engine. The car hesitates, the dashboard red lights come on and the car slows to a stop. Amad was taking a short cut to his friend's house using Google Maps to get to the other side of the county. The whole area is unfamiliar to Ahmad, and he has not seen any vehicles on this road for at least a mile. He doesn't remember seeing a gas station. He pulls an old white cloth from the car trunk and hangs it outside the window and rolls up the driver's side crank window to hold the cloth in place. Right about now he wishes he had a phone that worked. He sighs and begins walking up the road. He thinks, at least it is not raining. No cars pass and there are no houses nearby. After at least a half mile of walking he sees a house in the distance. He figures he can get help there. It will be dark soon; he picks up his pace. He hopes someone is home at that house. Ahmad can't call his friends because their number is in his cell phone contacts, and he has no cell phone power and no power cord. He looks up the long driveway to the house. He thinks

about the best way to tell whoever lives there that he is friendly and just needs to ask if he can use their phone to call his uncle, and maybe call a tow truck. He walks slowly up the long gravel driveway that leads to the house. Ahmad pulls out his phone from his jean pocket to show whoever answers the door that his phone has no power. He knocks on the front door and rings the doorbell. Not hearing the doorbell ring, he knocks again and tries to look in the sidelight window to see if there is anyone home. Ahmad looks down again at his phone thinking how he will ask his mother tonight for money for a new cell phone battery when he gets back home because the phone just won't hold a charge. He looks up to see the door open and an older woman with silvery short hair is standing behind a pistol. He doesn't have a chance to say anything before she shoots him in the chest. He falls back and lands on the steps of the porch. His last thought is why is this happening.

The older White woman, Ms. H calls the Police. Two Police cars arrive after a short while. They see the kid with his hand still on the phone, and a surprised look on the young man's face collapsed on the side of the steps. The older woman tells the White Police Officer taking her statement that she thought the Black youth was coming inside her house to take something, and or hurt her. She said she shot the Black man with her registered handgun when she opened the front door. He was standing in front of her. Ahmad never got to tell her he needed help and was simply requesting that he use her phone to call a tow truck because his car stopped, and his cell phone was out of power.

The older woman, Ms. H told the Police Officer that she was simply "standing her ground".

### **Sample Questions:**

What are the issues in this case?

How is gun violence part of the case and what are the takeaways?

How will or should people be notified of Amad's death?

What is the role of the Social Worker?

Who would be the advocate for Ahmad?

How might this case have been different?

What is a "stand your ground" law?

What is a "Castle Law?"

What States have these laws in place and what impact do you think they might have, if any, on gun violence?

What are your thoughts about “stand your ground” laws?

Is this a social justice issue, why or why not and why?

## RESOURCES

(Thanks to Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Gun Violence Solutions for photo/chart on gun violence on page 49 )

### Research Organizations

- **Gun Rights vs. Gun Control (OpenSecrets.org)**

OpenSecrets.org, a resource for federal campaign contributions, lobbying data and analysis, is powered by The Center for Responsive Politics, which is a research group that tracks money in U.S. politics and its effect on elections and public policy. This is their analysis of the politics behind the gun control debate.

### U.S. Government Agencies

- **Federal Bureau of Investigation: Uniform Crime Reporting Program**

The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program was conceived in 1929 by the International Association of Chiefs of Police to meet a need for reliable, uniform crime statistics for the nation. In 1930, the FBI was tasked with collecting, publishing, and archiving those statistics. Today, several annual statistical publications, such as Crime in the United States, are produced from data provided by nearly 17,000 law enforcement agencies across the United States.

#### Gun Rights Advocacy Organizations

- **National Rifle Association (NRA)**

The National Rifle Association seeks to educate the public about firearms, defend US citizens' second amendment rights, and lobbies for gun rights legislation.

- **Gun Owners of America**

Gun Owners of America (GOA) is a non-profit lobbying organization formed in 1975 to preserve and defend the Second Amendment rights of gun owners.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) is an American national trade association for the firearms industry that is based in Newtown, Connecticut. Formed in 1961, the organization has more than 8,000 members: firearms manufacturers, distributors, retailers, shooting ranges, sportsmen's clubs and media.

- **Second Amendment Foundation**

The Second Amendment Foundation (SAF) is dedicated to promoting the right of U.S. citizens to privately own and possess firearms. They carry on many educational and legal action programs designed to inform the public about the gun control debate.

### Gun Control Advocacy Organizations

- **Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence**

The Brady Campaign works to pass and enforce federal and state gun laws, regulations, and public policies through grassroots activism, electing public officials who support gun control legislation, and increasing public awareness of gun violence.

- **Coalition to Stop Gun Violence**

The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence (CSGV) seeks to secure freedom from gun violence through research, strategic engagement, and effective policy advocacy. CSGV is comprised of 47 national organizations working to reduce gun violence. Its coalition members include religious organizations, child welfare advocates, public health professionals, and social justice organizations.

- **Everytown for Gun Safety**

An umbrella organization coordinating the activities of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America and Mayors against Illegal Guns.

- **Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America**

Important grassroots activist organization formed by stay-at-home mom Shannon Watts following the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012.

- **Mayors Against Illegal Guns**

Mayors Against Illegal Guns is a coalition of over 1000 current and former mayors across the country who have joined together to prevent criminals from possessing guns illegally.

### **Third Way**

Third Way is a think tank that seeks to advance public policy. Their agenda includes tighter gun safety laws.

