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Causes, Consequences, and Critiques of Gun Violence in America:

A call to action to save black women and girls

Delta Research and Educational Foundation

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Forward

[PHOTO]

The narrative on gun violence in America is a moving target. Pick a headline on any given day, and an interesting point of view about how to tackle gun violence emerges. Unfortunately, gun violence in the Black community is consistent and affects our lives every single day!

I have commissioned this research to understand how gun violence is affecting our community, what causes it and how we might understand it's critical affects. Finally, the Delta Research and Education Foundation was interested in contributing to the conversation about prevention through meaningful programming.

We are excited to contribute to the conversation about and understanding of gun violence because it aligns 100% with our mission. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. established the Delta Research and Educational Foundation (DREF) as a public charity supporting scholastic achievement, public service programs, and research initiatives focused upon African American women.

This research initiative aims to give DREF a voice in the debate and encourage further research and programmatic efforts around gun violence.

The Delta Research and Educational Foundation (DREF) provides opportunities in keeping with our mission to promote research which identifies and fashions solutions to issues affecting African American women and their families, nationally and globally, through funding and support of the charitable and educational programs of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and collaborative organizations.

Carolyn Lewis

President

Delta Research and Education Foundation

About the Research

[PHOTO]

Gun violence is a public health issue. It destroys Black communities and has no seat at the table of the public health debate.

To associate gun violence with mental illness when we hear of a mass shooting, is to do the entire gun violence discussion a serious dis-service. It is a distraction at best. It limits our ability to highlight funding disparities to promote significant and meaningful research to similar to that of funding related to more common issues such as cancer or smoking cessation.

Gun violence is massive and it is urgent.

There are massive gaps in understanding how gun violence affects the Black community. This paper is an attempt to summarize the causes and consequences of gun violence as an everyday issue and not as isolated mass shooting events.

In the same vein, this paper is not an academic exercise but a tool to encourage conversation about the more pressing correlates of gun violence in America, that, if addressed, might reduce the negative consequences of gun violence on black women and girls.

Gaps in the data on gun violence resulting from limited and disparate data sources as well as a lack of demographic specificity, and lack of a consistent and comprehensive research program stagnates a wider understanding of the causes and consequences of gun violence on a national level. Given that black communities are significantly more likely to suffer from the notion of everyday gun violence this exploration is a start, not the end, of more to come to save our black women and girls from gun violence in America.

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Background

American news media is filled with episodes of gun violence. In 2017 there was a tremendous focus on police-involved shootings from LaQuan McDonald in Chicago to Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO. In the same year, Americans experienced the deadliest mass shooting, so far, in history. The Las Vegas shooting on October 1, 2017 claimed 58 human lives and wounded more than 515 more. This is indeed sensational news and is worthy to be reported.

What is less prevalent in the news media is the impact of 'everyday gun violence' on black communities and particularly, black women and girls. Lesser known cases of gun violence are arguably more devastating in the black community because they are believed to be more frequent and hypothesized to have longer lasting and more devastating consequences in the lives of black women and girls. In the last 90 days, a quick search of news headlines reveals a sampling of the tragic deaths of women and girls in the United States:

- A woman, 40 years old, shot and killed in an attempted car-jacking in Newark, N.J. on Thanksgiving
- Two bystanders watching an altercation shot in Toledo, OH. A 20-year-old woman was killed and a 15-year-old girl was shot and hospitalized.
- A woman, 20 years old, shot and killed outside of her home in Ferguson, MO while sitting in the car with her boyfriend resulting from an altercation between her current boyfriend and her ex-boyfriend
- A pregnant woman and her unborn child killed, one of many victims over a weekend in Chicago, IL shootings.
- A 22-year-old woman found shot and killed inside a vehicle after gunshots were heard in Pittsfield, MA.
- In Dekalb County, GA., a 16-year-old girl found shot to death in her bedroom
- A woman shot and killed in Lancaster, CA while attending a house party. Police report finding a man and a woman bleeding on the street due to multiple gunshot wounds. Both were pronounced dead at the scene of the crime.
- A woman, 32 years-old, shot and killed while sitting in a drive through line at McDonald's in Memphis, TN.
- An 18-year-old woman shot and killed in Toledo, OH while sitting in a truck behind a home with her friend around 2 pm in the afternoon. The gunman walked up to the vehicle and sprayed it with bullets. Both were pronounced dead at the hospital.

How many news stories must we read about black women and girls dying before we are compelled to do more than shake our heads and shrug our shoulders? It may be that we need to dig deep under the headlines to understand how gun violence affects black families and ultimately black communities as a whole.

While the causes of these shootings are quite diverse, there are commonalities

among each case noted: 1) mental illness is not reported as the motivation for the shooting in any case and 2) 100% of the victims in these shootings are black women and girls. Hundreds more stories like these could be introduced in this context, but few receive the attention that mass shootings receive and even fewer will highlight the more critical systemic cultural implications of these types of shootings.

