

**GUN VIOLENCE IN PHILADELPHIA: MULTIDISCIPLINARY
ANALYSIS AND A NOVEL COMMUNITY-BASED
INTERVENTION FRAMEWORK**

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ABSTRACT

The gun violence epidemic is a deeply complex crisis in America's cities and urban settings. Despite concerted efforts by government agencies, law enforcement, community organizations, and advocacy groups, gun violence remains a persistent and pervasive problem in the city of Philadelphia. The aims of this writing include a comprehensive analysis of the factors contributing to gun violence in Philadelphia and identification of multi-disciplinary strategies for prevention and intervention. By evaluating existing efforts in Philadelphia, including community-based programs, law enforcement initiatives, and policy reforms, as well as the generation of a theoretical multidisciplinary framework and proposal for gun violence mitigation, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gun violence prevention and to inform evidence-based policy and practice in Philadelphia and beyond.

The work of this thesis is dedicated to all of those who have supported and inspired me throughout my medical school journey, nurturing my passions and interests in bioethics, advocacy, and social justice, particularly as it pertains to the devastating toll of gun violence and trauma in my home city of Philadelphia. These groups and individuals include but are not limited to the Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University, the Center for Urban Bioethics at Temple University, the Department of Surgery and Division of Trauma & Surgical Critical Care at Temple University Hospital, the Department of Surgery and Division of Traumatology, Surgical Critical Care & Emergency Surgery at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, and, of course, my classmates, friends, parents, family, and fiancée.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Now all too commonplace, the rates of gun violence in the United States of America continue to reach staggering heights. According to the Pew Research Center, firearm mortality has increased nearly 40% or more in a 10-year span, according to data from 2012-2022. Gun violence targets our youth populations, suffocates and condemns our most vulnerable minority communities, and results in costs and spending of \$550 billion or more per year. Despite down-trending statistics from the seemingly irremediable peak experienced during the height of the COVID pandemic, gun-related deaths in the country continue to approach nearly 50,000 deaths per year (Gramlich, 2024).

For these reasons, gun violence has been diagnosed and nationally recognized as an epidemic (Thompson, 2012). The rising rates and widespread commonality of gun violence and its burden on society have grasped the attention of politicians, policy makers, interest groups, law enforcement, medical bodies, and communities large and small across the country. Its consideration and reclassification as a public health crisis, likening its scope and evolution to a familiar disease process framework, serves as part of a larger effort to contextualize, dissect, divert resources to, and ultimately attempt to combat the complex issue (Thompson, 2012).

Philadelphia is no exception to this rule. According to data from the Philadelphia Police Department as well as the census bureau, the city consistently ranks among the highest in the nation for gun-related crimes, including homicides, aggravated assaults, and non-fatal shootings (Semenza, 2021). The toll of gun violence extends beyond the immediate victims to affect community well-being, economic stability, and public safety. With thousands of gun-related violent crime rates reported each year, gun violence not

only results in injury or loss of life, but also perpetuates a cycle of trauma, fear, and social disruption that reverberates throughout affected neighborhoods (Wang, 2020).

The financial burden of gun violence is steep. It is estimated that nearly \$3 billion is spent annually for medical care of victims of gun violence, not to mention the over \$10 billion estimated to be spent on police and criminal justice costs, or the nearly incalculable billions of dollar losses in employer costs, income-loss costs due to death and disability, and quality-of-life adjustment costs (Everytown, 2022). The mitigation of gun violence and its associated outcomes, even marginally, could yield tremendous unburdening of the city itself as well as the communities most marginalized by long term quality-of-life losses. This would represent “a potentially large social payoff given the concentration of socially costly outcomes among a relatively small group of people” (Bhatt, 2024).

In addition to the obvious physical health stress that violent crime can lead to, these communities of Philadelphia also take on a tremendous mental health burden. The presence of such unrelenting gun violence erodes at the feelings of a safe community space and deters outside investments in such community safe spaces. Whether due to the violence itself or contributing socioeconomic and historical factors to be discussed in the coming chapters, these suffering communities also become victims of isolation. Particularly in the urban space and with Black communities, isolation and segregation further propagate increased rates of violence, creating a cycle of mental and physical trauma in these already jeopardized populations (Shihadeh, 1996).

