

G U N V I O L E N C E I N M I S S O U R I

SEEKING SOLUTIONS



GUN VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

This digital event series is part of the Missouri Gun Violence Project, a two-year, statewide journalism collaboration investigating the causes and possible solutions to gun violence. It is supported by the nonprofits Report for America and Missouri Foundation for Health.

The Development of this fact sheet made possible thanks to support from the William T. Kemper Foundation.



Gun violence is a serious public health problem that reached high levels in 2020 in the State of Missouri and Kansas City. In fact, 2020 saw 689 people killed by guns in the state and 161 in Kansas City. Last year Missouri had the third highest per-capita rate of gun deaths in the United States – with only Louisiana and Mississippi recording more.

<https://www.kansascity.com/news/state/missouri/gun-violence-missouri/article248131395.html>

While this number is staggering, it doesn't tell the entire story of gun violence in Kansas City. Gun violence is a complex issue and research shows that there are many factors that contribute to it including policy and Social Determinants of Health such as deep roots of inequality, poverty, and lack of opportunity.

This fact sheet will explore how gun violence is defined, look at data related to gun violence, unpack the term Social Determinants of Health, and highlight strategies for gun violence prevention.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

What are social determinants of health?

Social determinants of health (SDOH) are the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health>

SDOH can be grouped into 5 domains:



Social Determinants of Health are related to one's home, but also school, church, workplace and other environments. These together are known as "place". The impact of place on health is well documented through research. When populations have access to resources that enhance their quality of life, they have improved health outcomes. Some examples of social determinants of health include:

- available resources – housing, food, etc.
- access to education, job, and economic opportunities
- access to health care services
- public safety
- social support
- literacy
- culture
- built environment
- housing
- natural environment (such as green space, trees, and grass)
- discrimination
- incarceration
- crime and violence
- poverty

Improving the conditions in which we live, learn, work, and play and the quality of our relationships will create a healthier population, society, and workforce. This can be done by establishing policies that positively influence social determinants of health and support changes individual behavior. ([Healthy People 2020](#))

Correlation between Community Health and Violence

According to the [Prevention Institute](#), violence is not randomly distributed. The same social factors (social determinants) that shape health – including education, income and wealth, and related conditions where we live, learn, work and play – also are strongly linked to violence.

Data that is collected about violence often lacks any information on socioeconomic factors. However, studies that have included this information have concluded that exposure to violence is greatest for people in socioeconomically disadvantaged groups.

Examples include:

- The risk of homicide increases with proportions of neighborhood residents who have not completed high school.
- Residents of neighborhoods with low family incomes, high poverty, high proportions of residents who had not completed high school, and low housing values were at increased risk of death from homicide taking their own individual socioeconomic characteristics into account.

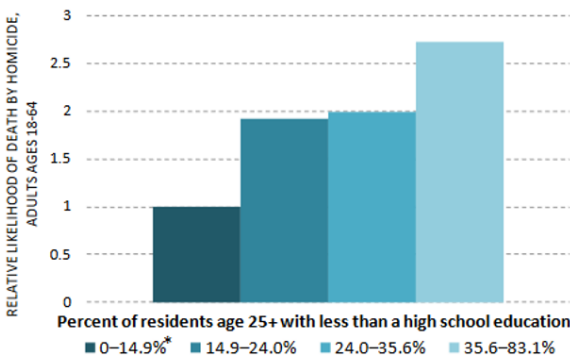


Figure 4. Risks of homicide increase with increasing proportions of neighborhood residents who have not completed high school.

*Reference group. Adjusted for individual demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.
Source: Cubbin et al. J Epidemiol Community Health 2000.

Social Disadvantage and Increased Risk of Violence

According to the [Prevention Institute](#), there are many possible reasons that social disadvantage leads to an increased risk of violence. People who have limited economic and social resources experience high levels of chronic stress. They may also have social networks with others who have similar limited resources and have little economic or emotional support.