Why are we writing about gun violence?

Consider these stats:

- Black men are 14x more likely than non-Hispanic white men to be shot and killed with guns. (Ref)

- Black Americans make up 14% of the US population, but are victims of more than half of all gun homicides. (Ref)

- When a gun is present in a situation of domestic violence, it increases the risk the woman will be killed 5-fold. (Ref)

- African American women are 3x more likely than white women to be murdered by a gun. Domestic violence makes up a substantial percent of urban gun violence. Although domestic violence accounts for eight percent of 911 calls, it was involved in fourteen percent of homicides. (Strategies for Reducing Gun Violence in American Cities Ref)

- Among 10 to 24-year-olds, homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans.

- Homicide rates in 2014 among non-Hispanic, African American males 10-24 years of age (48.2 per 100,000) exceeded those of Hispanic males (9.6 per 100,000) and non-Hispanic, White males in the same age group (2.6 per 100,000). (Ref)

These data suggest that there is a serious gun violence epidemic in the black community and it is not being addressed satisfactorily. What happens to victims' families that are left to cope with the devastating loss of human life and how do we stem these losses which create further degradation of the black family – particularly of women and girls – is an imperative that we must work to solve.

Gun Violence by the Numbers

What is gun violence?

Gun related violence is violence committed with the use of a gun (firearm or small arm) that may or may not be considered criminal. Criminal gun violence includes homicide (except when and where ruled justifiable), assault with a deadly weapon, and suicide, or attempted suicide, depending on jurisdiction (need reference).

The exploration of gun violence in this context focuses on criminal gun violence, with an emphasis on homicide,

gun violence among teens, gun violence by intimate partners, and police-involved shootings in the US, particularly as it relates to Black women and girls.

Gun Violence in the United States

The US has the 31st highest rate of gun violence in the world. In 2016 there were 3.85 deaths due to gun violence per 100,000 people (Ref). The University of Washington's Institute for mental health metrics and evaluation (IHME) tracks lives lost in every country, in every year and by every possible cause of death. They found that 3.85 deaths per 100,000 is 4x the expected rate of deaths related to gun violence based on IHME estimates. In fact, death rates in

(19.6/100,000), Louisiana (9.9/100,000) and Maryland (9.9/100,000). In 2017, according to the Associated Press, Baltimore broke a record for homicides.

A closer look at these communities reveals that 3 of the 4 communities with the highest per capita rate of gun violence, have a higher than average percentage (13%) of minority population: 51% of DC's population is Black, 32% of Louisiana's population is Black, and Maryland's population is 29% Black according to the US Census Bureau (census.gov).

In 2015, over 13,000 people were killed in the US by firearms according to the Gun Violence Archive [add link]. Note that these figures exclude suicide.

On an average day, 93 Americans are killed with guns.

Source: Gun violence by the numbers

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the US are only second to Iraq.

The IHME also estimates what it would expect a country's rate of gun violence deaths to be based solely on its socioeconomic status. By that measure, the US should only see .79 deaths per 100,000 people.

On average, there are nearly 12,000 gun homicides a year in the US. According to FBI statistics, the highest per capita rates of gun-related homicides in 2005 were in DC (35.4/100,000), Puerto Rico

In an average month, 50 women are shot to death by intimate partners in the US. More than half of all women killed by intimate partners in the US are killed with guns. America's gun homicide rate is more than 25 times the average of other high-income countries. The US accounted for 46% of the 'high income' population but 82% of gun deaths.

The statistics on gun violence among our youth is equally if not more concerning.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in 2014, over 4,000 young people ages 10 to 24 were victims of homicide, which averages 12 homicides among our youth each day. The CDC statistics also report that homicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for young people ages 10 to 24 years old. Among these victims, 86% (3,703) were male and 14% (597) were female, and close to 9 in 10 (86%) were killed with a firearm.

In a 2015 nationally-representative sample of youth in grades 9-12 researchers found that 16.2% of youth reported carrying a weapon (gun, knife or club) on one or more days in the 30 days preceding the survey and the prevalence was higher among males (24.3%) than females (7.5%).
Seven children and teens (age 19 or under) are killed with guns in the US on an average day. Rates of firearm injury death increase rapidly after age 12 and unintentional shootings of children and teens are under-reported in the CDC data.

Research (Ref) suggests that Burglary and assault are lower in the US but crime in US is more lethal. The sentiment around gun violence is that "Gun violence is a uniquely American problem." Factually, fun ownership is higher in the US. It is easier to get a gun, so it is not surprising that there are more gun deaths in the US.

Continuing down this path, based on the statistics uncovered, not only is gun violence is a US problem, is arguably more lethal to both youth and adults in the Black Community. So, what impact does this have in the Black community?