In consideration of each of these vantage points, whether it be financial, social, or medical, the impact of gun violence is multidimensional, profound, and unremitting. The prevalence of gun violence in Philadelphia reflects a complex interplay of socio-economic, structural, and environmental factors, including entrenched poverty, systemic racism, limited access to economic opportunities, and neighborhood disinvestment. The consequences of gun violence are felt most acutely in marginalized communities and

neighborhoods, where residents are disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment, and structural inequities (Beard, 2017).

Despite concerted efforts by government agencies, community organizations, and advocacy groups, gun violence remains a persistent and pervasive problem in the city of Philadelphia. The aims of this writing include a comprehensive analysis of the factors contributing to gun violence in Philadelphia and identification of multi-disciplinary strategies for prevention and intervention. By evaluating existing efforts in Philadelphia, including community-based programs, law enforcement initiatives, and policy reforms, with particular focus on what makes this issue unique in Philadelphia and possible gaps in or areas of improvement, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gun violence prevention and to inform evidence-based policy and practice in Philadelphia and beyond.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This research employed literature review of both quantitative and qualitative data and analyses of gun violence in Philadelphia, as well as reviewing opinions and approaches from a wide variety of perspectives and fields of study. Evaluating the varying positions and groups across different socioeconomic domains reveals the many stakeholders and interest groups concerned with gun violence prevention, recovery, and analysis. These perspectives include the voices of community members and victims of gun violence, groups and advocates focused on these trauma victims and community members, healthcare officials and medical perspectives, law enforcement initiatives, local government offices and policymakers, public educational campaigns, and many more. Each of these sources utilize common sources of quantitative data, including existing published data sources related to gun violence in Philadelphia, such as statistical totals, crime mapping, and other demographic data (“Crime Maps & Stats”, 2024). These sources, such as the Philadelphia Police Department and US Census Bureau data, allow for the assessment of the socioeconomic characteristics of neighborhoods affected by gun violence, including poverty rates, unemployment rates, educational attainment, and racial demographics. Additionally, other secondary sources and multilevel analyses, yearly reports from violence prevention initiatives, mission statements of various agencies and coalitions, and broader overviews of the violence epidemic across the country were all utilized to contextualize the history and progress of firearm violence prevention initiatives in the city of Philadelphia. The primary overall methodology of research combined these diverse perspectives on gun-violence in the city throughout an interdisciplinary and mixed-methods literature review.

It is important to highlight the significance of maintaining this broad and diversified point of view. As various intervention frameworks and initiatives aimed at gun violence mitigation have begun to be developed across the country, the importance of partnerships across different sectors and groups is a common and emphasized theme of approach (Wang, 2020). Additionally, the coordinated and harmonized messaging and public communications between these groups, as now commonly seen between local government, law enforcement, community advocacy groups, and local hospitals for example, highlight the significance of shared and synchronized messaging and partnerships. Any of these sources or perspectives in isolation fail to capture the extensive magnitude and substantial impact of gun violence, confirming the importance of integrated, coordinated, and multifaceted approaches to its prevention.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIOECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF GUN VIOLENCE AND THE CYCLE OF TRAUMA

Before investigating prior and ongoing prevention strategies aimed at the prevention and de-escalation of gun violence, it is critical to understand the socioeconomic determinants and epidemiological characteristics of the communities most victimized by gun violence. This epidemiologic overview provides important context to understanding the complexities of this issue in Philadelphia as to why certain communities are at higher risk. These socioeconomic and sociopolitical determinants are predictably not unique to Philadelphia as compared to other cities with high rates of crime and violence (Wintemute, 2015). These characteristics have been well studied and described through raw data and statistical analysis, as well as through illuminating crime mapping by location, race, socioeconomic status, survival outcomes, and much more (Boschan, 2024).

