

Investing in the Frontlines:

Why Trusting and Supporting Communities of Color Will Help Address Gun Violence

Key takeaways from the *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* article by Amber K. Goodwin and TJ Grayson

THE DECADES LONG PERSISTENCE OF GUN VIOLENCE IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR SHOWS THAT **OUR CURRENT APPROACH IS NOT WORKING.**

THERE ARE **SOLUTIONS** WE CAN IMPLEMENT TODAY IF WE ADOPT ONE SIMPLE APPROACH:

Trusting and empowering those directly impacted by gun violence to decide what the response should look like.



The use of police to address gun violence in America has contributed to the persistence of trauma in communities of color.

Instead of an over reliance on law enforcement as the solution to gun violence in our communities, we advocate for evidence-informed and community-led violence prevention programs that are already being implemented by people of color throughout the country.

Those directly impacted by gun violence need long-term and sustainable resources to address the problem and the negative repercussions of the current response.



8 of the largest city police departments kill **Black men** at rates higher than the United States murder rate.¹



Black people are **3x** more likely to be killed by police than white people.²



Police jeopardize the safety of **women of color** facing disproportionate rates of gun related domestic violence.³



Evidence-Informed and Community-Led Violence Prevention Programs

Communities that are traditionally heavily policed have **successfully utilized violence reduction strategies** that center positive interventions rather than criminal punishment.

There are many successful organizations led by people of color, Black and Latinx individuals in particular, that use a public health approach.



The public health approach treats violence as an epidemic (like communicable diseases) recognizing that both **the victim and the perpetrator** are impacted by violence because of direct experiences with harm and thus provide resources to both groups to prevent future violence.⁴

Research has shown that in cities with **100,000 residents**, the addition of every 10 organizations focusing on crime and community vitality results in

a 9 percent reduction in the murder rate,

9% reduction

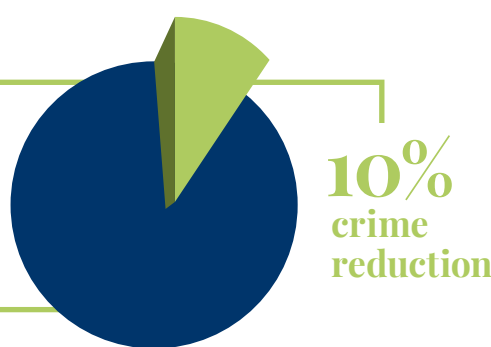
a 6 percent reduction in the violent crime rate,

6% reduction

and a 4 percent reduction in the property crime rate.⁵

4% reduction

Outcomes have shown to be stronger with groups led by Black and Latinx community members. Life Camp, an evidence-based program led by activist Erica Ford, has helped New York City reduce crime by 10 percent citywide.⁶



Studies suggest that **increased investment in community-led programs** that result in higher and consistent salaries for communities on the frontlines, more staff, and better collaboration with other community-based organizations can produce **meaningful reductions in gun violence in their communities.**⁷

Yet, cities, states, and local governments continue to invest **billions of dollars in policing** while successful programs like these continuously fight to sustain their funding.⁸

In some cities, per capita police spending ranges from

\$318 to as high as \$772,

with cities like Oakland dedicating as much as **41.2 percent of their general fund expenditures to police.**⁹

State, county, and local governments should work with health departments, hospitals, schools, universities, and non-profits to

1. share data on all forms of violence

2. identify protocols for screenings and referrals

3. develop and enhance programs and policies to prevent and reduce violence in communities of color

4. use data to continuously increase the efficiency and effectiveness of these efforts

Conclusion:

National, state, and local policy makers must give people of color addressing gun violence the funds to take on this issue and rely on their expertise and experiences when deciding how to address gun violence in communities of color; and Philanthropic stakeholders and partners should center the voices of leaders of color who work to prevent gun violence and invest in their leadership. Until then, it is all too likely that these communities will continue to endure the physical, economic, and social consequences of this issue.

View the entire article [here](#).

¹ G.L. Schwartz and J.L. Jahn, "Mapping Fatal Police Violence across U.S. Metropolitan Areas: Overall Rates and Racial/ Ethnic Inequities, 2013-2017," *PLoS ONE* 15, no. 6 (2002):e0229686.

² S. Sinyangwe, *Mapping Police Violence* (May 29, 2020), available at <<https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>> (last visited September 30, 2020).

³ Everytown For Gun Safety Support Fund, *Guns and Violence Against Women: America's Uniquely Lethal Intimate Partner Violence Problem* (October 17, 2019).

⁴ G. Slutkin, "Contagion of Violence: Workshop Summary," *National Academic Press (US)* (February 6, 2013).

⁵ P. Sharkey, G. Torrats-Espinosa, and D. Takyar, "Community and Crime Decline: The Causal Effect of Local Nonprofits on Violent Crime," *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 6 (October 2017): 1214-40, 1214.

⁶ L. Hu, "Exclusive: Mayor Tours Queens 'Cure Violence' Site, Calling it the 'Solution,'" *Spectrum News*, June 14, 2020.

⁷ D.W. Webster, S.A. Buggs, and C. Crifasi, *Estimating the Effects of Law Enforcement and Public Health Interventions Intended to Reduce Gun Violence in Baltimore*, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (January 2018).

⁸ J. Anderson, "Baltimore City Council Members Say Budget Must Include Safe Streets Funding," *The Baltimore Sun*, May 19, 2017.

⁹ The Center for Popular Democracy et al., *Freedom to Thrive: Reimagining Safety & Security in Our Communities* (July 4, 2017).