Consequences of Gun Violence

Gun violence is affecting the African American community at an alarming rate. This violence has a tremendous effect on the entire community but the research on the consequences it has on Black women and children is lacking. What we do know is that there are serious mental, behavioral and economic consequences of gun violence.

Research indicates that certain children could be at higher risk for negative outcomes if they are exposed to gun violence including those children injured due to gun violence, those who witness violent acts at close proximity, those exposed to high levels of violence in their communities or schools, and those exposed to violent media. (Collins & Swoveland, year).

Mental and Behavioral Effects

- The Child Welfare League of America reports that children and youth exposed to chronic trauma can experience **inhibited brain development**, producing a lasting impact on life outcomes. As a result, children/youth that live in neighborhoods that have high

rates of poverty and crime can have numerous skill deficits (Collins & Swoveland).

- Research also shows that "children exposed to gun violence may experience negative short and long-term psychological effects, including **anger**, **withdrawal**, **posttraumatic stress**, and **desensitization to violence**" (Garbarino et al., 2002).

- "Exposure to gun violence has been linked to a variety of psychological challenges like anger and **dissociation**, **anxiety and depression**, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It can also affect youth in the classroom, making it **difficult** for them **to concentrate** in class and **damaging** their **academic performance** and educational or career aspirations." (Bieler, 2014).

- "Children exposed to violent conditions are more likely to succumb to a wide range of negative health and behavioral outcomes later in life, including **increased risk of perpetrating violence** themselves." (Strategies for Reducing Gun Violence in American Cities)

Economic Effects

- An increase in gun violence within neighborhoods can lower the number of businesses that occupy buildings within that community. This **reduces** the **employment opportunities** within that neighborhood. Research shows that in most cities, an increase in gun violence has a negative effect on the existence of community business and employment (Irvin-Erickson, et al., 2016)

- It is estimated that youth homicides and assault-related injuries result in an estimated **$18.2 billion** in combined **medical and work loss** costs (Ref). Exactly how much money is being spent on gun violence is of interest by the nurses association and pediatric association who are pushing for more research to understand how much money is being spent specifically on after care such as hospitalization, rehabilitation, and therapy. Other costs include costs related to not only the primary victims but also secondary victims such as time off work and job loss – and area that we believe may dis-proportionately impact the Black community.

- In impoverished neighborhoods gun violence happens at an extremely higher rate than other

neighborhoods. Race and gun violence are intertwined, with a disproportionate share of African Americans living in poor neighborhoods with lower performing schools, **higher rates of incarceration** and unemployment where gun violence also exists at a higher rate. (Strategies for Reducing Gun Violence in American Cities)

Causes of gun violence

Studies have noted that the cumulative number of deaths related to gun violence is far greater than deaths associated with mass shootings (Burgason, Thomas, and Berthelot, 2013). Despite findings which reveal that as many as 99.9% Americans are likely to know a victim of gun violence, funding to address this public health concern has failed and gaps in research remain (Printz, 2017).

Understanding the causes of gun violence is substantially more difficult than studying violence in its entirety. Research regarding causes of gun violence poses a challenge, primarily, because findings on gun violence have failed to address the directionality of the relationship of gun violence funding and gun violence-related deaths (Rosenberg, 2017).

Over 750,000 incidents of injuries related to gun violence were documented over the past 10 years (Follmna, Lurie, Lee & West, 2015). According to the Gun Violence Archive, "2,920 more people have been shot across America, 906 of them fatally," between October 1st and October 26th" (Mascia and Yablon, 2017).

To put things into perspective, Mozaffarian, Hemenway, and Ludwig, (2013) pointed out, "Gun homicide alone causes 11,000 deaths each year, more than all US troops killed throughout the last decade in Iraq and Afghanistan (p.551).   A Los Angeles Times article says, "Instead of focusing on mass killings, we need to address everyday gun violence, which affects nearly 275 people a day" (Winkler, 2017).

We spend hours discussing what we can to do prevent mass shootings, but they actually account for only a fraction of gun victims. We spend almost no time on preventing the most common way guns are misused." Outside of suicides, and arguably more detrimental to the Black community, is the homicide rate.

Yet, mental illness has categorically become the mainstay of conversations pertaining to gun violence. Several analyses of the topic centrally posit that gun violence and psychiatric diagnoses should be used to mitigate violence (Metzl and MacLeish, 2015). Public health policies propose that the management of mental health would alleviate gun violence (Kivisto, 2016). Yet, research on gun violence and mental illness show that mental illness is significantly less likely than believed to be a factor in gun-related incidents (Hodges and Scalora, 2015). According

to Hodges and Scalora (2015), "Prevalence rates specific to firearm violence among psychiatric samples are scarce, and preliminary evidence suggests it may be rare and calls into question whether mental illness presents a unique risk for this form of violence" (p. 215). Studies note that mental illness is a causal factor in only "3% to 5% of violent crimes in the United States" (p.1).