It comes as no surprise that the summarization of some of these findings indicate neighborhoods and communities with lower socioeconomic status, by a variety of measures, are at higher risk of being exposed to gun violence by direct victimization or community-associated exposure. Communities with increased risk of violent crime have, predictably, higher poverty and unemployment rates, greater housing insecurity, higher income inequality, and lower education attainment (Beard, 2017). Some of the “hotspots” in Philadelphia include community pockets throughout North Philadelphia, South Philadelphia, and West Philadelphia, each distinct regions and neighborhoods within the greater City of Philadelphia. These hotspots are located in communities qualifying as minority-majority neighborhoods, particularly in neighborhoods with higher proportions

of Black residents. There exists a weighty disparity in firearm violence by race and location, a theme that exists in Philadelphia and on the national level (Lane, 2017).

These disparities in risk and exposure, while profound and shocking, are plainly obvious. However, it is important to state that gun violence is, of course, not the root of the socioeconomical disparities experienced in the affected communities. The disparate experience of these communities and neighborhoods in comparison to their Center City, Philadelphia counterparts cannot be explained by or attributed to violence and its associated complications, despite the victim-blaming efforts of local leadership in the past (WHYY, 2021). Instead, alternative perspectives and studies suggest the existence of a cycle of trauma, where communities with the above-detailed social determinants are the communities at greater risk of seeing rising rates of firearm-related violence. This increased exposure to violence and crime further propagates the risk and likelihood of the same challenges of poverty, injury, community fear, and traumatic exposure, submitting such groups to the cycle anew. This can be followed by victim-blaming, neighborhood disinvestment, and structural and societal barriers to improvement (Wang, 2020).

Recognizing that gun violence is a symptom and result of the sociopolitical environment, and not itself a causative agent alone, sets the stage of approach for the preventative framework to follow. With this reasoning in mind, breaking this cycle of trauma has been the focus of many new initiatives and preventative measures, attempting to identify and combat root-cause sources. Fully understanding this cycle and how it came to be requires a review and consideration of the historical and socio-political landscape of the city, and how structural racism has played a central role in shaping Philadelphia's vast neighborhood disparities of race and place.

CHAPTER 4

STRUCTURAL RACISM AND ITS IMPACT

This brief chapter is dedicated to discussing some of the historical policies in Philadelphia that have shaped the socioeconomic inequities recognized in the city today. Year after year, Philadelphia continues to rank among the most unequal and segregated cities in the United States in terms of income distribution, with significant disparities in household income, wealth accumulation, and access to economic opportunities (Hwang, 2020). Research has shown a strong association between income inequality and rates of violent crime, including homicides, aggravated assaults, and shootings (Beard, 2017). This chapter will emphasize how historical and structural racism have helped shape these stark inequities and why its intersection with gun violence rates serves as a unique barrier faced in efforts to prevent to gun violence in Philadelphia.

A now commonly cited example of one of the most glaring forms of structural racism, redlining has left an indelible impact by marginalizing communities of color and minorities in Philadelphia. Redlining is a discriminatory practice of denying loans and other financial services to communities or populations deemed “too risky”, specifically targeting racial and ethnic minority groups (Hillier, 2003). The practice was utilized in the 1930s in Philadelphia and is attributed to be a primary contributor the city’s stark inequity between neighborhoods and an economic barrier that condemned these communities (Arana, 2024). Discriminatory lending and the 1937 redlining map were central components to economic, social, and political campaigns and policies that solidified the economic disparities for generations to come. Additionally, this financial segregation became and reinforced social and geographical segregation. This severe

degree of social isolation has been attributed as another sociological factor contributing to higher rates of violence (Shihadeh, 1996).

