

The Gun Violence Tragedy

Black and Latinx children and teens are impacted by gun violence at higher rates than their white peers, in part because of deliberate policy decisions that created segregated neighborhoods and underinvestments in their communities.¹ Exposure to gun violence has an impact on children's and teens' psychological and mental well-being and affects their school performance, among other factors. When neighborhoods and schools are not safe from gun violence, entire generations of American children are affected. With the production of guns, people often abuse this power and decide to use it for nefarious purposes. According to teamenough.org on average 316 people in America are shot and the statistics continue as follows. "Every day 106 people die from gun violence, 210 people are shot and survive, 38,826 die from gun violence, and 76,725 people survive gun injuries, etc". From these statistics, gun violence is very obviously a problem in America however one thing goes under the radar every time a shooting happens and news reporters interview the victim. People who saw the shooting occur, what effect does it have on the person?

Walter Bradford Cannon is an American Psychologist professor and chairman of the Department of Physiology at Harvard Medical School. Walter wrote a book called “bodily changes in pain, hunger, fear, and rage”. He is more commonly known for the term he coined “fight or flight response”. In this book, he noted that when animals are threatened by exposure to a predator their body releases adrenaline “the overall effect of adrenaline is to prepare the body for the ‘fight or flight response in times of stress, i.e. for vigorous and/or sudden action. Key actions of adrenaline include increasing the heart rate, increasing blood pressure, expanding the air passages of the lungs, enlarging the pupil in the eye”. We can infer from this that whenever someone hears a gunshot their immediate reaction is flight meaning to get away as far as possible. The person can only be experiencing one thing which is fear. They’re scared because their life is in danger so a natural response is for them to run away. Furthermore, on [businessinsider.com](https://www.businessinsider.com) there are studies that have shown that the brain “rapidly releases cortisol, adrenaline (aka epinephrine), and other hormones like serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. This can lead novice shooters to feel intense fear, anxiety, or aggression after shooting”. This not only applies to people who are shooting the gun but people who are around the shooting as well. The bright muzzle flash, the recoil, and the loud bang. All this occurs in a matter of seconds and it can leave a lot of people rattled by the experience. The rush of neurochemicals to the brain directly affects bodily functions. An example of this is the digestive system pausing and your eyes beginning to dilate. The reason for your digestive system pausing is because your body is in fight or flight and is prioritizing other bodily functions to help you survive while it puts others such as the digestive tract on hold until you’ve calmed down. Likewise, some people have a positive experience when shooting a firearm. It has been recorded that “after the danger has

passed, the nervous system responds by releasing all sorts of chemicals to calm the body back to normal, while others that spiked linger for some time. The initial response and come-down that follows can lead to a strong sense of pleasure in some people”. While it is well known some people are scared others have been known to be exhilarated by the experience.

While it is known that gun violence has effects on a person physically it is also worth noting the mental side effects as well. People have experienced second-hand trauma despite not being a victim at all. According to publichealth.columbia.edu “not only to those who have come in direct contact with it but to those like me who have internalized the secondary trauma of mass shootings experienced through television and social media. While the psychological effects of large-scale acts of violence most acutely affect those directly involved, there is evidence to suggest that individuals develop similar symptoms— such as post-traumatic stress disorder— without having witnessed first-hand trauma.” This is direct evidence as to how people who aren't even directly involved but rather a witness can also have catastrophic effects on a person. The article adds on by saying “There is strong scientific evidence that chronic stress causes epigenetic changes, which have lasting effects on our health and behavior by altering the way our genes function. Chronic stress acts differently on the body than acute trauma: it accumulates over time and silently alters our DNA. Long-term exposure to stress has been linked with the development of mood disorders, depression, anxiety, and other persistent illnesses. But it doesn't stop there. Epigenetic changes to our genes are likely passed to our children, in the same way, we inherit hair or eye color.” Not only is the stress and anxiety harmful to the person but it has a chance to be passed down to the child which is bad because children are innocent and shouldn't

be experiencing mental health problems at such a young age. All of these are due to the lack of gun violence control in America and how easy it is to acquire one. In the United States, you have to pass a background check that checks to see if you have a criminal record and immigration status. It is worth noting some states have additional restrictions but generally those two are what's required.

School is the cornerstone of our community and helps build character and shapes our youth. Now imagine if something was to disrupt that education. School shootings are a tragedy that is unfortunately common in America. While these tragic acts of violence result in people dying or being injured there's also an effect on other students. According to [journalistsresource.org](https://journalistsresource.org/article/children-school-shootings-absenteeism) “Children who attend public schools where a shooting occurred are, on average, 1.8 percentage points more likely to be chronically absent than kids at similar schools that have had no shootings. Students exposed to school shootings are 1.3 percentage points more likely to repeat a grade, on average.” Attendance is an important factor in school because when you miss a day you miss out on information that is required of you to graduate by missing out behind the rest of the students and you will need to catch up to everyone else. Getting left behind puts the student at a disadvantage and thanks to gun violence chronic absence in a child will increase due to fear and safety. Despite their valid reasoning, they are still at risk of graduating due to their attendance being so low. In addition “students exposed to a school shooting in grades 9 through 11 are 4.4 percentage points less likely to have jobs when they reach age 24 to 26, and their average annual earnings are \$2,779.84 lower. This estimate, the researchers write, “implies a \$115,550 reduction in the present discounted value of lifetime earnings per shooting-exposed student”. This is probably due to attendance being poor. Since they missed a lot of days they

generally are missing a lot of knowledge that may be required for some jobs and since they lack those skills they, unfortunately, cannot get any jobs. Not only is this unfortunate but it goes to show what a tragedy can do to a student even if they aren't directly injured.

Despite all these problems, it's not something that can't be resolved. One proposition is to ban all semi-automatic guns unless they're military personnel. Semi-automatic weapons have a detachable magazine which allows for more ammunition but no citizen or police officer should have a weapon like that in any community because of the dangers it poses. Another proposition is we have stricter gun laws so that anyone can just get a gun. Such a weapon should be reserved for official personnel only such as the police or a rightfully discharged veteran. While the second amendment does in fact state every American has the right to bear arms that were written in 1791 so a long time has passed since then and what's been accepted then most likely isn't accepted into modern society. The people committing the acts are suffering from some mental illness and yet they somehow have access to such dangerous weaponry. Guns should be confiscated from those who aren't official personnel because gun violence is getting out of hand and its effects on our society are too deleterious to ignore. It's way easier to own a gun than it is to own a car. To get a car you have to go through a bunch of procedures in order to drive alone however you can walk into Walmart and purchase a firearm. Although this issue affects Americans as a whole it's not something out of reach and is something that we can definitely resolve with time and activism and soon we can live peacefully.

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