<u>Environmental Stressors</u>

An effective effort to address the causes of gun violence requires a broader focus on variables associated with to gun violence. Some findings narrowly address sociocultural, educational, and behavioral issues (Fisher and Lieberman, 2013; Mozaffarian, Hemenway and Ludwig, 2013; p.551). While some

environmental stressors, consistently link such crimes with one's relationship to their environment (Cerda, 2016; Jacob, 2016). Beckett, Lartey, and Aufrichtig (2017) state, "Half of America's gun homicide victims died in just 127 cities that represent less than a quarter of the nation's population.

Within those cities, gun homicides were further concentrated in tiny neighborhood census tracts that had seen multiple gun homicide incidents." They add, "the biggest barrier is the lack of interest – and financial support – from the Americans outside the hardest-hit neighborhoods."

While public attention tends to focus on "black-on-black" violence, **structural barriers are overlooked** (Overton, 2016). Yet, social and structural

> "...the biggest barrier [to solving gun-related homicides]
> is the lack of interest – and financial support – from
> Americans outside the hardest-hit neighborhoods."

Source: Becket, Lartey, and Aufrichtig (2017)

studies consistently and vaguely focus on determinants which significantly impact the overall well-being of individuals; factors such as the "failure to meet basic needs (e.g., clean water, sanitation, nutrition, housing, immunization) due to poverty...," broader approaches; dissecting

barriers are historically-based and are huge factors in contributing to community violence (Lane et al., 2017).

This means individuals are contending with disproportionate levels of crime, trauma, stress, family disruption, economic distress and health concerns (Lane et al., 2017). Distress related to

social stressors and social change has been commonly linked to gun violence, (Jacob, 2016). Bailey et al., (2015) say, 'Gun violence is deeply rooted in social complexities" which "compound and complicate" every aspect of the individual's life.

Socioeconomic and Structural Disadvantage

Theories of social disorganization assert that **structural disadvantage** and disorganization commonly result in higher levels of violence (Burgason, Thomas and Berthelot, 2013). Findings on gun-violence suggest that gun usage is "contingent upon" higher levels of socioeconomic disadvantage and in turn, "exacerbated levels of violence" (p.8). The literature explains that social and structural barriers negatively impact individual "well-being, self-esteem and sense of control, resulting in diminished socioeconomic status and societal position. This decrease in status and position can exacerbate already apparent differences between students and further increase feelings of ostracism, isolation, and failure" (Bailey et al., 2015, p.1).

Distracting biases cause us to lose focus so we fail to address factors such as substance abuse, history of violence, access to guns and interpersonal concerns (Wolf, 2014). **Data on gun violence and mental illness show that correlations are highly skewed and do not provide an accurate analysis the issue.** Although popular opinion suggests mental illness is the leading

contributing factor to gun violence, further investigations point to more involved factors; such as Protracted Grief, Melancholia and psychic pain, layered by the complexities of environmental factors (Wintemute, 2015; Yager 2015, p. 244). Sociologist says gun violence is a vicious cycle that exacerbates already disparate conditions (Cook and Pollack, 2017).

Exposure to Gun Violence

Exposure to the **effects of community violence** increases the risk of future involvement in crime and violence (Lane et al). Studies on youth violence propose that exposure to violence increases "aggression, substance abuse, adult criminality, depression, anxiety and other mental health problems (Lane et al., 2017, p. 455).

According to Paolini's (2017) article which addresses gun-related violence in schools; depressive symptoms, the inability to cope the inability "to connect with others has contributed to the pervasiveness of gun violence" (p.8).

Misuse of Social Media

She further notes, because we live in the age of technology, many fail to connect and "are stunted emotionally and experience a **detachment from others**" (p.8). Thus, they have not developed appropriate interpersonal skills, they are unable to effectively communicate and they struggle with social acceptance.

Findings on social media usage indicate that while social networking sites are used as a tool for individuals to connect,

users actually spend more time isolating themselves from others (Alloway et al., 2014). Based on studies of personality traits and social media use is highly associated with social anxiety, difficulty integrating into social settings and introversion (Aydın, Muyan and Demir, 2013). Social media usage is also strongly connected with "social rejection, cyberbullying, depression, exposure to inappropriate content, and other negative consequences related to general well-being." (Pettijohn II et al., 2012). Recent examinations of social media highlight an increase in self-absorption with a simultaneous decrease in empathy or regard for others (Konrath, 2012).

Decreased Sense of Self

Franklin and Franklin's (2000) proposes that "**psychological invisibility** takes the form of a struggle with inner feelings and beliefs that personal talents, abilities, and character are not acknowledged or valued by others, nor by the larger society..." (p.33).   The internal struggle is often manifested through anger, rage and other maladaptive behaviors (Franklin and Franklin, 2000).