These historical legacies of racism have left lasting scars on the city's social and economic landscape, contributing to disparities in education, employment, housing, and access to justice (Jacoby, 2018). In other cities such as Chicago, Oakland, or Indianapolis with shared prior practices, similar challenges with socioeconomic and racial disparities persist as well (Civic Coalition to Save Lives, 2024). While this not only underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing structural racism as a root cause of violence and injustice on a broad scale, it also highlights the how the spatial dynamics of segregation and gentrification in Philadelphia impact community cohesion, social capital, and access to resources (Sememza, 2021). For these reasons, such improvements and the re-emphasis of this narrative has been the focus of many community-minded organizations, such as CeaseFirePA or the Philadelphia Coalition for Racial Justice, who have chosen to center their discourse around the voices and experiences of those most impacted by structural racism and trauma. Capturing this perspective lays the groundwork for understanding the complex interplay of factors contributing to gun violence in the city and suggests where interventions for uplifting and revitalization may be effective (Whitehill, 2014).

CHAPTER 5

SPATIAL CONCENTRATION AND IMPACT ON NEIGHBORHOODS AND SOCIAL COHESION

Building upon the historical context, this chapter will aim to consider present day neighborhood and geographical impacts on gun violence, based in large part upon the principles of social disorganization theory. Social disorganization theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between neighborhood characteristics and rates of crime and violence. According to this theory, neighborhoods characterized by weak social ties, residential instability, and economic deprivation are more susceptible to crime and violence, as they lack the collective resources and social control mechanisms necessary to address community challenges effectively. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, residential mobility, and ethnic heterogeneity contribute to social disorganization, creating environments of social isolation and economic marginalization where crime and violence thrive (Bellair, 2017).

As discussed in the prior chapters, gun violence in Philadelphia is not evenly distributed across the city but tends to be concentrated in specific neighborhoods characterized by high levels of poverty, unemployment, and minority groups. Informally, this idea is referred to through some of the most commonly cited literature as a problem of “race and place” (Beard, 2017). Spatial analysis techniques, such as hotspot mapping and geographic information systems, have been instrumental in identifying these patterns of spatial concentration and understanding the underlying dynamics driving violence in affected communities (Semenza, 2021). Hotspot mapping allows researchers and practitioners to visualize clusters of gun-related incidents and identify areas with the highest rates of violence. Further tools enable the overlay of various socio-economic,

demographic, and environmental data layers to explore correlations and spatial relationships, providing valuable insights into the root causes of violence and informing targeted interventions.

A further look at the spatial relationship of gun violence and its associated factors is well illustrated by considering the same geographical mapping with regard to the presence of other socio-economic disparities (Boschan, 2024). One such commonly cited example is considering the map of gun violence in the city alongside that of food insecurity (Ali, 2022). The hotspot mapping of these two seemingly distinct “end-stage” problems (as opposed to “early-stage” or “causal” factors such as poverty or unemployment) reveal maps that are nearly interchangeable. The same can be done with eviction mapping, housing insecurity, or food access and retailers, to name a few (Reinvestment, 2021). Underpinned by the same socio-economic risk factors and structural barriers, these complex issues not only have long lasting economic and health effects, but further add to the social disorganization of the region. It also speaks to the complex task at hand when attempting to construct formidable, sustainable, and community-focused intervention strategies in the setting of these intertwined and deeply rooted challenges.

CHAPTER 6

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT BASED INTERVENTIONS

In consideration of prior and current intervention strategies, a review and analysis of recent prevention attempts reveal two primary sectors or sources of interventions: those led and initiated by law enforcement and backed by local governmental policy changes, and those created by community-minded agencies, non-profits, and advocacy groups. While many other sources of interventions exist, such as those from more medical or public health perspectives, amongst others, these two principal groupings mostly encapsulate the notable efforts and trends ongoing in Philadelphia as well as other cities. This chapter will focus on the first of these perspectives, that of law enforcement and local government.

In Philadelphia, as in the rest of Pennsylvania, gun regulations are governed by state and federal laws that establish the legal basis for the purchase, possession, and carrying of firearms (Pennsylvania State Police, 2024). Pennsylvania's firearm laws are relatively permissive compared to some other states, with provisions for open and concealed carry permits, background checks for handgun purchases, and limited restrictions on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines (Pomeranz, 2021). As reflected in the active national discourse surrounding access to firearms, access to weapons as well as public safety reinforcement initiatives as a means of gun violence minimization have been a focus for intervention in Philadelphia in the past (Philadelphia Police Department, 2023).