### **Gun Free Kids**

- GunFreeKids.org (GFK) is an Internet-based 501 (c) 4 issue advocacy organization, which provides tools for people to take action on pending state and national legislation and assists voters nationwide in learning about and supporting state-based candidates who favor gun violence prevention policies.

### **Data Sources**

- Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics
- Gun Policy (Pew Research Center)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation: Uniform Crime Reporting Program
- Data and Statistics (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives)
- **Gun Control** (Gallup Historical Trends)  
Historical polling data for American opinions on gun control and gun rights.  
Gun Violence
- **Gun Violence Archive**

Non-partisan group that gathers data on all acts of gun violence in the United States (2013-present). Includes a wide range of reports as well as a powerful database that can be searched and filtered in many ways.



- **Federal Firearms Regulations Reference Guide 2005**

Produced by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, this guide contains gun legislation from 1968 on, information on the gun industry, and general information about the laws.

Non-governmental Organizations (National and International)

**Amnesty International** - Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights for all.

**American Enterprise Institute**- The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research is a private, nonpartisan, not-for-profit institution dedicated to research and education on issues of government, politics, economics, and social welfare.

**Brookings Institute**- The Brookings Institution is a nonprofit public policy organization based in Washington, DC. Our mission is to conduct high-quality, independent research and, based on that research, to provide innovative, practical recommendations that advance three broad goals: Strengthen American Democracy, Foster the economic and social welfare, security and opportunity of all Americans, and Secure a more open, safe, prosperous and cooperative international system.

**Carnegie Endowment for International Peace** - The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing cooperation between nations and promoting active international engagement by the United States. Founded in 1910, its work is nonpartisan and dedicated to achieving practical results.

**Fund for Peace** - The Fund for Peace is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and educational organization. The organization works to prevent violent conflict and promote sustainable security through research, training and education, engagement of civil society, building bridges across diverse sectors, and developing innovative technologies and tools for policy makers.

**U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** -

<https://wisqars.cdc.gov/fatal-reports>

<https://wisqars.cdc.gov/cgi-bin/broker.exe>

## **Prevention and Intervention - Next Steps**

Social work programs providing resources to families surviving gun violence

### **District of Columbia Programs**

- The Restorative Justice Program aims to provide supportive and healing services to those impacted by violence, either directly or indirectly, through such means as peace circles, conferences, therapeutic services, and mediations
  - o <https://onse.dc.gov/service/restorative-justice>

- Building Blocks DC (BBDC) was launched in February 2021 as the Bowser administration's whole government approach to address gun violence. Using a public health approach, Building Blocks DC has evolved to become the District-wide strategy to reduce and prevent gun violence. The Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP) coordinates this strategy.
  - <http://www.buildingblocks.dc.gov/>
  - <https://www.buildingblocks.dc.gov/family-survivor>
  
- **The VAN, or Victim Assistance Network**, is a collaboration of victim service providers in the District of Columbia. Its members span disciplines and victimization specific services. The VAN has members that are mental health and medical providers, legal service providers, advocates, and prevention specialists. Comprised of 70 victim service providers in the District of Columbia, VAN strives to ensure that all victims of crime have the opportunity to access justice as each victim defines it, achieve restoration, and access services in a way that is most comfortable for them. <https://ovsjg.dc.gov/service/victim-assistance-network>  
 Launched in 2018, the Violence Intervention Initiative is a collaborative community engagement strategy designed to support District of Columbia residents in reducing gun-related violence in our communities. The initiative achieves this work by:
  - o Developing tactics to address potential conflicts
  - o Stabilizing communities following a violent conflict
  - o Offering support to individuals at high risk of being directly involved in violence, whether as a victim or perpetrator<https://onse.dc.gov/service/violence-intervention-initiative>
  
- **The Family and Survivor Support (FSS) Division**, formerly known as Community Stabilization Protocol, is the District's response to community violence. FSS aims to Facilitate a multi-agency approach to serve survivors and families during crisis
  - o Serve as a direct link between survivors, immediate family member and government/community-based services providers
  - o Ensure connections to a broad spectrum of services and supports<https://onse.dc.gov/service/family-and-survivor-support>
  
- **Maryland Violence Prevention Coalition** - is a coalition of organizations with a joint mission of reducing violence and improving living conditions across Maryland. Using a community-led approach, we seek to empower the voices often neglected and educate elected officials and the public about urgent community needs.
- <https://www.mnadv.org/>

- <https://mdpgv.org/coalition/>
- <https://momsdemandaction.org/resources/community/baltimore/>
- <https://www.mdcrimevictims.org/victim-services/support-groups/>
- <https://www.thetrace.org/2024/05/maryland-gun-violence-prevention-office/>

## National Programs

- Everytown is the largest gun violence prevention organization in America. They are a movement of nearly 10 million mayors, teachers, survivors, gun owners, students, and everyday Americans who exist to end gun violence and save lives.
  - o <https://everytownsupportfund.org/initiatives/programs-for-survivors/>
  - o <https://everytownsupportfund.org/initiatives/programs-for-businesses/>
  - o <https://everytownsupportfund.org/everytown-survivor-network/resources-for-victims-and-survivors-of-gun-violence/>
- Founded in 1977, the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards supports state compensation programs in providing financial aid to victims. They share a vision of working together so that every victim compensation program is fully funded, optimally staffed, and functioning effectively to help victims cope with the costs of crime.
  - o <https://nacvcb.org/>
- Founded in 1975, National Organization for Victim Assistance is the oldest national victim assistance organization of its type in the United States and is the recognized leader in victim advocacy, education and credentialing. Their mission is to champion dignity and compassion for those harmed by crime and crisis.
  - o <https://www.trynova.org/>
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) was created by Congress in 2000 as part of the Children's Health Act to raise the standard of care and increase access to services for children and families who experience or witness traumatic events. They are committed to changing the course of children's lives by improving their care and moving scientific gains quickly into practice across the U.S. The NCTSN has grown from 17 funded centers in 2001 to 185 currently funded centers and over 200 Affiliate (formerly funded) centers and individuals, working in hospitals, universities, and community-based programs in 46 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam.
  - o <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/terrorism-and-violence>
- The Trauma Survivors Network is a community of patients and survivors looking to connect with one another and rebuild their lives after a serious injury. Their goal is to ensure the survivors of trauma have a stable recovery and to connect those who share similar stories.
  - o <https://www.traumasurvivorsnetwork.org/pages/home>

