

EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

2016 WHITE PAPER



FIGURE 1.

Homicide and Shooting Statistics in Chicago

January 1 - October 3, 2016

545 shooting homicides in 9 months

61 shooting homicides per month, average

2 shooting homicides per day, average

1 shooting homicide every 12 hours, average

3,154 shootings in 9 months

350 shootings per month, average

12 shootings per day, average

2 shootings per hour, average

EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

1. THE PROBLEM

Shootings in Chicago are double what they are in New York and Los Angeles combined, the two largest cities in the United States. Every day children in impoverished, crime ridden communities are facing this violence. But what does it mean for tomorrow? Kids can't ride their bikes down the street, conquer imaginary mountains in their yard, draw with chalk on the sidewalk, or even walk to school without the risk of being a victim to gun violence. An entire generation has been denied their right to live in youthful trust. This is a loss that will be felt.

What impact does this horrific violence have on our children in the future?

Violence takes a direct toll on the physical, mental, and emotional health of its victims, but none more so than children. Children who are exposed to violence are more likely to suffer from attachment problems, regressive behavior, anxiety, and depression, and to have aggression and conduct problems. Other health-related issues, as well as academic and cognitive problems, delinquency, and involvement in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, are also associated with experiences of violence.¹ Violence leaves no aspect of a child's life untouched and robs them of normal development and future opportunities.

Any violent incident is a potentially traumatic event, which involves directly experiencing or being threatened with physical or psychological harm, or witnessing others being harmed. Examples of events that are potentially traumatic to youth include acts of violence, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, accidents, intensive medical procedures, and the unexpected death of loved ones. Children who feel the effects of violence often manifest negative consequences throughout their lives.²

Violence is the number one cause of death for some children and youth:

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the leading cause of death for African-Americans ages 10 to 24 is violence. Two out of every five of those deaths occur due to homicide. Violence is the second leading cause of death for Latinos in the same age group.

Often a single act of violence defines the path of that child's development. And too many kids in our city, neighborhoods, and programs are suffering the negative effects of widespread violence, meaning these kids have endured multiple exposures. Black and brown youth are twice as likely to witness a shooting or a stabbing as white youth in the same school system, according to recent studies.⁷ The type of violence children are exposed to increases in severity with age. For children ages six to nine, the most common exposure was assault without a weapon or injury, and the most common perpetrator of assault was a sibling. More serious types of assaults, including those involving a weapon or injury, were most common among 10 to 13-year olds. All other forms of violence, including dating violence, attempted rape or sexual harassment, and physical or emotional abuse, were most common among the oldest youth, ages 14 to 17.⁸

That said, even community violence that children do not directly witness has been shown to negatively impact children's attentional abilities and cognitive performance.⁹ While violence is certainly not limited to communities and persons in poverty, there exists a very clear and unfortunate correlation between the instability and despair of poverty, and the desperation of violence.

FIGURE 2.

Violence Affects Youth Development

Violence is linked to impaired academic achievement:

In children and youth, violence is linked to impaired school performance and judgment, vulnerability, and high risk for substance abuse, victimization, and emotional struggles.³ Youth with exposure to violence are unable to focus, learn, and develop in the same manner as their peers.

Violence is linked to chronic health conditions:

Being exposed to violence as a stressor has been linked to chronic conditions like heart disease, cancer, asthma, and stroke. Exposure is also tied to mental health problems, like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, stress, anxiety, and depression.⁴

Violence is linked to involvement with the youth justice system:

Multiple studies have found that justice-involved youth have experienced significantly higher rates of trauma than youth not involved in the justice system, with an estimated 70-96% of justice-involved youth having experienced at least one traumatic event.

2. NO ONE SINGLE SOLUTION

To start to prevent violence, its many causes must first be addressed. Very often these causes mirror the root causes of poverty. There is no one solution to ending either violence or poverty, but a viable plan would simultaneously consider both issues while pursuing enhanced quality and dignity of life for persons and communities. Initial interventions may include services for mental and emotional health, trauma responsive services, domestic violence, substance abuse, gang activity, employment, and homelessness, along with the confounding layers of other issues. For children, the earlier the intervention, the more likely the chance for success.