Examples of such law enforcement strategies have included police redeployment and reorganization of officers to high impact areas, as well as enhanced efforts in illegal

gun seizures (Oppenheim, 2008). Reallocation of funds in the past mayoral administrations have gone toward increased police recruitment as well as forensic enhancement in order to improve homicide case clearance rates (City of Philadelphia, 2023).

These approaches in intervention have their limitations. Such reforms have been hampered by limited investigative results, a lack of resources for meaningful financial reallocation, and roadblocks at the state legislative level, particularly regarding the inability to restrict the flow of guns in Pennsylvania purchased in other states (City of Philadelphia, 2023). But above all else, these initiatives are devoid of community engagement, and lack the partnering models seen in other cities and theorized to create more sustainable impacts (Bhatt, 2024). With this in mind, the Philadelphia Police Department and mayoral office have placed a newfound emphasis on such partnering opportunities, reallocating financial support and publishing intermittent results of initiatives such as the Community Crisis Intervention Program, a “credible messenger” outreach program, as well as forming the Firearm Homicide Review Coalition, a group created to bring together multiple city departments as well as community members and agencies to discuss intervention strategies and progress (City of Philadelphia, 2023).

Policy advocacy and systems change efforts seek to address the root causes of gun violence by advocating for policy reforms and structural changes that promote social justice, equity, and community well-being. In Philadelphia, grassroots organizations such as CeaseFirePA, POWER Interfaith, and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) engage in advocacy campaigns to promote gun safety legislation, support survivors of violence, and hold policymakers and elected officials accountable for addressing the root causes of violence. These organizations work to mobilize

community members, build coalitions, and leverage collective power to advocate for policies and practices that address systemic inequalities, dismantle structural racism, and create safer, healthier communities for all residents (CeaseFirePA, 2024; PCADV, 2024).

Community policing partnerships and other city government approaches represent a collaborative manner of addressing gun violence that emphasizes trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. In Philadelphia, community policing initiatives seek to build positive relationships between police officers and residents, enhance communication and transparency, and empower communities to play an active role in crime prevention and public safety (Philadelphia, 2024). Community policing strategies foster mutual trust and understanding and can help to bridge the divide between law enforcement and communities of color, reduce fear and suspicion, and enhance cooperation in addressing gun violence. As reflected in the PPD's recent trends in creating such programs, these initiatives and partnerships must be a staple and central component of meaningful gun violence prevention in the urban setting.

CHAPTER 7

COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES TO GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

In addition to initiatives oriented around political, legislative, and law-enforcement opportunities for intervention, community-based approaches have emerged as a meaningful and promising direction for gun violence interventions. One such concept of initiatives are that of “violence interruption” programs. Violence interruption programs employ a public health approach to gun violence prevention that focuses on identifying and mediating conflicts before they escalate into violence. Such programs such as CeaseFirePA have established a framework utilizing trained outreach workers, often referred to as “violence interrupters” or “credible messengers” who have credibility and trust within the communities affected by violence. Violence interrupters work to de-escalate conflicts, provide support to individuals at risk of involvement in violence, and connect them with resources and opportunities for positive change (Whitehill, 2014). In Philadelphia, organizations such as Cure Violence (affiliated with CeaseFirePA) and the Philadelphia Anti-Drug/Anti-Violence Network (PAAN) have implemented violence interruption programs in partnership with community-based organizations, schools, and local government agencies. These programs have been shown to reduce retaliatory violence, promote community resilience, and empower individuals to break the cycle of violence (DeFries Gallagher, 2021).