Social disorganization, or a lack of shared community values, is also more likely to be found in areas that are economically disadvantaged and may contribute to higher levels of violence. Living in these conditions may lead to deeper feelings of anger, frustration, and hopelessness that may make people more likely to resort to violence in conflict situations.

They physical and built environment can also impact violence in a neighborhood. A [2018 study in the Annual Review of Public Health](#) found cites that vacant buildings, vacant lots, and physical disorder can influence violence. Mortgage foreclosures and resulting vacancy has been associated with increased violent crime.

Elements such as improved street lighting, crosswalks, public transportation, and parks can decrease the incidence of violence in a neighborhood. In [one study in Philadelphia](#), these changes decreased the odds of a homicide by 76%.

Impact of Violence on Health

Just as social determinants of health can lead to increased violence, increased violence can impact health negatively. People who are exposed to violence are more likely to suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, risky substance use, and engage in violence. Violence also exacerbates social and economic inequalities further negatively impacting social determinants of health.

[\(Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence\)](#)

Disproportionate Effect of Gun Violence

Gun violence disproportionately affects young adults, males, and racial/ethnic minorities. It is the leading cause of death for Black males under the age of 55 and the second leading cause of death for Hispanic males under the age of 35. [\(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\)](#)

Gun violence disproportionately impacts communities of color. According to a report from the [Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence](#), Communities of color are more likely to experience social determinants of health such as:

- income inequality
- poverty
- underfunded public housing
- under-resourced public schools
- lack of opportunity and perceptions hopelessness
- easy access to firearms by high-risk people

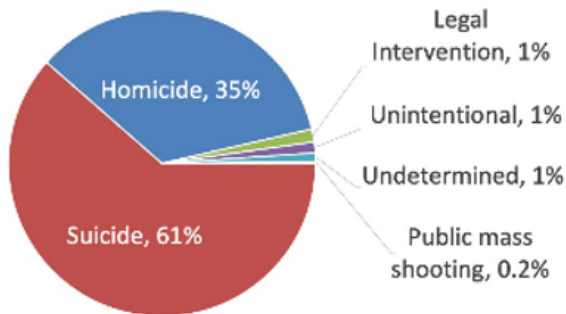
These inequalities are rooted in structural racism such as policies, social structure, and norms that prevent people living in communities of color from gaining equal access to opportunity. For example, Black Americans are more likely to live in hypersegregated poor neighborhoods with underfunded public services, poor housing, less economic opportunity, and limited healthcare access than White Americans.

[\(Center for American Progress\)](#)

What is Gun Violence?

When you think of gun violence, you may automatically think of homicide. But the scope of gun violence is much broader. Guns play a role in many forms of violence.

Deaths from Firearms in the U.S., 2018



Data from [CDC WISQARS](#) and [Mother Jones Mass Shooting Database, 1982-2019](#)

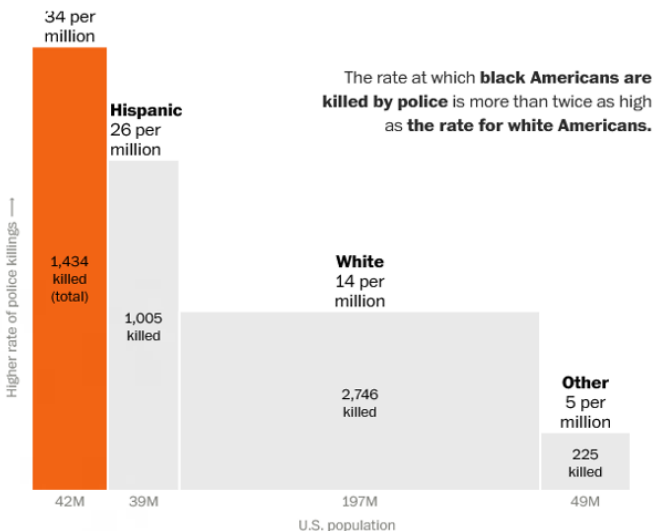
Suicide. Guns are the leading method of suicide and account for half of suicide deaths. Suicide by firearm results in death 85% of the time. In comparison, other methods result in death 3% of the time. This is an important statistic to understand because 90% of people who survive attempted suicide do not attempt a second time. [\(APHA\)](#)