- Giffords is an organization dedicated to saving lives from gun violence. Led by former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, Giffords inspires the courage of people from all walks of life to make America safer and is fighting to end the gun lobby's "stranglehold" on our political system.
- o <https://giffords.org/toolkit/from-healing-to-action-a-toolkit-for-gun-violence-survivors-and-allies/>
- **The National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children (POMC)** provides the on-going emotional support needed to help parents and other survivors facilitate the reconstruction of a "new life" and to promote a healthy resolution. POMC helps survivors deal with their acute grief and helps with the criminal justice system as well. POMC provide training to professionals in various fields to assist those who are interested in learning more about survivors of homicide victims and the aftermath of murder.  
<https://pomc.org/>
- **Survivors Empowered, Inc.** was founded by Sandy and Lonnie Phillips in 2012 after the slaughter of their daughter, Jessica Redfield Ghawi, and eleven others in the Aurora Colorado Theater Mass Shooting, Survivors Empowered endeavors to empower survivors of violence and to use their stories to create a reduction in violence that we all desire.
- <https://www.survivorsempowered.org/>

### **The Rebels Project**

- The Rebels Project was formed by a group of Columbine survivors in the wake of the Aurora theater shooting in 2012. These survivors simply wanted to offer their support for those who had experienced similar trauma. The Rebels Project seeks to embrace, support, and connect survivors of mass tragedy and trauma by creating a safe environment to share unique resources, experiences, and provide education surrounding the varying effects of mass trauma.  
<https://www.therebelsproject.org/>
- **The Dougy Center**  
The Dougy Center started the first peer grief support groups for children and has become a world-renowned model for bereavement support, known as The Dougy Center Model.. Dougy Turno, a 13-year old boy who came to Portland, Oregon to receive treatment for an inoperable brain tumor, is the inspiration for this organization that was founded in 1982. The mission of Dougy Center is to provide grief support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families can share their experiences before and after a death. We provide support and training locally,

nationally, and internationally to individuals and organizations seeking to assist children who are grieving.

The Dougy Center for Grief Services -

<https://www.dougy.org/> -

## How Do We Treat Grief and Loss?

### Micro/Mezzo

1. Assessing physical, social, emotional, spiritual, etc. needs of the client and family
2. Referring to other services and resources
3. Coordinating child protection measures if necessary
4. Providing, arranging, and suggesting practical and emotional support
5. Providing counseling and group work to bereaved families and individuals
6. Accessing and coordinating care for survivors
7. Therapy
8. Grief Counseling
9. Talk Therapy
10. Companioning

### Macro

1. Develop diverse and multi-tiered strategies for change
2. Advocate for services that are already in place and can be replicated in other jurisdictions. Provide how to documents that shows how services can be scalable,
3. Provide services and supports readily available, and can meet those in need
4. Develop local and state residents who can be part of a speaker's bureau or group that legislative staff can contact to share their stories
5. Dictate or write down these stories as first-person accounts for fact sheets, briefing documents or story collections that can show how the stories are human and real.
6. Develop updates to statistics on numbers of persons killed, injured,
7. Provide information on economic impact on businesses, workers, families showing cumulative impact of losses at the individual, community, and state levels.
8. Provide examples of what might be a different outcome if there were changes to policy that can appeal to moderate and conservative positions such as ....
9. Introduce examples of legislation that can be shared with specific legislators on modifications to 'stand your ground' 'Castle Laws' or other related legislative issues in the states that have this legislation already in place and those that might be contemplating introducing this language.
10. Provide directives that can be given to legislators who may be empathetic to change at the state and local levels
11. Develop SWOT analysis of how issues related to gun violence might be perceived at the local, state and national levels with ongoing threat assessments revised monthly or in real time.
12. Seek financial supporters that can provide help that include grassroots and organic group support.

13. Provide both front line and back-room groups to develop and continually energize supporters.
14. Establish teams by state that can be broken down into programmatic, legislative, and economic teams that are continually updated with spokespersons, supporters
15. Establish Advocacy and write in campaigns where each constituent contacts their legislator.
16. Reward legislators that listen with thank you letters and legal campaign contributions.

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## ***RESOURCES & INDEX***

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### Research Organizations

- **[Gun Rights vs. Gun Control \(OpenSecrets.org\)](#)**

OpenSecrets.org, a resource for federal campaign contributions, lobbying data and analysis, is powered by The Center for Responsive Politics, which is a research group that tracks money in U.S. politics and its effect on elections and public policy. This is their analysis of the politics behind the gun control debate.