Youth mentorship and empowerment programs have been another emphasized direction of focus, providing at-risk youth with positive role models, supportive relationships, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. These programs aim to steer young people away from involvement in violence by providing them with alternative pathways to success, including education, employment, and civic engagement

(City of Philadelphia, 2023). In Philadelphia, organizations and social programming opportunities exist to offer mentorship, tutoring, job training, and recreational activities to young people in high-crime neighborhoods. The “Cradle to Grave” program, in affiliation with Temple University Hospital in North Philadelphia, focuses on youth education about gun violence, community trauma, and surgical traumatic injuries and first aid training, as a part of their “360° approach to firearm injury prevention” (Temple Safety Net, 2024). By building relationships of trust and support with youth, these programs help to instill confidence, resilience, and a sense of belonging, reducing the likelihood of involvement in violent behavior and empowering young people to become leaders and change agents in their communities.

Trauma-informed care and healing initiatives, like those sponsored and created by local city hospitals, recognize the impact of violence and trauma on individuals, families, and communities, and seek to address the underlying causes of violence by addressing the root causes of trauma and promoting healing and resilience. In Philadelphia, organizations such as Healing Hurt People and the Trauma Advocacy Initiative provide trauma-informed services, including counseling, case management, and peer support, to individuals affected by violence (Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice, 2023). These programs help survivors of gun violence with the emotional and psychological effects of trauma, build healthy coping skills, and improve access to resources for healing and recovery. Evaluation studies have shown that Healing Hurt People has been effective in reducing rates of repeat victimization, improving mental health outcomes, and promoting resilience and healing among survivors of violence (Stolbach, 2020). By addressing causes of trauma and providing holistic support to survivors, trauma-informed care

initiatives contribute to breaking the cycles of trauma and promoting community well-being via a network of interdisciplinary support.

Lastly, another emerging framework for violence mitigation and prevention has been that of the Rapid Employment and Development Initiative (READI) Chicago. The goal of the recently published READI study was to identify very high-risk male individuals at risk of gun violence involvement and enroll them in preventative programming centered around employment opportunities, cognitive behavioral therapy, and a wide variety of social support initiatives. The study has illustrated notable decreases in gun violence involvement in the program participants, as well as increased rates of participant follow-up and engagement when compared to prior or other ongoing social support initiatives. These findings suggest the beginnings of a promising theoretical framework built upon the identification of the highest risk individuals or neighborhoods as a means of violence prevention and interruption (Bhatt, 2024).

In summing all that has been discussed thus far, the remainder of this writing will aim to synthesize these historical and current findings, initiatives, and approaches, and begin to develop the broad-strokes framework for gun violence mitigation initiatives befitting of Philadelphia's complex and multi-faceted violence epidemic.

CHAPTER 8

SUGGESTED INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

In tying together the previous two chapters, this section will focus on novel future directions of gun violence prevention interventions for the city of Philadelphia. In consideration of the aforementioned historical and socio-economical contexts of racial disparities in the city and its gun violence, the following proposal aims to synthesize and expand upon the interdisciplinary groundwork of preestablished community partnership programs that have been both well received by affected communities and yielded results suggesting positive progress. This suggestion also draws upon the proposed framework of the CeaseFire and Cure Violence models, READI Chicago, and several other community-focused intervention ideologies aimed at mitigating the sociopolitical, health, and financial impacts of gun violence in marginalized communities of Philadelphia.

As a means of capturing the voices and opinions of the local community, it is important to engage local residents of high-impact neighborhoods for their perspectives on local violence and the vast toll it takes on the community. In their community-based conceptual framework and design focused on community resilience, Wang et al. propose using spatial data mapping to identify “neighbourhood blocks that have been successful in avoiding gun violence” despite the challenges of local their environment. Identified individual or blocks would be targets for qualitative interview sampling of residents (Wang, 2020). Alternative means of identifying a community cohort for engagement would be to utilize existing networks of individuals previously exposed to violence or participating community members in any number of the emerging social support initiatives. By partnering with programs such as Cradle to Grave or Healing Hurt People, as well as utilizing a similar community liaison model such as the “violence interrupters”

at the center of many of CeaseFirePA's programs, future initiatives can take advantage of the formalized network of community participants already involved in gun violence prevention and recovery measures. These participants may provide keen insight into community and neighborhood dynamics or particular areas of concern for intervention.