Homicide. According to statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigations, 73% of homicides in the United States were the result of firearm use in 2018. All other methods combined make up the remaining 27%. (<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2018/crime-in-the-u.s.-2018/tables/expanded-homicide-data-table-8.xls>)

Guns are also the weapon of choice for mass homicide. Mass shootings are defined as incidents in which more than four people are shot, excluding the shooter. While most gun violence does not involve mass shooting, there were 418 mass shootings in the United States in 2019. (<https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>) In those incidents, a total of 211 people died. (<https://apnews.com/article/4441ae68d14e61b64110db44f906af92>)

Domestic Violence. In the United States, more than one in four homicides are related to domestic violence. Guns play a large role in domestic violence deaths. Over half of all intimate partner homicides in the United States are committed with guns. A woman is five times more likely to be murdered when the person abusing her has access to a firearm. (<https://efsgv.org/learn/type-of-gun-violence/domestic-violence-and-firearms/>)

Police-Involved Shootings. Every year 1,000 Americans are shot and killed by police violence. Black Americans are killed at more than twice the rate of White Americans by police-involved shootings. ([Washington Post](#))



Unintentional Shootings. Nearly 500 people die each year from unintentional shootings in the United States. These occur when someone is cleaning or playing with a gun or other situations that cause someone to fire it accidentally.

[\(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\)](#)

Nonfatal Firearm Injuries. While gun violence often makes us think of death, there are many people who experience nonfatal injury by firearm. Every year there are approximately 115,000 nonfatal shooting injuries. [\(UC Davis Health\)](#)

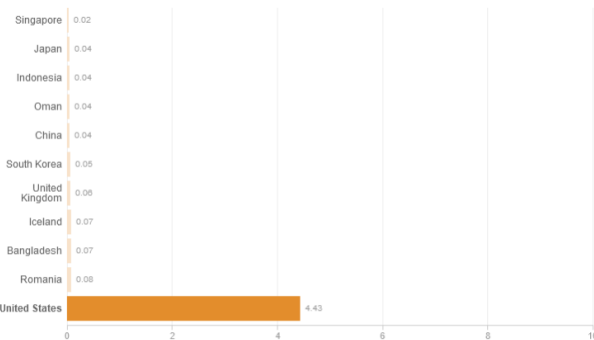
GUN VIOLENCE DATA

The United States has the 28th highest rate of gun violence deaths in the world. It is higher than the rates in many low-income countries.

[\(NPR\)](#)

How The U.S. Compares With The Lowest Rates Of Violent Gun Deaths Worldwide

Violent gun deaths per 100,000 people in 2017



Notes

All charts exclude deaths in armed conflict and from accidents or self-harm.

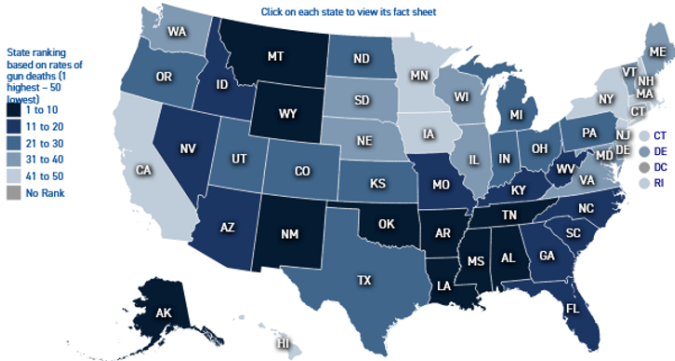
Source: [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation](#)

Credit: NPR

From 2008-2017, Missouri had the 11th highest rates of gun deaths of any state with an average of 15.91 gun deaths for every 100,000 people, 46% higher than the national average.

