

Summary of Trauma and Gun Violence Among Bereaved Parents

While 59 percent of American adults report that they or someone they know or care about has experienced gun violence in their lifetime, a devastating subset of this majority of adults—parents—live through the death of their child from gun violence.¹ To better understand the breadth and depth of trauma experienced by survivors of gun violence, Everytown for Gun Safety conducted 16 focus groups with 103 survivors of gun violence with diverse identities that have not been researched extensively such as bereaved parents.² A total of 39 bereaved parents shared their experiences with gun violence that resulted in the death of their child which include experiences such as unintentional shootings, mass shootings, intimate partner violence, firearm suicide, and shootings by law enforcement.

“We don’t have a word for ‘ex-parent’. We have widows, widowers. We have orphans. We don’t really have ‘used to be a parent but is no longer.’”

—Bereaved father whose daughter was shot and killed

Key Findings

- **Experiences of Retraumatization**

Bereaved parents experienced retraumatization in the aftermath of gun violence from frequent incidents of gun violence in the media, persistent gun violence in their communities, and navigating systems of support and services, such as insurance companies, the criminal justice system, and mental health care.

- **Widespread Impact of Gun Violence**

Bereaved parents discussed the ripple effects of trauma from gun violence. Through their experiences, they noticed that the trauma from gun violence impacts people beyond their families which includes the classmates of their children, school systems, their community and networks, and various professions that interact with victims and survivors.

- **The Grieving Process**

Bereaved parents experienced several difficulties in the grieving process, such as feeling isolated, erosion of relationships with family members and friends as a result of difficulty with relating to others, and lack of information and access to services like therapy specializing in traumatic grief and financial resources to cope with the trauma from gun violence.

- **Support Systems**

Various professions that interact with survivors and victims play a critical role in assisting bereaved parents to complete logistical tasks, such as funeral arrangements and filing documents related to court proceedings and insurance. Peer-to-peer supports including Moms Demand Action and Everytown’s Survivor Network and others with similar lived experiences contributed significantly to the parents’ growth and healing.

- **New Motivations and Advocacy**

Many bereaved parents became involved in the gun violence prevention movement. Their motivation and participation in advocacy deepened their spirituality, desires to advocate for justice, and appreciation for life.

Solutions and Recommendations

Included in the full report *Beyond Measure: Gun Violence Trauma* are eight solutions and recommendations for action. The first recommendation is to educate workers across systems on the impact of trauma with a culturally responsive lens. Expanding the Trauma Recovery Center model and building on investments in trauma awareness and mental health services in the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) and President Biden's Executive Order 14092 will continue necessary progress that has begun. Congress must pass the Everytown-endorsed bipartisan Resources for Victims of Gun Violence Act (H.R. 1560 / S. 556), and continue to expand access to trauma-informed peer support programming like Everytown's SurvivorsConnect program. Efforts must be increased to solve gun crimes and address police violence. Research on the needs and experiences of survivors of gun violence is critical to inform advocacy and services. Finally, expanding technical assistance programs for community violence interruption (CVI) practitioners, like the work of the Roca Impact Institute, will disrupt cycles of trauma and violence.

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1. SurveyUSA, "Results of SurveyUSA Market Research Study #26602," October 24, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3JJuwLY>. See question 29. See also Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Gun Violence Survivors in America," February 1, 2023, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/gun-violence-survivors-america/>.
 2. Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, "Beyond Measure: Gun Violence Trauma," May 2023, <https://everytownresearch.org/beyond-measure>

