

Characteristics of Gun Violence

Committee on Priorities for a Public Health Research Agenda to Reduce the Threat of Firearm-related Violence

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Characteristics of Gun Violence

Information from three roundtable
discussions with senior law and front line
enforcement personnel

Sheldon Greenberg, Ph.D.
Division of Public Safety Leadership
School of Education
Johns Hopkins University

Purpose...

1. Draw closer ties between public health and public safety in advancing the evidence and informing practice
2. Provide law enforcement perspective on characteristics of gun violence and shooting encounters
3. Provide research topics for consideration

Characteristics of Gun Violence

Research challenge:
Advancing the evidence

Decision makers in law enforcement change rapidly...almost half of the chiefs of police of the nation's largest law enforcement agencies were not in their positions three years ago.

Change at senior and mid-management levels is more frequent.

Characteristics of Gun Violence

Research challenge:
Advancing the evidence

Law enforcement agencies and their personnel focus on what the mass dictates...response to calls for service, crisis resolution, traffic safety, and crime deterrence at the neighborhood level.

Preventing and responding to multiple casualty events and other aberrations, while important, is not the highest priority.

Characteristics of Gun Violence

Research challenge: Advancing the evidence

Greater attention must be given to advancing research on gun violence to practice. Much of the best research does not make it to application.

Generally, law enforcement personnel are not oriented to participating in, identifying, and applying research.

Evidence must be marketed and conveyed with “how to’s.”

Law enforcement officer perspective...

1. Law enforcement wants to be better informed.
2. Important to distinguish characteristics of gun violence by type. Broad-based information on gun violence has modest value to law enforcement.
3. Much of the political, media, and popular dialogue and hype tends to lump all types of gun violence together.
4. Law enforcement personnel cite ten types of gun violence (identified in three facilitated roundtable discussions).

Types of Gun Violence

(as identified by front line law enforcement personnel)

1. Random shooting event (rare)
2. Domestic and intimate partner-related shooting
3. Shooting as part of or subsequent to a street crime (robbery, drug deal)
4. Gang-related shooting (street gangs, drug gangs)
5. Multiple casualty shooting (school, campus, shopping center, military base)
6. Illness-driven shooting (suicide, homicide/suicide, mercy, mental illness)
7. Defense or protection-driven shooting
8. Accidental shooting
9. Police action
10. Military action (cited, but no connection to local police)

Underlying factors/influences on gun violence

(in addition to accessibility to weapon)

- Greed
- Anger
- Vengeance
- Fear
- Despondency
- Survival
- Protection (including executive protection)
- Prevention
- Carelessness
- Illness
- War

Focus on common characteristics of individual shooting incidents (except for military action, some police action, and sniper shootings)

- Quick (entire incident)
- Close
- Chaotic and in constant motion
- Shooter has familiarity with the weapon (familiarity may vary significantly from skill)
- Shooter had prior contact with the intended victim
- Involves a handgun rather than long gun
- In most cases, shooter chooses the environment
- Victim has little or no defense at point of shooting
- Multiple rounds fired (except for suicide)
- Rounds fired miss intended target (and go somewhere)
- Vast majority is non-fatal

Considerations for research...

(four priorities)

- Fear as a predominant influence in the decision by non-criminals to use or not use a firearm in a crisis situation
- Identifying the needs of front line law enforcement personnel regarding gun and violence-related research by the public health community
- Assumptions about skill in using a handgun in a life/death encounter by non-law enforcement/non-military personnel, with attention to those who completed a firearms training course (including simulation training)
- Risks and assumptions associated with teachers and other school officials armed with handguns in school facilities as a deterrent and intervention strategy to stop/reduce multiple casualty shootings

Considerations for research...

(additional considerations)

- Having a gun at-the-ready (availability) versus readiness to use a gun (application) in a life-death encounter
- Framing of public health research to meet the needs of the various types of law enforcement agencies (large, medium, small, urban suburban, state, local, and specialty [campus, transit]) serving communities in the United States
- Risk resulting from police inability to identify a non-criminal shooter in a multi-weapon shooting encounter
- Informing the public health community: What public health practitioners need to know about the law enforcement culture and police operations to facilitate greater application of gun and violence-related research

Thank you...