This disproportionately affects communities of color. While 12% of the state's population is Black, 69% of Missouri's gun homicide victims are Black. [\(Center for American Progress\)](#)

Rates of gun deaths across U.S. states and Washington, D.C., 2008–2017



Gun Violence and State Firearm Laws

A study of the United States from 1991-2016 found that universal background checks were associated with a 15% lower overall homicide rate. ([Siegel et al](#))

In 2013, researchers found that a higher number of firearm laws in a state are associated with a lower rate of firearm fatalities in the state for suicides and homicides, however the study couldn't determine the cause and effect relationships. ([Fleegler et al](#))

Gun Violence Research

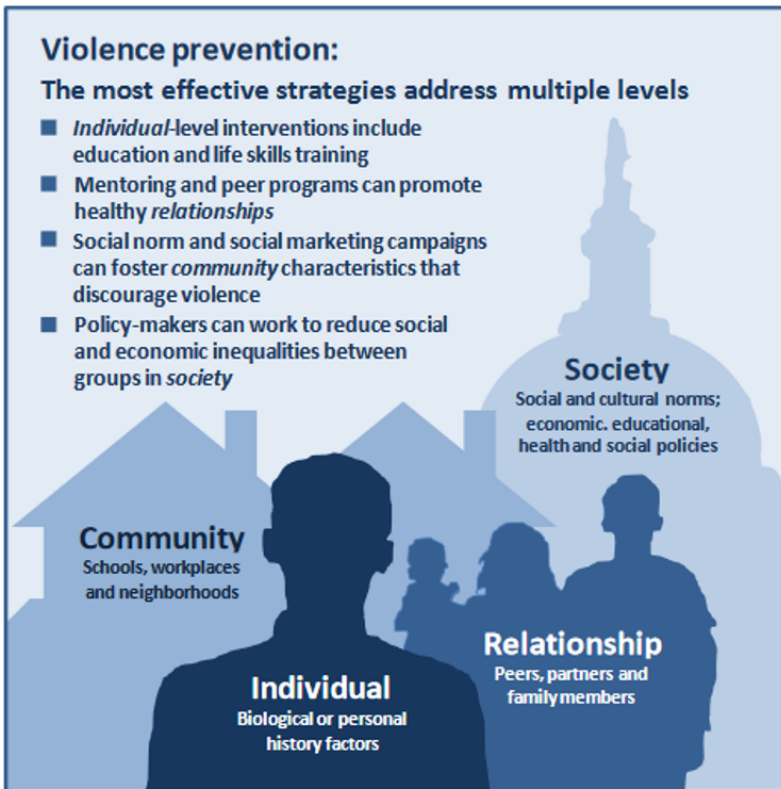
The US Centers for Disease Control recognizes that gun violence is a public health problem. ([CDC](#)). However, gun violence research was not federally funded for 20 years. Without funding, the field of gun violence research was hindered. This has made it difficult for public health professionals to develop gun violence prevention and intervention programs. ([APHA](#))

In 1996, the federal government stopped funding gun violence research after Congress passed the Dickey Amendment. This amendment barred the CDC from using funds to "advocate or promote gun control." This language was interpreted as prohibiting federal funding of gun violence research.

In 2019 the federal government approved \$25 million to fund the first gun violence research for the CDC and National Institutes of Health in two decades. ([Nature](#))

PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Gun violence is a complex problem that requires more than one method of prevention. The CDC supports the use of the Social-Ecological Model for preventing violence. This model suggests interventions at the societal, community, relationship, and individual levels in order to be most effective. ([CDC](#))



Adapted from *Violence Prevention—The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Further Reading:

American Public Health Association

[Gun Violence](#)

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Brief

[How Social Factors Shape Health: Violence,
Social Disadvantage and Health](#)

Centers for Disease Control

[Violence Prevention](#)

Healthy People 2020

[Social Determinants of Health](#)