3. CATHOLIC CHARITIES PROGRAMS HELP IN THE PROBLEMS OF VIOLENCE FACED BY CHILDREN

Employment

Offering a positive alternative to danger on the streets, Catholic Charities facilitates annual Summer Youth Employment Programs in partnership with the city of Chicago. Program participation presents an opportunity for young adults, ages 16 to 24, to learn workplace skills, earn

money, and broaden their network and perspective of the world. Over the summer months, Catholic Charities worked with more than 300 young adults from neighborhoods most impacted by violence. Summer Youth Employment offers more than a summer job and a stipend; youth learn new skills, acquaint themselves with workplace expectations, build relationships, develop emotional maturity, and connect with the community through civic engagement trips and activities. Youth attest to the great benefits of the program, and many become repeat attendees. Through Summer Youth Employment, Catholic Charities intervenes at a critical moment in the youths' development, as they struggle with increased violence, summer learning loss, and disenchantment with society, and shows them an alternative path forward.

Counseling

A gang-related shooting happened at a bus stop adjacent to a school where Catholic Charities provides counseling specifically to help children who are victims of trauma. As expected with children exposed to community violence, there were a variety of responses. One second grade student, Carlos, who normally completed exceptional academic work, began demonstrating aggressive behaviors in his classroom which resulted in a suspension. His history

was filled with other trauma including a household fire, addicted parent, poverty, and possible domestic abuse. After two years of Catholic Charities therapy, Carlos successfully regained control of his behaviors, and with some hurdles along the way, he regulated the intrusive thoughts and feelings. He was able to resume achievement in school. Catholic Charities counseling allows kids to break the cycle of violence and realize future successes. Counseling techniques directly respond to each student's needs; children express themselves in languages they use most often, including play, art, and movement. With Catholic Charities professional assistance, Carlos is a success story. Unfortunately, not enough youth have the same result.

When Derek was in seventh grade, his gang-involved father was incarcerated. Derek was very angry and refused to listen to anyone in a position of authority. School was especially difficult; Derek talked back and rebelled. His principal referred him to the Catholic Charities Community Family Service Center, which provides individual and family trauma-focused therapy services in school settings. With increased gang activity and excess neighborhood violence, summers were especially difficult to avoid trouble and danger. After many counseling sessions, Derek was able to express his feelings about his father's incarceration and refocus attention on school and engage in positive activities. With a renewed motivation to create a positive life, Derek looked forward to school where he continued to excel and had become known as a leader.

Youth Development

The Peace Corner Youth Center provides a safe haven for youth on Chicago's west side. The Austin neighborhood is much like any underserved community in Chicago, with tragedies and violence routine occurrences. Kids witness rampant unemployment, underfunded schools, and a lack of community resources. But with the help of Catholic Charities programming, youth spend less free time in the summer and after school on the streets and more time in a safe place that supports them. The Peace Corner offers athletics, academic programs and games, and field trips to places like the Adler Planetarium in addition to trauma-informed counseling, should the need arise. Youth engage in community service projects like peace marches and community gardens. The Peace Corner provides a place for young people to feel safe, increase resilience in coping with challenges, and develop life skills that will help them succeed.

Housing

Catholic Charities New Hope Apartments assisted Gina and her children at their most desperate moment. Already living on the streets without a safe home, the family recently suffered an unthinkable tragedy when Gina's eldest daughter was murdered. After Gina called 311, Catholic Charities Mobile Outreach team drove the family to a transitional shelter, where she met with professional staff that guided her to Catholic Charities New Hope Apartments program. Within weeks, the family was placed in a safe home, in a familiar community where they had connections. A dedicated case manager helped them successfully settle, restoring a sense of peace and allowing time to grieve. Through the case management and support services, Gina addressed and managed her medical problems, and the kids even received two new bikes when theirs were stolen. The trial for her daughter's murder is about to happen, but with the support of her case manager and Catholic Charities, Gina will not be alone. New Hope Apartments has stabilized a family torn apart by violence. Beyond securing a house, Catholic Charities caring staff has given Gina and her children a home and hope for the future.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

As a collective effort, Catholic Charities; the Archdiocese of Chicago and other faith-based programs; community-based social services programs; the Archdiocesan parishes, hospitals, and schools; police departments; the business community; other coalitions; individuals; families; and the neighborhoods themselves can render change and mitigate the violence threatening the well-being of children.