Critical considerations of violence must seriously consider structural inequality which an contribute to a "decreased sense of self-worth and a lack of autonomy, which in turn leads to violence" (Wolf et al., 2014, p.221). Similarly, clear evidence suggests that gun violence contributes to hopelessness and despair (CNN, 2016).

Lack of Social Connectedness

One study found "social connectedness" to be a key variable in minimizing the threat of danger, often found in school violence incidents (Shao-Chiu and Hemenway, 2017).   The study recognized social connectedness as a mediating factor, as it contributes to "better health outcomes, a lower likelihood of depression, and less violent behaviors (p.2). Likewise, trajectory studies show strong social connections are instrumental in shaping one's sense of hope (Stoddard et al., 2011). Juan and Hemenway (2017) point out, "one-third (34%) of perpetrators of school shootings experienced **social isolation** (i.e. the relative absence of social relationships) and were characterized by others as loners..." (p.2).

The sense of hope or hopelessness, according to Stoddard et. al., (2011) can be a powerful mitigating factor in violent behavior. Hopeless and despair are common themes in gun violence (Fabian, 2017). Studies support findings which substantially link sadness, aggression and social rejection (Twenge and Cambell, 2003).

Hopelessness and fear of Victimization

Community Psychologists describe hopelessness as a "defining characteristic" of what may be considered an "underclass personality" (Bolland, Lian and Formichella, 2005, p.293). This implies that failure is an inevitable for the individual. Unfortunately, this **sense of hopelessness** heightens the potential

for the individual to engage in riskier behaviors. Risky behaviors have been connected with fear (Cobbina, Miller and Brunson, 2008). Studies have evidenced that higher levels of fear and a need to protect one's identity is linked to gun possession and usage (Hammond and Yung, 1993). The need to **protect one's self from victimization** or re-victimization becomes more visible as the individual evolves from the victim to the perpetrator (Parson, 1989). The fear of a traumatic event re-occurring is mediated through internal mechanisms and present themselves as aggression

gun-related homicides approximately 10 times more than White children (Weyrauch, 2017). The findings are not surprising, considering studies on community violence and African American adolescents show that African American adolescents are exposed disproportionately to violence, which in turn contribute to anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, aggressive behaviors and behavioral adjustment disorders (Busby, Lambert and Lalongo, 2016).

An analysis of violence in Chicago highlights the complexity of violence in

"African American children experience gun-related homicides approximately 10x more than White children."

Source: Weyrauch (2017)

or other risker behaviors.

One study on gun violence and urban youth, shows **exposure to victimization**, direct or indirectly, may have a significant effect on delinquent behavior (McGee et al., 2017). The analysis, specifically found "direct victimization, as a measure of exposure to violence, was the best predictor of problem behavior as measured by gun-related delinquency (p.6).

Desensitization of Community Violence

Similarly, research has found that African American children experience

African American communities. Hardiman (2012) says "Violence in Chicago's African-American community can be difficult to understand until you look back over the last 40 years. We have a major problem that stems from being disconnected from any and all forms of self-identity: African-American people had to fight for the right to be accepted in the United States for so long that I believe we lost our heritage/foundation." He adds, "...Violence is so commonplace in the African-American community that some people have accepted violence as an

everyday occurrence in the ghetto. Someone gets shot and as soon as the crime scene is cleared the community returns to the daily struggle of living in the ghetto." The acceptance of these everyday occurrences has also produced a street culture that informally contributes to community violence (Richardson, Brown and Van Brakle, 2013). Rich and Grey (2005) point out that street culture dictates street codes and these codes define "informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, particularly violence" (p.5).

Lane et al., (2017) posits, "Childhood exposure to violence increases reactivity and worsens impulse control, both of which contribute to the perpetuation of aggression, violence and retaliatory behavior. **Witnessing community violence** increases the risk of substance use and emotional numbing" (Lane et al., 2017, p. 453). The sense of having to stay ready contributes to a "**constant state of hypervigilance or hyperarousal**" in communities plagued with violence (Richardson et al. 2013, pg. 11).

Extended findings highlight the role of fear in hypervigilance (Smith and Patton 2016). Tull (2017) says, "PTSD sufferers with hypervigilance live in a long-lasting state of insecurity." As a coping mechanism, the individual may become hyperaware and exhibit reckless behaviors.

The rate of gun-related deaths is considerably high among African American and Hispanic Adolescents (Reid et al., 2017; Seal et al., 2014).

These findings are not surprising, given the fact that it is estimated that as many as 96% of inner-city youth have experienced violence (Seal et al., 2014). Literature on criminology supports findings in regard to the overlap of victimization and the perpetuation of violence.

Binder and McNiel (2013) note, "Economic disadvantage, impoverished neighborhoods, and weak social bonds may contribute to the likelihood that an individual is exposed to risky situations that promote both victimization and violence" (p.123). In fact, studies show youths living in the most deprived communities are more likely to report the highest rates of exposure to violence (Zimmerman and Messner, 2013).

