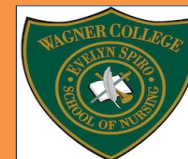




Gun Violence and its Effects on School Aged Children in Newtown, Connecticut

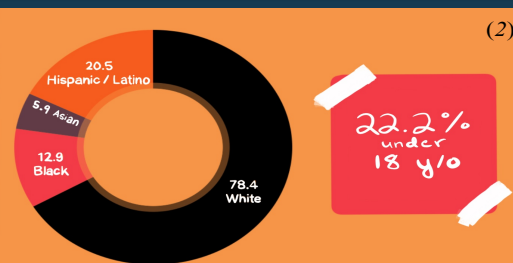


Aleksandra Kubrak WCSN, Alexa Buralassi WCSN, Serena Lawrence WCSN
Wagner College Evelyn L. Spiro School of Nursing

Introduction

- Gun violence is an urgent, complex, and multifaceted problem that needs to be addressed and it has become an overwhelming issue that seems to have no answer in sight.
- This problem has become an unfortunate reality not only in the streets, but as well as in schools around the country thus leaving a worry in the back of every school age child, every teacher, and every parents mind. The impact of gun violence goes beyond those who are shot and killed.
- An estimated three million American children witness gun violence every year, which can lead to poor performance in school and serious physical and behavioral health issues later in life (1).

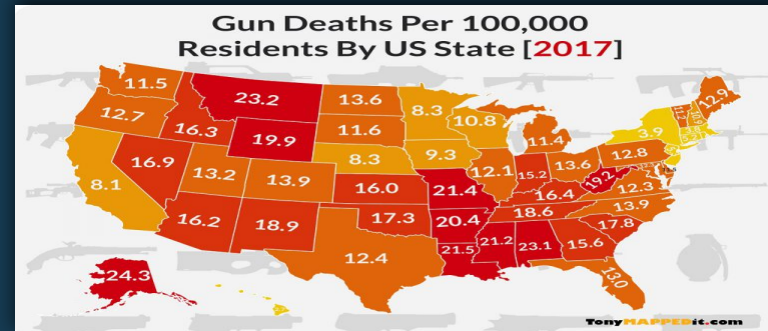
Community Assessment and Analysis



- The specific population to be focused on are the children and school aged students of Newtown (Fairfield County), Connecticut. It is important to focus on those who have been exposed or are at higher risk of being exposed to gun violence; this younger generation falls to the very vulnerable end of the spectrum of victims of gun violence.
- The community is predominantly white, with less than 10% accounting for other ethnicities; 256 residents are foreign.
- The current unemployment rate is 3.5% within Newtown and recent job growth has been negative with the consistent impact of COVID-19.
- Due to children being the population of focus, any economic effects on the environment would be familial (I).

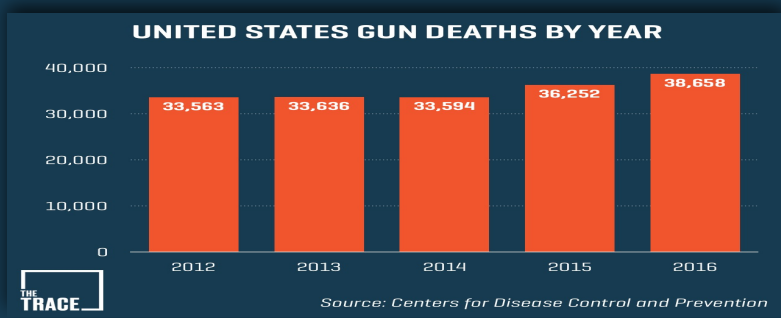
Problem in the Community

- The major issue our group identified is the effects of gun violence in school aged children in Newtown, Connecticut. On December 14th, 2012 at the Sandy Hook Elementary School twenty year old Adam Lanza, shot and killed twenty-six people including twenty children between the ages of six and seven, and six adult staff members (3).
- The tragic events that took place in Newtown, Connecticut started a much needed national conversation about gun violence in school aged children.
- Sandy Hook stands out because of the large number of deaths in a single incident, the nature of the premeditated act and the characteristics of the victims; young, innocent, and defenseless.
- The shooting has been labeled as a "fundamentally different" episode of gun violence (4). This tragedy became the second deadliest school based shooting massacre in US history. The aftermath became a tipping point in a national discussion regarding potential solutions to curbing gun violence.
- Gun violence goes beyond the physical aspect of it; the mental health effects are just as devastating. In the event of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, almost all direct witnesses reported psychological symptoms. The National Center for PTSD estimates that 28% of people who have witnessed a mass shooting develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and about a third develop acute stress disorder (5). Those who are impacted by gun violence may experience stress, depression, and anxiety along with PTSD.
- The psychiatric effects of gun violence in school aged children is another national conversation that must be brought to light. Although resources are already available in Newtown, Connecticut for those who experienced the 2012 tragedy, implementing a threat assessment program may be beneficial for those in the community.



Proposed Solution

- A Threat Assessment Program would establish interventions and activities to foster a safe environment for students to receive their education. The development of this program would keep students aware of potential threats and give them resources to stay safe.
- The primary prevention for the program would be to develop a campaign to help educate students and staff on how to identify threats when near it. Those who have an increased risk of hurting themselves or others often show signs before an act of violence takes place.
- A secondary prevention would be a screening tool to identify students who are at risk of committing violence. Professionals would be trained in using a questionnaire to screen students and identify which students are a potential threat to others.
- High risk students from the screening tool would be recommended to join a group therapy for conflict management. The group therapy is the tertiary prevention component of our program.
- The key component of the threat assessment program would be the collaborative approach. It would ensure that a psychologist or a mental health nurse is available to students on school premises. It serves as a critical resource for students to have the opportunity to speak to a professional one on one whenever needed. The school psychologist or nurse will be among the first to know when students are experiencing problems or when they are a potential threat to others. They should guide students through the emotional and behavioral problems that they may be facing (6).



References

1. "CT Against Gun Violence." n.d. CT Against Gun Violence. Accessed November 23, 2020. <http://cagv.org/>.
2. "Census.Gov." n.d. Accessed November 23, 2020. <https://www.census.gov/>.
3. Levine, Phillip B., and Robin McKnight. 2017. "Firearms and Accidental Deaths: Evidence from the Aftermath of the Sandy Hook School Shooting." *Science* 358 (6368): 1324–28. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aan8179>
4. nShultz, James M, Glenn W Muschert, Alison Dingwall, and Alyssa M Cohen. 2013. "The Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting as Tipping Point." *Disaster Health* 1 (2): 65–73. <https://doi.org/10.4161/dish.27113>
5. "What Happens to the Survivors?" n.d. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2018/09/survivors>.
6. "Keeping Our Schools Safe: A Plan for Preventing Mass Shootings and Ending All Gun Violence in American Schools." n.d. Everytown Research & Policy. Accessed September 22, 2020. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/a-plan-for-preventing-mass-shootings-and-ending-all-gun-violence-in-american-schools/>