

Summary of Trauma and Gun Violence Among Students over 18

Guns are the number one killer of children and teens (ages 1-19)¹ as well as college-aged people (ages 18-25).² Nearly 4,000 children and teens are shot and killed every year, and 15,000 more are shot and wounded.³ To better understand the breadth and depth of trauma experienced by survivors of gun violence including children and teens through the perspective of students, Everytown for Gun Safety conducted 16 focus groups with 103 survivors of gun violence with diverse identities that have not been researched extensively.⁴ A total of 12 students over the age of 18 shared their experiences of gun violence. More than half witnessed or had been involved in multiple incidents of gun violence in their lifetime. Some survived school shootings, while others experienced incidents of intimate partner violence or experienced the death of a loved one to gun violence.

“It was definitely a wakeup call... understanding truly the power and the gift of life itself again, because looking back, I experience watching so many people, our lives being cut short due to gun violence and at the same time witnessing and having to advocate for other families within the past 10 years of them losing their children to [unintentional] shootings by each other.”

—Wounded survivor who experienced multiple forms of gun violence

A lot of us were like really scared to leave our houses after the shooting. And so having the option to do class online was actually very helpful, and having the support of our classmates was useful, but I think had we not had the support of our classmates. That could have been very isolating and problematic to not having.”

—Survivor who witnessed a shooting near school campus

Key Findings

• Family and Community Support

Students shared that it was difficult to talk to their family members about their experiences with gun violence. Participants who did have support from their family and community members reported that it was one of the most helpful supports after the incident.

• Counseling and Processing with Peers with Similar Experiences

To navigate the impacts of their exposure to gun violence, students shared that they relied on their peers with similar experiences for support, as well as accessing therapy and counseling through their schools and other institutions.

• Racism, Prejudice, and Stigma

Students experienced stigma and prejudice due to their identities in coping with the aftermath of gun violence. This was a common feeling for Black students who felt that their experiences of gun violence was minimized in the aftermath. In addition, students experienced stereotypes around how they should react to grief or trauma.

- **Access to Resources**

Some students shared there was a lack of resources to support them in the aftermath of their exposure to gun violence. Their schools or universities did not provide mental health care services, while others who had support from their schools received short-term care until their graduation.

- **Motivation to Create Change**

Students became involved in gun violence prevention advocacy such as joining Students Demand Action. They became eager to advocate for gun safety and legislative action. In addition, some students pursue college education and research on preventive action and gun safety.

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, Injury Mechanism & All Other Leading Causes. Data from 2021. Children and teenagers aged 1 to 19.
 2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Underlying Cause of Death, Injury Mechanism & All Other Leading Causes. Data from 2021. Ages 18 to 25.
 3. 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. Ages 0 to 19. Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund, “A More Complete Picture: The Contours of Gun Injury in the United States,” December 2020, <https://everytownresearch.org/report/nonfatal-in-the-us/>.
 4. Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, “Beyond Measure: Gun Violence Trauma,” May 2023, <https://everytownresearch.org/beyond-measure>