Research which explores the pathways of violent deaths and youth offenders say street codes or culture becomes a response to community disorganization (Richardson et al., 2013). According to Anderson "high rates of poverty, joblessness, violence, alienation, lack of faith in the police and the judicial system, and hopelessness have produced a neighborhood street culture 'code' that influences how individuals, particularly Black male youths, negotiate interpersonal violence" (Richardson et al., 2013).

Community violence is well-documented to adversely contribute to negative family relationships (Baskin-Sommers, 2016). Studies of domestic violence explain that social disorganization contributes to higher

rates of domestic violence in communities there is a lack of structure and chaos resides, researchers say individuals have a difficult time regulating themselves (Maume et al., 2014). The communities have higher levels of social disorganization and tend to lack necessary social ties and supports. Thus, there are higher levels of violence and crime (Tracy et al., 2015, Maume et al., 2014).

Fear and Distrust

The idea of "Post" connected with PTSD is null and void in urban neighborhoods (Lane et al., 2017). Rich (2016) says, "The term 'post-traumatic stress' implies that there is a "post" to the trauma (p.4). He adds, this implies that victims of urban of urban-related trauma will "return to safety," but this is certainly not the case (p.4). In fact, it is the exact opposite. These individuals are consistently faced with crime and violence. They live with exposure to violence, racism, substance abuse, adversity and poverty. Chaos becomes the norm and they are never "free of the effects of trauma." (p.4).

Under such conditions, Bolland, Lian, and Formichella (2005) contend, chaos and disorder emerge; causing people to develop a sense of distrust. This distrust causes individuals "to withdraw and isolate themselves" (p. 294). **Fear, distrust, anger, and isolation are frequently associated with the perpetration of violence** (Dehart and Moran, 2015; Bolland, Lian, and Formichella, 2005). Theorists contend that the disorganization and chaos,

which is common in many inner-city neighborhoods heightens fear and creates a feeling of powerlessness to escape a bad situation" (Bolland, 2005). Subsequently, fear and anxiety are formed (Smith and Patton, 2016; Bolland, 2005).

With regard to emotional regulation among psychopathic offenders, some studies debate fear undermines their ability to process and regulate emotions (Baskin-Sommers et al. 2013). Trauma, desensitization and numbing have increasingly been shown as contributing dynamics in the perpetuation of violence. The relationship between trauma and emotion regulation is often associated with criminality (Dargis, Newman, and Koenigs. 2015). Some have identified that psychopathic individuals are less reactive to unpleasant experiences and tend to exhibit callous behaviors and lack sensitivity (Baskin-Sommers et al. 2013). And, lack of sensitivity and a lack of self-control are often pegged as a predicating factor in crime (Entorf, 2013).

Racial Discrimination

Additional studies have found that racial discrimination has been found to contribute to psychological distress and psychopathology, uniquely, in minorities (Assari et al. 2017). Similarly, studies on the psychological effects of racism reveal that post-traumatic stress disorder leads to hypervigilance (Tull, 2017; Dalgleish et al., 2001).

Early Childhood Trauma

While early childhood trauma can set the tone for a poor life trajectory destructive path, women appear to more likely to be impacted by early experiences than their male counterpart (Scott et al., 2016). Scott et al., (2016) says, "Women who experienced interpersonal violence as children are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors as youth and in criminal behaviors as adults" and "the experience of trauma is a likely determinant in women's involvement in criminal activities and other self-defeating behaviors (p.104).   Similarly, Price et al. (2013) notes, "**Trauma experiences**, especially those which begin at an early age, prolonged, lack immediate restorative experiences, and/or involve the caregiving system, can disrupt psychological, neurobiological, relational, and cognitive development (p.652).

While there is a dearth of literature which addresses childhood trauma and the longitudinal effects of adverse childhood experiences, there is an imbalance of research examining experiences of black females, adverse childhood experiences and criminogenic factors (Burt and Simons, 2015). The lack of attention, some believe, is associated with findings which report that men are more likely to be involved in criminal activity and they are more likely to be victims (Stewart, Elifson & Sterk, 2004).

Intimate Partner Violence

It was found that "Women are a fast-growing criminal justice population according to trends over the past 30 years (NRCJIW, 2016). Many findings suggest that the recent **trends in crimes committed by females have a direct link to intimate partner violence**. Other examinations reveal connections between intimate partner violence and gun-related incidences. According to the CDC (2017) "more than half of female homicide victims were killed in connection to intimate partner violence (Domonoske, 2017). It was also noted that African American women experience imprisonment more than 2 to 4 times the rate of their counterparts (NRCJIW, 2016; Taylor, 2016). In Why So Many Black Women Are Behind Bars, Hutchinson (2006) says, "Women are less likely than men to assault or murder strangers while committing crimes. Two-thirds of the women jailed assaulted or killed relatives or intimates. Their victims were often spouses, lovers, or boyfriends. In many cases, they committed violence defending themselves against sexual or physical abuse. Women's groups and even the more enlightened governors have recognized that women that kill abusive husbands or lovers have acted out of fear".