Catholic Charities calls specifically for greater investments to be made in effective mental and behavioral health programs, to alleviate the already existing trauma of violence. Invest in robust mental health assessment and counselling services for children, youth, and adults with trauma and post-traumatic stress syndrome.

- Grow and coordinate summer and after-school programs for youth to engage in, invest in themselves and their communities, and ultimately help keep youth out of gangs, violent circumstances, and the criminal justice system.
- Increase opportunities for all children and young adults, including gang members, to experience nurturing companionship and trusting relationships with adults. Increase access to role models and mentors especially through formal programs.

FIGURE 3.

Entering the Cycle of Violence

In a study of a single Chicago Public School, University of Chicago researchers found that 46% of students had witnessed someone being injured or killed - in a non-gang incident (which is significant itself). Child development experts agree that this experience can have wide-reaching effects on children's growth.

Witnessing violence has been linked to future involvement in crime.⁵ A 2004 study of 1,829 youth arrested and held in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Chicago found the three most frequently reported traumatic experiences were "having 'seen or heard someone get hurt very badly or be killed' (75% males, 64% females), having been

'threatened with a weapon' (59% males, 47% females), and being in a situation where 'you thought you or someone close to you was going to be hurt very badly or die' (54% males, 49% females)." Moreover, 30% of the girls studied reported "having been forced to do something sexual that you did not want to do".⁶

- Expand early education programs. While proven effective, they are severely limited in number and a more long-term strategy is needed.
- Expand opportunities for children of incarcerated parents to establish or maintain the parent-child bond.
- Develop emergency social services responses on nights and weekends, including pastoral responses; initiate a post-violent incident response both immediate services from that moment on, with a focus on mental health crisis treatment and anti-retaliation responses. Establish programs that quickly foster healthy responses, reestablish stability, and stop the cycle of violence.
- Investigate and support emerging restorative justice programs and neighborhood-based resource "hubs" as promising initiatives for changing violent patterns in the community.
- Invest in programs for vocational training, apprenticeships, and training for seeking and maintaining employment in order to break the intergenerational problem of poverty.
- Increase the availability of safe and affordable housing for both younger and older populations.
- Invest in programs that address substance use and abuse in youth early on in their development.
- Expand communication to youth and families on how to access available services.
- Expand family strengthening-focused programming and efforts to establish future solutions to the sources of poverty and violence. Existing programs need greater capacity to help address layers of issues.

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Catholic Charities urges community members across the Archdiocese of Chicago and beyond to reach out to and support social service agencies like Catholic Charities in whatever way possible.

Catholic Charities is aided in its mission by thousands of volunteers each year. This enables us to be efficient, and maintain the ratio of 92 cents of every dollar we raise going directly to our programs. Whether you become involved through your Parish, your circle of friends, or, if when you retire, you find yourself with time and expertise to share, volunteerism not only provides needed human resources for Catholic Charities, but it allows us to offer more compassionate services to people in need. In return, we attempt to provide all of our volunteers with an enriching experience that matches interests and enhances the quality of lives.

Donate, volunteer, and partner with Catholic Charities to help end violence by addressing its root causes.

TO VOLUNTEER, CALL: (312) 655-7322

www.volunteerbridge.com

TO DONATE, CALL: (312) 655-7525

www.catholiccharities.net/donate







“Violence infests our neighborhoods and casts a dark and traumatizing shadow over the lives of too many children.

Violence has become a normal and even expected experience. This should never be.”

Msgr. Mike Boland



www.catholiccharities.net

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OUR MISSION

Catholic Charities fulfills the Church's role in the mission of charity to anyone in need by providing compassionate, competent, and professional services that strengthen and support individuals, families, and communities based on the value and dignity of human life.

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Near North

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Chicago, Illinois 60654
(312) 655-7000

Southwest

St. Gall Parish
5533 South Sawyer Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60629
(773) 349-8835

SUBURBAN COOK COUNTY

North/Northwest Regional Services

Family Service Center
1717 Rand Road
Des Plaines, Illinois 60016
(847) 376-2100

West Regional Services

1400 South Austin Boulevard
Cicero, Illinois 60804
(708) 222-1491

South Regional Services

(708) 333-8379

Southwest Regional Office

7000 West 111th Street, Ste. 101
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LAKE COUNTY

Lake County Services

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Center
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