

## THE ROOT CAUSES OF GUN VIOLENCE

### **POLICYMAKERS MUST ADDRESS THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES THAT ARE THE ROOT CAUSE OF GUN IN IMPACTED COMMUNITIES OF COLOR.**

- The root causes of gun violence include:
  - Income inequality <sup>1</sup>
  - Poverty <sup>2</sup>
  - Underfunded public housing <sup>3</sup>
  - Under-resourced public services <sup>4</sup>
  - Underperforming schools <sup>5</sup>
  - Lack of opportunity and perceptions of hopelessness <sup>6</sup>
  - Easy access to firearms by high-risk people <sup>7</sup>

### **COMMUNITIES OF COLOR ARE IMPACTED BY STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES ROOTED IN RACISM.**

- The inequalities that fuel gun violence are caused by racist policies that target communities of color and create segregated and underinvested neighborhoods.<sup>8</sup>
- Black Americans are more likely to live in hyper-segregated poor neighborhoods with underfunded social services, less economic opportunities, and limited healthcare access than White Americans.<sup>9</sup>
- Many disadvantaged neighborhoods face a number of ongoing challenges including the shortage of affordable housing, inadequate infrastructure, wealth inequality, and poverty.<sup>10</sup>
- The unemployment rate for Black Americans is at least twice as high as that of White Americans in many US cities.<sup>11, 12</sup>
- In addition to under-qualified instructors, high-poverty urban schools face problems of outdated curriculum, and dilapidated facilities, which impact students' developmental outcomes.<sup>13</sup>

### **FIREARM VIOLENCE IS HIGHLY CONCENTRATED WITHIN IMPACTED COMMUNITIES OF COLOR**

- Nearly 60% of firearm homicide victims in the United States are Black Americans, yet Black Americans account for less than 18% of the population.<sup>14</sup>
- Gun violence 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 34.<sup>15</sup>
- Young Black males ages 15-24 are 23 times more likely to be murdered by firearm than their White counterparts and young Hispanic males are over 4 times more likely to be murdered by firearm than their White counterparts.<sup>16</sup>
- Young Black females ages 15-24 are nearly 7 times more likely to be murdered by firearm than their White counterparts and young Hispanic females are nearly 2 times more likely to be murdered by firearm than their White counterparts.<sup>17</sup>
- In 2015, twenty-six percent of firearm homicides in the US occurred within urban census tracts that contained only 1.5% of the population.<sup>18</sup>

**IN MANY COMMUNITIES OF COLOR, NEARLY EVERYONE IS IMPACTED BY GUN VIOLENCE**

- A 2013 study found that among Black Americans the likelihood of having someone within their social network die by firearm at some point during their lifetime was 95.5%.<sup>19</sup>
- A survey of Baltimore City youth ages 12-24 found that 42% had witnessed a shooting compared to 4% of suburban youth.<sup>20</sup>
- A survey of middle school children enrolled in the Richmond, Virginia public school system found that 94% reported hearing gunshots and 44% of boys and 30% of girls reported witnessing a shooting.<sup>21</sup>

**GUN VIOLENCE EXPOSURE CHANGES THE CHEMISTRY IN THE BRAIN AND CAN HAVE LASTING IMPACTS ON HEALTH, WELLBEING, AND DEVELOPMENT IF LEFT UNTREATED.**<sup>22</sup>

- Exposure to gun violence is associated with:<sup>23, 24, 25, 26</sup>
  - Posttraumatic stress disorder
  - Antisocial behavior
  - Depression
  - Stunted cognitive and emotional development
  - Risky alcohol and substance use
  - Increased likelihood in engaging in violence

**WIDESPREAD COMMUNITY EXPOSURE TO GUN VIOLENCE EXACERBATES ALREADY EXISTING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES AND FURTHER PERPETUATES GUN VIOLENCE.**<sup>27</sup>

- A study that examined 500 Black American youth found that direct exposure to violence was the best predictor of whether an individual would later engage in gun related crimes.<sup>28</sup>
- An analysis of gun violence in Oakland found that each gun homicide in a census tract in a given year was related to five fewer job opportunities in the subsequent year.<sup>29</sup>
- An analysis of gun violence in DC found that ten additional gunshots in a census tract in a given year were linked to one less new business opening, one more business closing, and 20 fewer jobs.<sup>30</sup>

**Gun violence is a multifaceted challenge that demands a holistic set of solutions to stop the cycles of daily gun violence in impacted communities of color. In addition to limiting easy access to firearms by high-risk people, we must:**

- 1) Address the underlying social and economic inequalities that fuel gun violence.
- 2) Adequately fund community-based violence prevention and intervention efforts that build authentic relationships within those impacted
- 3) Support local organizations that address the social and economic inequalities at the root of gun violence.

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- <sup>15</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Injury mechanism and all other leading causes of death. WONDER Online Database, 2013-2017.
- <sup>16</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Homicide Deaths and Rates per 100,000. WONDER Online Database, 2013-2017. Ages 15-24. Non-Hispanic Black males compared to non-Hispanic White males, Hispanic males (all races) compared to non-Hispanic males.
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