### U.S. Government Agencies

- **[Federal Bureau of Investigation: Uniform Crime Reporting Program](#)**

The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program was conceived in 1929 by the International Association of Chiefs of Police to meet a need for reliable, uniform crime statistics for the nation. In 1930, the FBI was tasked with collecting, publishing, and archiving those statistics. Today, several annual statistical publications, such as *Crime in the United States*, are produced from data provided by nearly 17,000 law enforcement agencies across the United States.

### Gun Rights Advocacy Organizations

- **[National Rifle Association \(NRA\)](#)**

The National Rifle Association seeks to educate the public about firearms, defend US citizens' second amendment rights, and lobbies for gun rights legislation.

- **[Gun Owners of America](#)**

Gun Owners of America (GOA) is a non-profit lobbying organization formed in 1975 to preserve and defend the Second Amendment rights of gun owners.

[The National Shooting Sports Foundation \(NSSF\)](#) is an American national trade association for the firearms industry that is based in Newtown, Connecticut. Formed in 1961, the organization has more than 8,000 members: firearms manufacturers, distributors, retailers, shooting ranges, sportsmen's clubs and media.

- **[Second Amendment Foundation](#)**



The Second Amendment Foundation (SAF) is dedicated to promoting the right of U.S. citizens to privately own and possess firearms. They carry on many educational and legal action programs designed to inform the public about the gun control debate.

#### Gun Control Advocacy Organizations

- **[Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence](#)**

The Brady Campaign works to pass and enforce federal and state gun laws, regulations, and public policies through grassroots activism, electing public officials who support gun control legislation, and increasing public awareness of gun violence.

- **[Coalition to Stop Gun Violence](#)**

The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence (CSGV) seeks to secure freedom from gun violence through research, strategic engagement, and effective policy advocacy. CSGV is comprised of 47 national organizations working to reduce gun violence. Its coalition members include religious organizations, child welfare advocates, public health professionals, and social justice organizations.

- **[Everytown for Gun Safety](#)**

An umbrella organization coordinating the activities of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America and Mayors against Illegal Guns.

- **[Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America](#)**

Important grassroots activist organization formed by stay-at-home mom Shannon Watts following the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012.

- **[Mayors Against Illegal Guns](#)**

Mayors Against Illegal Guns is a coalition of over 1000 current and former mayors across the country who have joined together to prevent criminals from possessing guns illegally.

- **[Third Way](#)**

Third Way is a think tank that seeks to advance public policy. Their agenda includes tighter gun safety laws.

- **[Gun Free Kids](#)**

GunFreeKids.org (GFK) is an Internet-based 501 (c) 4 issue advocacy organization, which provides tools for people to take action on pending state and national legislation

and assists voters nationwide in learning about and supporting state-based candidates who favor gun violence prevention policies.

## Data Sources

- [Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics](#)
- [Gun Policy \(Pew Research Center\)](#)
- [Federal Bureau of Investigation: Uniform Crime Reporting Program](#)
- [Data and Statistics \(Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives\)](#)
- [Gun Control \(Gallup Historical Trends\)](#)

Historical polling data for American opinions on gun control and gun rights.

## Gun Violence

- [Gun Violence Archive](#)

Non-partisan group that gathers data on all acts of gun violence in the United States (2013-present). Includes a wide range of reports as well as a powerful database that can be searched and filtered in many ways.

- [Federal Firearms Regulations Reference Guide 2005](#)

Produced by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, this guide contains gun legislation from 1968 on, information on the gun industry, and general information about the laws.

## Non-governmental Organizations (National and International)

**Amnesty International** - Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights for all.

**American Enterprise Institute**- The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research is a private, nonpartisan, not-for-profit institution dedicated to research and education on issues of government, politics, economics, and social welfare.

**Brookings Institute**- The Brookings Institution is a nonprofit public policy organization based in Washington, DC. Our mission is to conduct high-quality, independent research and, based on that research, to provide innovative, practical recommendations that advance three broad goals: Strengthen American Democracy, Foster the economic and social welfare, security and opportunity of all Americans, and Secure a more open, safe, prosperous and cooperative international system.

**Carnegie Endowment for International Peace** - The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing cooperation between nations and promoting active international engagement by the United States. Founded in 1910, its work is nonpartisan and dedicated to achieving practical results.

**Fund for Peace** - The Fund for Peace is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and educational organization. The organization works to prevent violent conflict and promote sustainable security through research, training and education, engagement of civil society, building bridges across diverse sectors, and developing innovative technologies and tools for policy makers.

**U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** -  
<https://wisqars.cdc.gov/fatal-reports>  
<https://wisqars.cdc.gov/cgi-bin/broker.exe>