According to data by the FBI, in 2014, "black women were murdered at more than twice the rate of white women. Of black victims who knew their killers, 57 percent were killed by an intimate partner" (Taylor, 2014). Some findings

cite fear of abuse and threats of victimization as relational/causal factors in gun violence among black women (Sabri et al., 2014).   For many Black women, the idea of being victimized is startling and provokes the desire to protect themselves.

According to a study by the Pew Research Center, 59% of African American women view owning a gun as being a necessity and the only way to have a "fighting chance" (Staff, 2017). Cooper (2015) argues conversations about violent crime "continue to make Black women intersectionally invisible. Within Black political discourses, the focus on intracommunal and intraracial crime usually center on violent neighborhood-based crime, perpetrated by young men. Within our broader national conversation about gun control, female victims of lethal intimate partner violence are rarely the driving force for the conversation."

Although others believe that the increase in Black women vying for gun ownership is a response to the current political climate and White supremacists campaigns; gun instructors say African American Women express feelings of vulnerability; vulnerability to being victims of domestic violence and sexual violence (Roberts, 2017). Many Black women voice concerns about living alone and wanting to protect themselves, their children and their homes (Romanyshyn 2017).

Advocates argue that gun ownership, simply, has become the replacement for the male presence for women who are

realizing they are prime targets for victimization (Romanyshyn 2017). Political scientists argue the increase in gun-carry permits will increase accidental shootings and gun-related violence (Romanyshyn 2017). With ownership, comes a potential hazard. Despite these fears, gun-advocates quickly argue that laws regulating firearms will never substantially impact gun-related violence because of expansive loopholes and Unregulated Gun Markets (Defilippis and Hughes, 2015). And, in spite of fears, community violence theorists argue failure to adequately address community ills should be the primary concern (Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence Guns & Domestic Violence, 2017).

Weismann (2017) argues that efforts to mitigate gun-violence should be shifted away from controlled gun possession and redirected towards violence against women and community needs. Community activists are adamant that the system, as a whole, is "failing black women" (Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence Guns & Domestic Violence, 2017; p.8). They note that while dominant discourse centers on males and gun violence, women have traditionally been ignored. Conversations have failed to explore challenges of black women and access to support services, adequately. Nor have the conversations addressed the unique challenges that black women face, in terms of their path through the criminal justice systems as perpetuators of gun violence, in such instances. Most

of all, discussions have not touched upon how all of these factors may contribute to the perpetuation of gun-violence by black women (Commission on Domestic & Sexual Violence Guns & Domestic Violence, 2017).

Strategies for Prevention

Treating gun violence as a disease may heighten attention and research activities around the exploration of its causes and consequences beyond the obvious, death. The effects of gun violence does not end with too many funerals, but has long lasting effects that creates a cycle of dysfunction in the Black community.

However, identifying correlates of gun violence with adverse impacts in the community at large, and the Black community specifically, requires funding for comprehensive research programs and effective prevention strategies.

Considering the impact of gun violence from a community health perspective allows for the examination of gun violence in the same manner as other dangers to public health diseases such as cancer or diabetes. Not doing so prevents comprehensive approaches to stem gun violence which fails to promote viable forms of prevention and cure/treatment (Laine et al, 2017).

Physicians have even become vested in the topic of gun violence and urge that gun violence receive the same attention as treatment of drunk driving and smoking cessation (Mozaffarian,

Hemenway and Ludwig, 2013). There is consensus in the medical community that countermeasures to this national epidemic should exist and can be implemented through enacting laws or improving public policy (Laine et. al., 2013).

While public policy and passing laws have a place in the discussion of curbing gun violence, this overview highlights other gun violence correlates such as the improper reliance on technology, hopelessness, community violence, over-exposure to violence, early childhood trauma, etc. that should also be a part of the conversation. We believe it is time for a set of programs and policies that reach beyond the issue of access and gun safety, which on their own are incapable of decreasing gun violence as an everyday stressor in the Black community.

Some programmatic recommendations to be explored might include more programs such as the "Voices against Violence," which is a collaboration between the United Nations, Women and the World Association of Girl Guides, and Girls Scouts. This program is an original and innovative co-educational curriculum designed for various age groups ranging from 5 to 25 years that provides young people with tools and expertise to understand the root causes of violence in their communities, to educate and involve their peers and communities to prevent such violence, and to learn about where to access support if violence is experienced. The curriculum includes a Handbook for peer educators that will help them deliver age-appropriate

sessions, as well as age-appropriate non-formal education activities. Voices against Violence is a tool for young people around the world that can be adapted for a national context, translated into local languages, and rolled out in schools and communities in partnership with youth organizations, UN partners and governments.

