

## THE ROOT CAUSES OF GUN VIOLENCE

### **POLICYMAKERS MUST ADDRESS THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES THAT ARE THE ROOT CAUSES OF GUN VIOLENCE 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> and
  - Easy access to firearms by high-risk people.<sup>7</sup>

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

- Structural inequalities are policies, social structures, and norms set by the institutions in power that prevent individuals living in impacted communities of color from gaining equal access to opportunity. These structural inequities often perpetuate the root causes of gun violence.<sup>8</sup>
- Structural inequalities are caused by racist policies that target communities of color and create segregated and underinvested neighborhoods; these inequalities fuel gun violence.<sup>9</sup>
- Black Americans are more likely to live in hypersegregated poor neighborhoods with underfunded public services, poor housing, less economic opportunities, and limited healthcare access than White Americans.<sup>10, 11</sup>
- The unemployment rate for Black Americans is at least twice as high as that of White Americans in many US cities.<sup>12, 13</sup>
- In addition to under-qualified instructors, high-poverty urban schools face problems of outdated curriculums and dilapidated facilities, which impact students' developmental outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

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

- 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 35.<sup>15</sup>
- Each year nearly 7,800 Black Americans are murdered by a firearm.<sup>16</sup>
- 60% of firearm homicide victims in the United States are Black Americans, yet Black Americans account for less than 15% of the population.<sup>17</sup>
- Young Black males ages 15-24 are 22 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>18</sup>
- Young Black females ages 15-24 are over 6 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>19</sup>
- In 2015, 26% of firearm homicides in the US occurred within census tracts that contained only 1.5% of the population.<sup>20</sup>
- Over the last decade (2009-2018) the firearm suicide rate among Black Americans increased by over 31%; in 2018 1,569 Black Americans died by firearm suicide.<sup>21</sup>

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

- A 2018 nationally representative poll of American adults found that 27% of Black Americans had witnessed a shooting and 23% reported that someone they care for has been killed by a gun.<sup>22</sup>
- A survey of Baltimore City youth ages 12-24 found that 42% had witnessed a shooting compared to 4% of suburban youth.<sup>23</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>24</sup>

**GUN VIOLENCE EXPOSURE CHANGES THE CHEMISTRY IN THE BRAIN AND CAN HAVE LASTING IMPACTS ON HEALTH, WELLBEING, AND DEVELOPMENT IF LEFT UNTREATED**<sup>25</sup>

- Exposure to gun violence is associated with:<sup>26, 27, 28, 29</sup>
  - Posttraumatic stress disorder,
  - Antisocial behavior,
  - Depression,
  - Stunted cognitive and emotional development,
  - Risky alcohol and substance use, and
  - Increased likelihood in engaging in violence.
- While there are evidence-based treatments to support those exposed to gun violence, individuals in impacted communities often lack access to these vital mental health services.<sup>30</sup>

**WIDESPREAD COMMUNITY EXPOSURE TO GUN VIOLENCE EXACERBATES ALREADY EXISTING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES AND FURTHER PERPETUATES GUN VIOLENCE**<sup>31</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>32</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 the subsequent year.<sup>33</sup>
- An analysis of gun violence in Washington 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>34</sup>

**Gun violence is a multifaceted challenge that demands a holistic set of solutions to stop the cycles 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 intervention and prevention efforts grounded in evidence that build authentic relationships with those impacted, and
- 3) Support local organizations that address the social and economic inequalities at the root of gun violence.

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