

Summary of Trauma and Gun Violence Among Latinx Communities

More than 4,700 Latinx Americans die from gun violence each year in the US,¹ and they are more than twice as likely to die from gun homicide than white Americans.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 including the Latinx community.³ A total of 19 Latinx survivors discussed their vast experiences of gun violence such as surviving gun violence themselves, while others experienced the death of children, siblings, family and loved ones, and caregivers to gun violence. These tragedies resulted from unintentional shootings, as well as from interactions with law enforcement, intimate partner violence, and suicide.

“Being first generation Americans with Mexican immigrant parents and family, ...the Catholic Church is huge for us and to be ripped away from that and some people looking to God for guidance because of the shooting. And some of us hating God because of the shooting. And so, it just kind of, it caused a lot of arguments. Thankfully, we're still in connection, but it definitely puts a strain on relationships.”

—Bereaved Latinx mother whose son died by gun homicide

Key Findings

- **Disproportionate Impact of Gun Violence**

Participants discussed racism and hate-crimes against the Latinx communities within the intersections of immigration status, religion, and colorism. Persistent gun violence in their communities are unacknowledged by support services and law enforcement. Participants discussed the lack of resources in their communities to cope with the trauma of gun violence. In addition, during the investigation process in the aftermath of gun violence, Latinx survivors experienced less attention, self-blame, and disbelief from law enforcement and the media.

- **Cultural Norms**

Latinx survivors discussed cultural norms that inhibited their ability to heal from their exposure to gun violence. These cultural norms include families being averse to discussing the event or mental health concerns which led survivors to keep their experiences a secret, and an unwillingness within their communities to participate in therapy. Instead many turn to their faith-based institutions to cope. In addition, participants felt as though they had to ‘remain strong’ due to familial pressures, such as becoming the head of their households after the death of a family member—leading to compartmentalizing and avoidance.

- **Access to Support Services**

Survivors who identified as Latinx 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.

- **Long-Term Impact**

Latinx survivors experienced long-term negative impacts following their exposure to gun violence, including estrangement from family, losing an important part of their identity as a parent, spouse, or friend as a result of the death of a loved one, and re-traumatization from prolonged court involvement and gun violence. Survivors also limited their time in communal spaces due to feelings of fearing violence and lack of safety.

- **Post-Traumatic Growth**

Survivors developed an appreciation of life by seeing changes in gratitude for their family, friends, community, and their journey. They gained motivation to ‘change things’ through their involvement in advocacy in the gun violence prevention movement.

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. Latinx defined as all races of 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. Latinx defined as all races of Latinx origin. 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>