## *Prevention and Intervention - Next Steps*

### **Social work programs providing resources to families surviving gun violence**

#### **District of Columbia Programs**

- The **Restorative Justice Program** aims to provide supportive and healing services to those impacted by violence, either directly or indirectly, through such means as peace circles, conferences, therapeutic services, and mediations
  - <https://onse.dc.gov/service/restorative-justice>
- **Building Blocks DC (BBDC)** was launched in February 2021 as the Bowser administration's whole government approach to address gun violence. Using a public health approach, Building Blocks DC has evolved to become the District-wide strategy to reduce and prevent gun violence. The Office of Gun Violence Prevention (OGVP) coordinates this strategy.
  - <http://www.buildingblocks.dc.gov/>
- The VAN, or **Victim Assistance Network**, is a collaboration of victim service providers in the District of Columbia. Its members span disciplines and victimization specific services. The VAN has members that are mental health and medical providers, legal service providers, advocates, and prevention specialists. Comprised of 70 victim service providers in the District of Columbia, VAN strives to ensure that all victims of crime have the opportunity to access justice as each victim defines it, achieve restoration, and access services in a way that is most comfortable for them.
  - <https://ovsjg.dc.gov/service/victim-assistance-network>
- The **Violence Intervention Initiative**, launched in 2018, is a collaborative community engagement strategy designed to support District of Columbia residents in reducing gun-related violence in our communities. The initiative achieves this work by:
  - Developing tactics to address potential conflicts
  - Stabilizing communities following a violent conflict
  - Offering support to individuals at high risk of being directly involved in violence, whether as a victim or perpetrator
    - <https://onse.dc.gov/service/violence-intervention-initiative>
- The **Family and Survivor Support (FSS) Division**, formerly known as Community Stabilization Protocol, is the District's response to community violence. FSS aims to
  - Facilitate a multi-agency approach to serve survivors and families during crisis
  - Serve as a direct link between survivors, immediate family member and government/community based services providers
  - Ensure connections to a broad spectrum of services and supports
    - <https://onse.dc.gov/service/family-and-survivor-support>

## National Programs

- **Everytown** is the largest gun violence prevention organization in America. They are a movement of nearly 10 million mayors, teachers, survivors, gun owners, students, and everyday Americans who exist to end gun violence and save lives.
  - <https://everytownsupportfund.org/initiatives/programs-for-survivors/>
  - <https://everytownsupportfund.org/initiatives/programs-for-businesses/>
  - <https://everytownsupportfund.org/everytown-survivor-network/resources-for-victims-and-survivors-of-gun-violence/>
- Founded in 1977, the **National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards** supports state compensation programs in providing financial aid to victims. They share a vision of working together so that every victim compensation program is fully funded, optimally staffed, and functioning effectively to help victims cope with the costs of crime.
  - <https://nacvcb.org/>
- Founded in 1975, **National Organization for Victim Assistance** is the oldest national victim assistance organization of its type in the United States and is the recognized leader in victim advocacy, education and credentialing. Their mission is to champion dignity and compassion for those harmed by crime and crisis.
  - <https://www.trynova.org/>
- The **National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)** was created by Congress in 2000 as part of the Children's Health Act to raise the standard of care and increase access to services for children and families who experience or witness traumatic events. They are committed to changing the course of children's lives by improving their care and moving scientific gains quickly into practice across the U.S. The NCTSN has grown from 17 funded centers in 2001 to 185 currently funded centers and over 200 Affiliate (formerly funded) centers and individuals, working in hospitals, universities, and community-based programs in 46 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam.
  - <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/terrorism-and-violence>
- The **Trauma Survivors Network** is a community of patients and survivors looking to connect with one another and rebuild their lives after a serious injury. Their goal is to ensure the survivors of trauma have a stable recovery and to connect those who share similar stories.
  - <https://www.traumasurvivorsnetwork.org/pages/home>
- **Giffords** is an organization dedicated to saving lives from gun violence. Led by former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, Giffords inspires the courage of people from all walks of life to make America safer and is fighting to end the gun lobby's "stranglehold" on our political system.
  - <https://giffords.org/toolkit/from-healing-to-action-a-toolkit-for-gun-violence-survivors-and-allies/>

- The **National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children (POMC)** provides the on-going emotional support needed to help parents and other survivors facilitate the reconstruction of a “new life” and to promote a healthy resolution. POMC helps survivors deal with their acute grief and helps with the criminal justice system as well. POMC provide trainings to professionals in various fields to assist those who are interested in learning more about survivors of homicide victims and the aftermath of murder.
  - <https://pomc.org/>
- Founded by Sandy and Lonnie Phillips in 2012 after the slaughter of their daughter, Jessica Redfield Ghawi, and eleven others in the Aurora Colorado Theater Mass Shooting, **Survivors Empowered** endeavors to empower survivors of violence and to use their stories to create a reduction in violence that we all desire.
  - <https://www.survivorsempowered.org/>
- The **Rebels Project** was formed by a group of Columbine survivors in the wake of the Aurora theater shooting in 2012. These survivors simply wanted to offer their support for those who had experienced similar trauma. The Rebels Project seeks to embrace, support, and connect survivors of mass tragedy and trauma by creating a safe environment to share unique resources, experiences, and provide education surrounding the varying effects of mass trauma.
  - <https://www.therebelsproject.org/>
  -
- The **Dougy Center** started the first peer grief support groups for children, and has become a world-renowned model for bereavement support known as The Dougy Center Model. Dougy Turno, a 13-year old boy who came to Portland, Oregon to receive treatment for an inoperable brain tumor, is the inspiration for this organization that was founded in 1982. The mission of Dougy Center is to provide grief support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families can share their experiences before and after a death. We provide support and training locally, nationally, and internationally to individuals and organizations seeking to assist children who are grieving.
  - <https://www.dougy.org/>

### How do we treat grief and loss?

- **Micro/Mezzo**
  1. Assessing physical, social, emotional, spiritual, etc. needs of the client and family
  2. Referring to other services and resources
  3. Coordinating child protection measures if necessary
  4. Providing, arranging, and suggesting practical and emotional support
  5. Providing counseling and group work to bereaved families and individuals
  6. Accessing and coordinating care for survivors
  7. Therapy
    - Grief Counseling

