

Summary of Trauma and Gun Violence Among Black Communities

Black Americans are 2.5 times more likely than white Americans to die from gun violence,¹ and 12 times more likely to die from gun homicide.² 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 Black communities.³ A total of 36 Black survivors with various and multiple experiences with gun violence such as survivors who have been wounded or witnessed gun violence, police violence, intimate partner violence, and the death of loved ones by homicide and suicide.

“As a Black woman, I feel like there isn’t enough attention given to the individual and collective trauma experienced by gun violence in our communities and the trauma is either ignored or addressed from a white perspective.”

—Black survivor of multiple incidents of gun violence

Key Findings

• **Normalization of Gun Violence**

Black survivors experienced persistent gun violence in their communities and neighborhoods. Due to this reality, many survivors stated that community members become desensitized to gun violence. A collective trauma is produced as their communities struggle to cope in the aftermath of gun violence. As a result, participants discussed the need for investments in community-based interventions to disrupt violence and support healing.

• **Racism and Discrimination**

Historical traumas based on racism were compounded by the added trauma from gun violence for Black survivors. In the aftermath of gun violence, survivors experienced racial narratives of criminality and self-blame from the media and law enforcement which shapes how their experiences, families, and communities were understood. As a result, many Black survivors stated that their cases were not prioritized in the criminal justice system. Participants also experienced stigma when their loved ones were involved in incidents of gun violence. To protect families against stigma, Black parents became protectors of their families to preserve their children’s reputation even after death.

• **Generational Loss**

Black survivors had a heightened concern about the generational loss for the youth in the United States. This generational loss impacts their communities as many are raising children of a lost generation to gun violence, and others witness the death and wounds of their friends and family.

• **Access to Support Services**

Survivors who identified as Black were less likely to have access to short- and long-term support for mental health services. Even with access to services, they experienced stigma and discrimination, and providers who were not culturally attuned to their communities.

- **Post-Traumatic Growth**

Appreciation of life was a common growth area for Black survivors of gun violence. Such growth was a result of their desires to fight for justice, being involved in gun violence prevention advocacy and peer support networks, and being active in their communities.

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. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A yearly average was developed using four years of the most recent available data: 2018 to 2021. Rates are age-adjusted. Black and white defined as non-Latinx origin.
 2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death. A yearly average was developed using four years of the most recent available data: 2018 to 2021. Rates are age-adjusted. Black and white defined as non-Latinx origin. Homicide includes shootings by police.
 3. Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, “Beyond Measure: Gun Violence Trauma,” May 2023, <https://everytownresearch.org/beyond-measure>