In continuing in this same vein of establishing community rapport, community partnerships should play an essential role in the mitigation of gun violence. Of particular importance is the involvement of law enforcement, as seen in Philadelphia's recent reemphasizing on rebuilding trust and coordination between police and community. Ensuring that law enforcement as well as local government are reflecting the same missions as grassroots community efforts is an important step in messaging and communication, as divergence in the messages being delivered between such groups correlates with deepened mistrust, misunderstanding of programming intentions, and further violence (Lane, 2017).

Youth mentorship, education, and empowerment are also particular points of emphasis. An important subset of statistics concerning gun violence in Philadelphia are those studying and summarizing youth involvement, including youth adverse health, educational, employment, and housing outcomes, and the rate of youth individuals involved in multiple incidences of firearm events over time (Kalesan, 2016). The READI Chicago model, amongst others, have emphasized relentless youth outreach and engagement as a means of identifying and mitigating root causes of violence in this population (Bhatt, 2024). Bertrand et al., in evaluation of the READI program, propose the opportunity for cognitive behavioral therapy in addition to other means of social support for those identified as at high risk to be exposed to or involved in firearm events (Bertrand, 2018). This same proposition could be extended to youth residents, further

partnering healthcare practitioners in various subspecialties and communities with such violence prevention efforts.

A final major tenant of this proposal and theoretical framework is the importance of advocacy. In line with CeaseFirePA's "Common Agenda To End Gun Violence," a dynamic and goal-oriented set of legislative targets and community outcomes can be generated from the diverse group of stakeholders and community agencies as a means of formulating united themes of messaging and a powerful lobbying voice for change. This includes evidenced-based campaigns at the city, state, and national level regarding weapon access reforms and support for social and financial programming for gun violence victims and families in line with the principles of trauma-informed care initiatives.

Analysis of the impact of such a framework and proposal would be both qualitative and quantitative. Continual community member involvement and partnership programming would ensure engagement and follow-up with community members as a means of assessing progress through surveys or reflective checkpoints. Quantitative assessment would not only be concerned with gun violence rates or total events, but ensuring progress at other endpoints such as healthcare follow-up and outcomes, educational attainment, youth participation, and unemployment and housing insecurity rates in at risk neighborhoods.

CHAPTER 9

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

This proposal is, of course, limited in a number of ways. By focusing more narrowly on the historical sociopolitical context in the backdrop of Philadelphia’s gun violence epidemic, this framework may not serve as one more widely adaptable to other cities with unique barriers to justice, health, and social wellbeing. This proposal also does not begin to consider the financial commitment required of such types of initiatives – it simply lays the foundation for intervention strategies across a number of primary tenants and components.

The presence of resource constraints, including limited funding, staffing shortages, and competing priorities, represents one of the primary challenges in addressing gun violence in Philadelphia. Many community-based organizations, law enforcement agencies, and social service providers operate with limited resources, making it difficult to implement and sustain comprehensive violence prevention initiatives. Budgetary constraints can hinder efforts to hire and retain qualified staff, provide training and support, and scale up successful programs to reach more individuals and communities in need. Moreover, funding for violence prevention programs may be subject to political fluctuations and budget cuts, further exacerbating resource constraints and undermining long-term sustainability. For these reasons, this proposal strongly emphasizes the utilization of previously established community networks and programming as a means of productively operating within preexisting financial limitations.

Another significant challenge is the presence of data gaps and measurement challenges that hinder efforts to track trends, evaluate interventions, and inform evidence-

based decision-making. While improving, data on gun violence, including shootings, homicides, and injuries, may be incomplete, inconsistent, or inaccessible due to limitations in data collection and reporting systems. While literature has more recently captured some of the socioeconomic inequities and disparities (Beard, 2017), existing data sources can struggle to contextualized systemic and structural barriers to equality and equity.