- Talk Therapy
  - Companionship
- **Macro**
  1. Develop diverse and multi-tiered strategies for change
  2. Advocate for services that are already in place and can be replicated in other jurisdictions. Provide how to documents that show how services can be scalable,
  3. Provide services and supports readily available, and can meet those in need
  4. Develop local and state residents who can be part of a speakers bureau or group that legislative staff can contact to share their stories
  5. Dictate or write down these stories as first person accounts for fact sheets, briefing documents or story collections that can show how the stories are human and real.
  6. Develop updates to statistics on numbers of persons killed, injured,
  7. Provide information on economic impact on businesses, workers, families showing cumulative impact of losses at the individual, community and state levels.
  8. Provide examples of what might be a different outcome if there were changes to policy that can appeal to moderate and conservative positions such as ....
  9. Introduce examples of legislation that can be shared with specific legislators on modifications to 'stand your ground' 'Castle Laws' or other related legislative issues in the states that have this legislation already in place and those that might be contemplating introducing this language.
  10. Provide directives that can be given to legislators who may be empathetic to change at the state and local levels
  11. Develop SWOT analyses on how issues related to gun violence might be perceived at the local, state and national levels with ongoing threat assessments revised monthly or in real time.
  12. Seek financial supporters that can provide help that include grassroots and organic group support
  13. Provide both front line and back room groups to develop and continually energize supporters.
  14. Establish teams by state that can be broken down into programmatic, legislative and economic teams that are continually updated with spokespersons, supporters
  15. Establish Advocacy and write in campaigns where each constituent contacts their legislator
  16. Reward legislators that listen with thank yous and legal campaign contributions



### ***The Black Perspective: Our Guiding Philosophy***

The core values reflect the Black Perspective, the guiding philosophy of the School of Social Work. The Black Perspective has been a part of the inception of the school and later evolved to include a focus on health and well-being and socio-cultural dynamics to be addressed in practice. The formalization of the Black Perspective occurred in the 1970s. It reaffirms the richness, productivity, and vigor of the lives of African Americans, Africans, and people of color and marginalized and oppressed people in other parts of the world and emphasizes the delineation of ways in which the strengths of African Americans can be used to respond to oppressive and discriminatory systems. Additionally, the Black Perspective calls for sensitivity to the experiences of all oppressed and underserved groups and embraces an international dimension with special emphasis on Africa and Caribbean. Thus, while our students are uniquely prepared to engage and work with diverse Black populations, they are equally readied to work with all other populations, particularly those that have experienced oppression and discrimination.



## **Six Principles of the Black Perspective**

**Affirmation-**The Black Perspective is an affirming and profoundly liberating stance at both the individual and collective levels. It celebrates the richness, productivity, and vigor of the lives of African Americans and Blacks in the U.S. and in other parts of the world. The School of Social Work is committed to imbuing social work practice and theory with this Perspective. This mission means a commitment on our part to use increasing levels of scholastic productivity and rigor, teaching effectiveness, and social work practice competence as tools to advance the contemporary Black agenda, as well as a commitment to public services, a service arena of importance to the Black community.

**Strengths-**Precisely because the Black Perspective is first an affirmation of strength, it insists on delineating ways in which that strength can be used to respond to the continuing oppression of Black people. The search for the causes, consequences and elimination of oppression is inherent in all areas of social work practice, research, and education.

**Diversity-**The Black Perspective is distinctive but not monolithic. Simplistic, global characterizations of Black individuals, families, groups and communities are intolerable. It is equally unacceptable to overlook the genuine cultural, economic, political and social bonds of distinctiveness that do exist. Producing social work practitioners, researchers and educators who are faithful both to the commonalities of interest and experience and to the rich and complex diversities within the Black population is a demanding educational task. Knowledge of commonalities and diversities is continually expanding. Keeping abreast of that knowledge, contributing to it, and shaping social work practice to it are prime elements of our mission.

**Vivification-**The Black Perspective is a positive and vivifying stance, not a negative or exclusionary one. This means that the School of Social Work has a special mission to educate Black social work practitioners, researchers, and educators while at the same time providing quality professional education to all students regardless of race, creed, sex or national origin. The school's curriculum gives primacy to Black content and, in fact, the School is a national leader in the development of social work curriculum materials that are responsive to the Black population. At the same time, the curriculum provides all of our students with a broadly-based professional preparation which gives them career flexibility and the skills to work with the diverse elements of modern American society.

**Social Justice-**The Black Perspective means a special sensitivity to the experiences of all oppressed and underserved groups in American society. There is no contradiction between giving primacy to the Black experience and being responsive to the perspectives and experiences of other groups who have been subjected to oppressive forces. Howard University's heritage as a leader in the struggle for social

justice places the School of Social Work in a uniquely advantageous position to work with all groups seeking equality and freedom from oppression.

Internationalization-An international dimension with a special emphasis on Africa and the Caribbean area is intrinsic to the School's Black Perspective. The School of Social Work has a mission to educate international students for positions of direct social work practice and leadership roles in social welfare administration and policy in their home countries. A second aspect of the international dimension is our school's commitment to developing that area of social work practice dealing with refugees and other displaced populations -- both those individuals displaced within their own countries and those displaced across national borders. A final aspect of the international dimension is the school's desire to foster in its graduates a sense of involvement and commitment to other parts of the world as an element of their professional identity. This is especially important for those areas where issues of social justice and social welfare for people of color are crucial.

