

Summary of Trauma and Wounded Survivors of Gun Violence

Every day, more than 200 people in the United States are shot and wounded.¹ According to a national poll, an estimated 8 million people have been shot and wounded in their lifetimes.² However, less is known about the impact of trauma on those who were shot and wounded with a firearm. 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. A total of 12 people who identified as a survivor or cared about someone who were shot and wounded by a firearm shared their experiences of concerns for safety, complex trauma, and navigating the lifelong impacts of wounds.

What was most hurtful for me after the incident was living with pain, living with pain meds, and having to go to the hospital for a medical review every month.”

—Survivor who was shot and wounded with a firearm

Key Findings

• The Initial Aftermath

In the aftermath, survivors stated that they were in shock or disbelief, were caught off guard, felt numb, and recalled the incident as a blur. As some survivors woke up from their surgeries, they were unsure of where they were and grew immediately concerned for the people who were with them during the incident. In addition, they immediately wanted to talk to someone about the incident, such as a friend, family member, or therapist.

• Living with the Wounds

Wounded survivors of gun violence discussed the difficulty of living with pain from their injuries, taking medication to relieve their pain on a daily basis, and traveling to their physicians and hospitals for their ongoing appointments. Their wounds impact their mobility, affect how they navigate their social environments, and can create isolation from friends and family. In addition, some survivors developed various wellness coping practices to prevent daily pain, such as running.

• Lifelong Stressors and Financial Impact

Survivors lived with ongoing stressors as they coped with their wounds and impact from trauma after the incident. A common experience was financial distress as they could not afford to pay for their medical bills and therapy for themselves and family members, such as their children. For those that did not have citizenship status, they struggled to maintain their resident status in the United States due to the difficulty of attending school and keeping a job. Some survivors also started to use alcohol and other substances following the incident in an effort to numb or escape the lasting impact of gun violence.

- **Mental Health and Support Services**

Wounded survivors experience depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after the incident. Access to employment, housing, and counseling services and receiving coverage for medical bills were the most helpful services. However, access to necessary support services was not available for many, notably including people who lived in rural areas and disinvested communities experiencing structural racism.

- **Post-Traumatic Growth and Gun Violence Prevention**

Survivors shared these incidents of gun violence became a “wake-up call” to join the gun violence prevention movement and advocate for gun safety. Survivors also developed expertise in various areas such as police violence, domestic violence, gun violence in LGBTQIA+ communities, and unintentional shootings. Despite their experiences, many described having a greater appreciation for life and now being focused on wellness activities to cope with trauma.

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. Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund, “EveryStat: United States,” <https://everystat.org/>. Based on analysis of 2019 HCUP nonfatal injury data.
 2. SurveyUSA, “Results of SurveyUSA Market Research Study #24554,” December 11, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2ExxpyZ>. See question 31. Four percent of American adults reported being shot and injured during their lifetime.