Another distinct challenge that hampers the victimized communities of Philadelphia is a problem of trust and collaboration. While the use of credible messengers and collaboration between stakeholders and community members has been reinforced as a central point of emphasis in established gun violence prevention initiatives, it is critical to recognize the pervasive existence of mistrust between these groups. Local participation in social programming can struggle with enrollment and engagement of community messengers, undermining their worth and financial investment.

Finally, some of the even more unique challenges faced in Philadelphia, as previously discussed, include the spatial organization of gun violence hotspots, spread out across North, South, and West Philadelphia, where the socioeconomic demographics and community identities of these neighborhoods can vary greatly (Semenza, 2021). Facing challenges that are often distinct from other areas of the city, each sub-community may require different agendas of advocacy, programming, and financial commitment, which can add to mixed-messaging, disorganization, and gaps in reform efforts.

CHAPTER 10

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH AND POLICY

There are many future directions and areas of research that emerged through the writing and contextualization of the proposal, as well as other areas and techniques of intervention being highlighted throughout the city of Philadelphia.

In consideration of the broad proposal and theoretical framework laid out previously, one obvious future consideration of study would be the long-term impact and evaluation of such a program and other community-engagement based interventions currently ongoing. Similar to READI Chicago and other evaluative research efforts, longitudinal studies that track outcomes over time, such as changes in rates of violence, community perceptions of safety, and indicators of well-being, can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of different approaches and inform evidence-based policy and practice. Moreover, qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus groups with program participants and stakeholders, can help to elucidate the mechanisms of change and identify factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of intervention strategies.

Other emerging areas of research explored in the development of this work include the intersectional analysis of gun violence narratives, considering how race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other social identities intersect to shape individuals' experiences of violence and their access to resources and opportunities for prevention and intervention. Future research should prioritize, as in this model, a community-driven approach that highlight the voices and experiences of affected communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of intervention strategies. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) methodologies empower communities

to define research priorities, shape research questions, and collaborate with researchers as equal partners in the research process. By engaging community members as co-researchers and decision-makers, CBPR can help to ensure that research findings are relevant, culturally responsive, and actionable, leading to more effective and sustainable interventions that address the root causes of gun violence and promote community well-being.

Amongst Philadelphia's local leaders on gun violence prevention, Dr. Jessica Beard is leading The Philadelphia Center for Gun Violence Reporting to combat harmful media narratives and coverage of local gun violence, which can perpetuate further violence, dehumanize victims and communities, and detract from other preventative initiatives. This fascinating and important emerging work on media reporting and perspectives may represent a future model or framework adaptable at a national level.

By prioritizing these future directions and areas for further research, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers can advance our understanding of gun violence in Philadelphia and inform evidence-based strategies for prevention and intervention. Through interdisciplinary collaboration, community engagement, and a commitment to social justice and equity, Philadelphia can work towards healthier and safer communities.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

Gun violence in Philadelphia represents a complex and urgent public health and social issue that requires collective action and commitment from stakeholders across multiple sectors. Through comprehensive analysis of the root causes, community impacts, and intervention strategies, this writing lays out key insights and recommendations for addressing this pressing challenge. Combatting gun violence requires a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that addresses the underlying socio-economic determinants, structural roots, and community impacts of violence. By prioritizing investments in community-based initiatives, strengthening law enforcement-community relations, enhancing gun regulations and enforcement, addressing socio-economic disparities, supporting trauma-informed care and healing, and advocating for policy reforms and social justice, stakeholders can work together to create positive change and reduce the impact of gun violence on individuals, families, and communities. Philadelphia's uniquely segregated communities and deeply rooted systemic racial barriers only add to the complexity of this pervasive issue. By drawing upon the successes of other cities alongside the incredible progress already made locally, there appears to be an emerging ideal and commonality of approaches across disciplines and fields. In this critical moment of national recognition and momentum aimed at curbing the toll of gun violence across the country, the time is now to take the next bold steps in efforts to control the gun violence epidemic in Philadelphia and beyond.

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