## Index

### Resources

Alliance of Concerned Men - <https://allianceofconcernedmen.org/>

Brookings Institution - ([www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu))

District of Columbia Office of the Attorney General, 2024, Cure the Streets: Violence Interruption Program. <https://oag.dc.gov/public-safety/cure-streets-oags-violence-interruption-program>

Hospital Based Violence Intervention Programs Give Survivors Opportunities to Thrive - <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/from-the-front-lines-hospital-based-violence-intervention-programs-give-gun-violence-survivors-opportunities-to-thrive/>

McKenzie Institute – ([www.mckenzieinstitute.org](http://www.mckenzieinstitute.org) )

Urban Institute – ([www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org) )

The Joint Center for Political and Social Research ([www.jointcenter.org](http://www.jointcenter.org) )

Manhattan Institute (<https://www.manhattan-institute.org/> )

International Peace Center ([www.ipinst.org](http://www.ipinst.org) )

RAND Corporation – ([www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org) ) For more than 60 years, the RAND Corporation has pursued its nonprofit mission by conducting research on important and complicated problems. Initially, RAND (the name of which was derived from a contraction of the term research and development) focused on issues of national security. Eventually, RAND expanded its intellectual reserves to offer insight into other areas, such as business, education, health, law, and science.

Institute for Women’s Policy Research - ([https://iwpr.org/about/on the reasons for gun violence](https://iwpr.org/about/on-the-reasons-for-gun-violence)) <https://gwtoday.gwu.edu/white-paper-offers-research-informed-recommendations-curb-gun-violence>

<https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/business/money-report/u-s-gun-homicides-reached-highest-level-in-25-years-during-covid-pandemic-cdc-says/3047587/>

<https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/new-plan-lays-out-recommendations-for-reducing-gun-violence-in-dc/3049155/>

<https://dcist.com/story/22/05/06/dc-gun-violence-strategic-plan/>

<https://wtop.com/dc/2022/05/criminal-justice-institute-offers-suggestions-for-curbing-gun-violence-in-dc/>

DC Safe – A 24/7 Crisis Intervention Agency for domestic violence in Washington, DC ensuring the safety and self-determination of domestic violence survivors through emergency services, court advocacy and system reform. [www.dcsafe.org](http://www.dcsafe.org)

D.C. Trigger Project (April 2024) <https://thetriggerproject.org/>

‘We are prevention.’ TRIGGER Project hosts gun violence prevention event | DC News Now

Safe Shores, Survivor Centered Services and Supports for Children.

<https://www.safeshores.org/>



## *Author Profiles*



**Ms Ahmari Anthony, MSW is a 2023 graduate from the Howard University School of Social Work.** Her Research interests include Understanding and Advocating Against Solitary Confinement, Safe Schools and Empowering Young Students



**Dr. Gloria Cain, Ph.D., MSW is an Assistant Professor.** Her research interests include: ethnic factors of alcohol and substance misuse among African Americans and the efficiency of screening and brief intervention in community and health care settings and Substance Use and Misuse, Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) work with youth and adults. She is Co-PI with Dr. JaNeen Cross and PI, Dr. Sandra Kalu on a Mental Health, and Children in D.C. Public Schools grant with the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Cain is also an instructor in the Department of Psychiatry's Addiction Medical Education Rotation.



**Dr. JaNeen Cross, DSW, MSW, MBA, LICSW, LCSW-C is an Assistant Professor.** She is Co-PI with Dr. Sandra Kalu on a Mental Health and Children in D.C. Public Schools grant with the U.S. Department of Education. Her research interests include maternal and child health care, child maltreatment, NICU family support services, and leadership development.



**Dr. Sandra Kalu, Ph.D., LMSW is an Assistant Professor.** Her research interests include Mental Health, Group Therapy, Individual Assessment, Data Analysis, Program Evaluation, and Case Management. She is PI for a U.S. Department of Education funded grant to increase the number of Mental Health practitioners working in District of Columbia Public Schools in high need areas East of the Anacostia River.



**Dr. Cudore Snell, DSW, MSW is Assistant Provost of International Programs and Professor.** His research interests include research on homeless youth sex workers, substance use and misuse, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders among pregnant mothers who engage in risky drinking in the wine lands areas of South Africa, and rural and urban family social work with specialization in childhood mental health.



**Dr. Kendall L. Moody, Ph.D., LCSW is an Assistant Professor.** His research interests include patients living with sickle cell disease, depression among pediatric sickle cell patients, mental health, and suicide among vulnerable populations, and Sickle Cell Pain & Symptoms on Health-Related Quality of Life Among Pediatric Patients.



**Dr. Janice Berry-Edwards, Ph.D., LICSW, LCSW-C, BCD is a Professor and School of Social Work Direct Practice Sequence Chair.** Her Research interests include clinical social work practice, social work education, leadership and psychoanalytic thought, trauma and mental health of children, adolescents, and adults in psychotherapy.



**Dr. Altaf Husain, Ph.D., MSW, is an Associate Professor, and Community, Administration and Policy (CAP) Practice (CAPP) Sequence Chair.** His research interests include the mental health and integration of immigrant and refugee families, and especially Muslim adolescents, in the United States.





**Dr. Sandra Edmonds Crewe, Ph.D., MSW, ACSW** is Dean Emeritus and Professor of Social Work at Howard University. Her research interests include social isolation, caregiving, aging, Ethnogerontology, welfare reform, and social welfare history.



**Ms. Joya Cleveland, MSW** is a 2024 graduate from the Howard University School of Social Work. Her experience includes over 12 years of working with disenfranchised populations with various non-profit organizations serving locally and nationally in various community roles. Ms. Cleveland is passionate about making a difference in the lives of others and bridging inequality gaps.



