2018

Gun Violence: Chicago, Illinois

Kayla Dillon
Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/pubh100issues
Part of the Community Health Commons, Criminal Law Commons, Criminology Commons, Health Policy Commons, Policy Design, Analysis, and Evaluation Commons, Public Health Education and Promotion Commons, Race and Ethnicity Commons, Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance Commons, and the Social Welfare Commons

Augustana Digital Commons Citation
https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/pubh100issues/23

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Public Health at Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Global Issues in Public Health by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.
Gun Violence in Chicago, Illinois
Kayla Dillon

**Background**
Chicago, Illinois is a densely populated major city in the United States. The city is well known for its industrial prosperity and ethnic diversity. However, it is also well known for its gun violence. Although Chicago has several higher socioeconomic regions, the west and south sides of the city tend to be populated with low-income, racially diverse communities. These low-income city districts experience the most poverty and gun violence. As of 2016, there are approximately 2.075 million residents of Chicago (U.S. Census, 2018).

**Issue**
Certain city districts in Chicago experience high poverty and homicide-by-gun-violence rates. This is by no means a coincidence. There have been many studies that suggest an association between poverty and gun violence (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Causative factors of gun violence typically include problems with mental health, anger, alcohol, poverty, inequality, racial tensions, and poor education (Hemenway, 2016). Gun violence is typically “diagnosed” by law enforcement authorities that have evidence suggesting it is rising beyond the norm in a particular area. Some of the most affected populations are those within urban, primarily non-Caucasian regions (Figure 1.3). The populations in these regions are often involved or caught in the crossfire of gang activity (Campie, 2016). In terms of race and age, the most at-risk populations include African-American males 15-34 years old and teens/young adults 15-24 years old (Campie, 2016). Females and Caucasians have a significantly less risk of being injured or dying from gun violence in Chicago.

From 2015 to 2016, the homicide rate in Chicago increased from 485 to 764 total homicide deaths each year, respectively. In other terms, this was an increase from 15.1 to 27.8 per 100,000 residents each year, respectively (Kapustin et al., 2016). Of these homicides, the number of them involving firearms increased from 88% to 90% from 2015 to 2016. Risk factors include race, socioeconomic class, and amount of gang activity in a specific area. Whites/Caucasians are about one-third of the total population of Chicago and make up about 5% of homicide-by-firearms victims. African-Americans, too, make up about one-third of the Chicago population, but they make up about 80% of homicide-by-firearm victims. Of all the African-Americans living in Chicago, 15-34-year-old people make up about <4% of the population, but are at the most risk for homicide-by-firearms.

*The figures at the right show the relationship between poverty level, demographic regions, and homicide rate. It is evident that primarily African-American communities are the most at-risk populations for gun violence.*
Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN)

Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a multiprogram initiative established in 2001 by the federal government that brought together federal, state, and local law enforcement with researchers and community organizations to develop methods for decreasing gun violence in different districts of Chicago (Grunwald & Papachristos, 2017, p. 131). All of Chicago faces some level of gun violence, but this program initially focused on the two police districts with the highest crime rates, 11th and 15th, PSN Areas 1 and 2 in Figure 2, respectively. At the start of the program, these districts had experienced 75.5 homicides and 13.8 gang related homicides per 100,000 residents, which was over three times the average of the entire city (Grunwald & Papachristos, 2017, p. 138). These districts were primarily African-American communities (97%) and experienced high levels of poverty, unemployment, gang membership, and high school dropout. The 7th and 9th police districts, which have similar characteristics to the 11th and 15th districts, became the next targeted districts in 2005. In 2006, PSN also began working in the 10th and 4th districts. PSN had aimed to reach 8% of the total districts in Chicago when it began, but by 2009 it had reached 24% of all police districts. Today, nearly all high-crime police districts are impacted by PSN (Grunwald & Papachristos, 2017, p. 139).

Solution

Several solutions to gun violence in Chicago have been proposed, but there are some elements that are essential for a successful intervention. One of these elements is recognizing gun violence as a public health issue rather than a political debate (Hills-Evan et al., 2018, p. 80). Other elements, as suggested by Hills-Evan and team, include determining specific research needs, building interdisciplinary partnerships, gathering funding from various resources, and collaboration between community leaders to implement change (Hills-Evan et al., 2018, p. 80).

What matters most, though, is what is done with the information that is obtained from the research. To determine that a problem exists is merely the first step to developing long term solutions. The information gained must be used effectively. This can be achieved by implementation of policies or programs that can address the results of the research completed and ultimately make a change.

Specifically, in terms of gun violence, research needs to continue and more multiprogram initiatives, like PSN, should take place. PSN made a substantial impact and if there are several programs like this that each make large impacts, the overall change on gun violence in Chicago could be significantly positive.

References