Another program is the CDC's Preventing Youth Violence: Opportunities for Action and Taking Action to Prevent program. The goal is to enhance the skills and experiences of individual youth. Serve as a mentor, tutor, or volunteer at schools and youth-serving organizations to support the healthy development of all young people. The programs help to provide meaningful and appropriate opportunities through businesses and social/civic groups for youth to develop their interests, skills, and talents. The program is designed to praise good behavior and take immediate action to stop youth violence when it occurs by using and promoting youth violence prevention strategies that are based on evidence to benefit the entire community. The program insists on the use of data to make decisions and put in place evidence-based approaches. It seeks to find and use existing resources to learn about effective youth violence prevention activities and programs. In essence, the program aims to **help communities build their capacity to prevent youth violence.**

Another effort trending in recent years is the increase in numbers of African American women enrolling in firearm safety classes and taking steps to own their own firearms. Investment in

community programs designed to educate African American women on matters of self-defense and firearm safety is an important step in keeping women safer from intimate partner violence.

The [Black Women's Defense League](#) is a Dallas-based organization playing an important role in increasing gun violence education and gun ownership as a tool for self-defense. The organization is notable for its' pro-gun stance in response to patriarchal violence. They work to ensure the best response to armed or un-armed rescues for women.

Gun advocate and domestic violence and sexual assault survivor, Marchelle Tigner, is a Georgia-based firearm instructor who aims to train 1 million women on how to operate and shoot a firearm. Her objective is to bring ladies, especially women of color, into the training fold to give them the confidence and knowledge to survive, according to an [August 7, 2017 article](#) on Guns.com.

Coming from an entirely different angle, the American Association of Pediatrics (Ref) suggests that guns be subject to safety and design regulations, like other consumer products. They urge that consumer companies develop quality, violence-free programming and constructive dialogue among child health and education advocates, the Federal Communications Commission, and motion picture industries, as well as toy, video games and other software manufactures and designers. They suggest that companies evaluate firearm injury prevention and

intervention strategies such as conflict resolution, alternatives to violence, storage techniques (such as trigger locks, lock boxes, and gun safes), and educational programs for kids and teens.

There are a number of other programs that are working to curb gun violence.

See Table below.

Organization	Approach	Website	Location	Focus
Community Justice Reform Coalition	Prevention / Reactive	Link	Texas	Gun Violence Prevention among Black women
Girls for Gender Equity	Prevention	Link	Brooklyn, NY	Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) is an intergenerational organization committed to the physical, psychological, social, and economic development of girls and women. Through education, organizing and physical fitness, GGE encourages communities to remove barriers and create opportunities for girls and women to live self-determined lives.
Operation Lipstick	Prevention / Advocacy	Link	San Francisco, CA	One woman is capable of putting hundreds of guns on our streets. **LIPSTICK** transforms her from being part of the problem to being part of the solution. LIPSTICK deploys peer-to-peer education, social service intervention, public awareness campaigns and community organizing to empower women and girls to say No!
The Louis D. Brown Peace Institute	Reactive	Link	Dorchester, MA	We refuse to be used to take a life.
Violence Policy Center	Policy	Link	Washington, DC?	The Violence Policy Center has many initiatives of which two include: "Black Homicide Victimization" & "Female Homicide Victimization by Males"
Women Against Gun Violence	Advocacy	Link	Los Angeles	Women Against Gun Violence has two active front-burner programs, our TALK Project that emphasizes safe gun storage; and our Education For Action series of salons and summits that brings together activists, community members, policy makers, and experts to engage in creative problem solving and develop new approaches to address gun violence.
Women Donors Network	Fund raising for advocacy	Link	San Francisco, CA	(Article Title) Not Just a Stand Against Gun Violence, But for Women .... Women Donors Network's (WDN) mission is to advance a just, equitable, and sustainable world by leveraging the wealth, power, and community of progressive women donors.
Young Women of Color Health Advocacy Coalition	Advocacy	link	Cambria Heights, NY	YWCHAC is a coalition for and made up of young women of color, created to foster development of the organizational and advocacy skills necessary to help change the climate and policies in which decisions about them are being made.
YWCA	Prevention / Reactive	Link	National	Has done political advocacy to address legislation on gun violence of women experiencing domestic violence.
The American Medical Women's Association	Education / Advocacy	Link	Philadelphia, PA	As women physicians at all stages of our medical careers and with a range of specialties and recognizing the significant impact of gun violence on communities throughout the country and the considerable repercussions of gun violence on the medical system, we have created the American Medical Women's Association Gun Violence Prevention Task Force.

In the end, DREF is committed to understanding how to protect Black women and girls. Through advocacy, research, policy recommendations, or programmatic funding, DREF will continue to do its' part to alleviate the gun violence epidemic in our community.

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