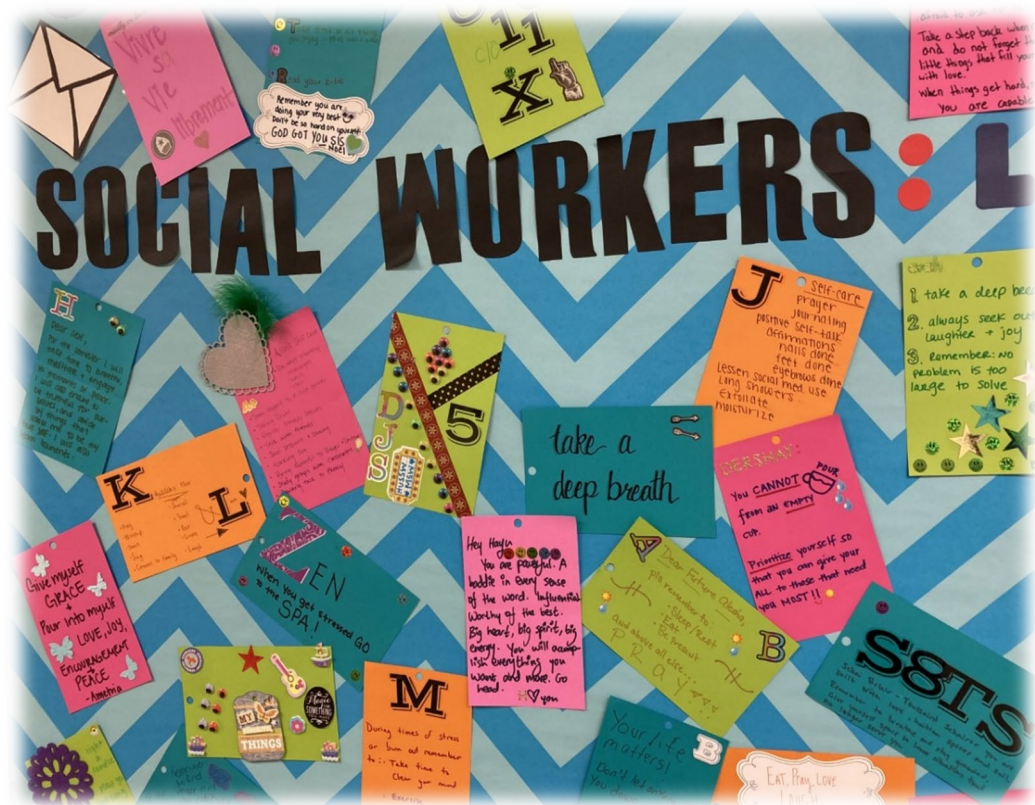
**Dr. Robert Cosby, Ph.D., MSW, MPhil, is Assistant Dean and Associate Professor.** His research interests include Social Isolation and Older Persons; Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, Adverse Childhood Experiences, Racism; HIV-AIDs, Spirituality and Health Care Disparities and Inequalities.

## ***IMPLICATIONS for the FUTURE / CLOSING THOUGHTS***

The future is unknown but the trajectory for change is in our hands...  
Gun Violence and the role of Gun Violence prevention remains before us.

### **RE-emerging Questions...**

What are the impediments to change?  
Why Me?  
Why my child?  
Who is responsible?  
Am I or are we target practice?  
Why won't someone do something about this?  
Why must so many people be hurt or killed to get people's attention?  
Why do so many minorities get killed or hurt?  
What do we do to fix this?  
What will it cost?  
Who is making all the money while people die?  
Why don't some just care anymore?  
How many more must die before something gets done?  
Who cares about people I don't know?  
When it happened in my community, they said... Why didn't they do anything then?  
and still don't now?  
Children ask: What will become of me?  
Does anyone care?  
Is it Black folk catching all the hell?  
What time is it?  
Is it time for change?  
If not me than who and if not now, when?







## Get in-depth knowledge about issues facing our society in our most recent HU School of Social Work Monographs.

Each monograph may be accessed at <https://socialwork.howard.edu> under the category Monographs.



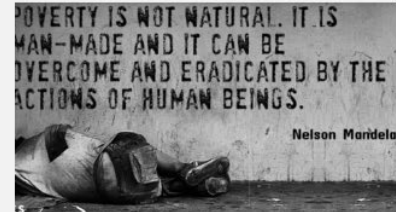
### Racism and Mental Health Monograph (2021)

Click to access the Gourline & Cross 2021 Racism and Mental Health Monograph.



### Race, Power, and Control Monograph (2019)

Click to access the Cosby 2019 Race, Power, and Control Monograph.



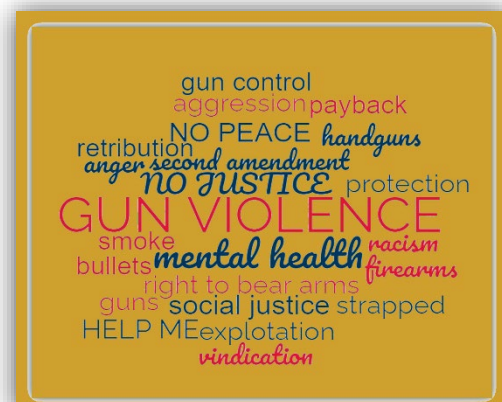
### Poverty Monograph (2016)

Click to access the Whitaker 2016 Poverty Monograph.



### The Black Perspective Monograph 4: Critical Race Theory: Perspectives and Reflections (2024)

Kendall L. Moody, LCSW, Editor  
Cudore L. Snell, DSW, LICSW, Editor



### Enough: Gun Violence Prevention and the Black Perspective

### A Social Work Response - Research and Reflections (2024)

Robert L. Cosby,  
PhD, MSW, MPhil, Editor







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