

**A REPORT ON**

# **GUN VIOLENCE**

**IN CANADA**



THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH &  
INNOVATION FOR BLACK  
SURVIVORS OF HOMICIDE VICTIMS

**NOV 2025**

## About Us

**The Centre for Research & Innovation for Black Survivors of Homicide Victims (The CRIB)** is a multidisciplinary research centre that focuses on advancing research, policy, and practice for Black survivors of homicide victims using community-engaged methods and principles.

Homicide disproportionately impacts Black communities globally, placing already marginalized communities at great risk for compromised mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. Despite the high prevalence of homicide, research on the traumatic impact of murder on surviving family members and friends of homicide victims is limited.

**The CRIB** addresses this critical need by advancing culturally responsive research, informing policy development, strengthening evidence-based practice, and providing specialized training for service providers and community-based organizations that support Black survivors of homicide victims. Through prevention and intervention initiatives, our work aims to assist survivors as they navigate grief and loss, ultimately enhancing the capacity of Black communities to not only endure profound tragedy but to foster pathways toward prevention, collective thriving and restoration.

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## How to Cite this Report

Sharpe, T. L., & Aqil, N. (2025). *A Report on Gun Violence in Canada*. The Centre for Research & Innovation for Black Survivors of Homicide Victims. <https://www.the-crib.org/reports/>



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# Introduction

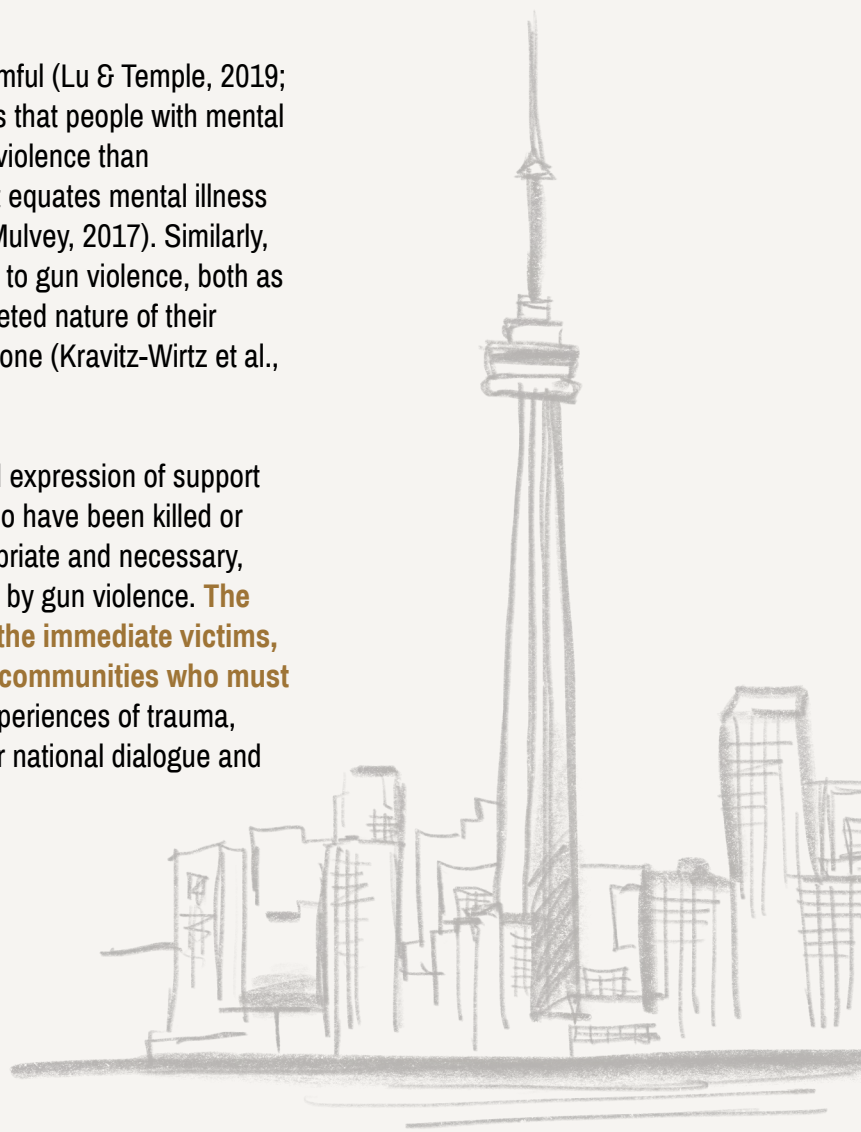
**Gun violence has become an increasingly urgent concern across Canada, prompting widespread public discourse, political debate, and media attention.** Yet much of this attention has narrowly focused on gun control measures and the prevention of firearm access among those perceived as threats, particularly individuals experiencing mental health challenges (Fleming et al., 2018). In addition, debates around gun control have become highly politicized, with racial resentment emerging as a key factor shaping individuals' policy preferences (Filindra & Kaplan, 2016; Schutten et al., 2022).

These framings are not only misleading but also harmful (Lu & Temple, 2019; Tuason & Güss, 2020). Research consistently shows that people with mental health conditions are far more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators, challenging the dominant narrative that equates mental illness with danger (Jeanne Y. Choe et al., 2008; Rozel & Mulvey, 2017). Similarly, racialized individuals are disproportionately exposed to gun violence, both as victims and as perpetrators, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their involvement rather than reducing it to perpetration alone (Kravitz-Wirtz et al., 2022).

From a micro-level perspective, public mourning and expression of support following a shooting typically focus on individuals who have been killed or physically injured. While this response is both appropriate and necessary, it often fails to capture the full scope of harm caused by gun violence. **The ripple effects of gun violence extend far beyond the immediate victims, affecting families, friends, neighbors, and entire communities who must learn to survive the carnage.** Yet these broader experiences of trauma, grief, and loss remain largely unacknowledged in our national dialogue and policy responses (Sharpe, 2015).

**Gun violence, must be understood not just as a series of isolated incidents, but as a pervasive public health and social justice issue.**

*Dr. Tanya L. Sharpe, December 2024*



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**The social, emotional, and psychological toll of gun violence reverberates across communities, impacting those who witness violence firsthand, those who live in close proximity to repeated incidents, and those who simply exist within an environment shaped by the constant threat of gun violence.**

Community-level impacts of gun violence such as reduced social cohesion, disrupted economic development, and weakened collective efficacy are well-documented (Hemenway & Nelson, 2020; Riley et al., 2017). **Without addressing the underlying harms that erode the community fabric, interventions remain limited in their ability to produce lasting change.**

Despite the widespread prevalence of gun-related incidents in Canada, there remains a notable gap in research on the indirect and long-term consequences of gun violence, particularly in relation to the unmet needs of survivors and community members.

**This report seeks to fill that gap by framing gun violence as a public health issue and emphasizing the importance of integrated, wraparound supports.** It examines the far-reaching implications of gun violence on individual and community well-being and presents a call to action for holistic, trauma-informed approaches to healing and prevention. Through this lens, the goal is to shift away from reactive strategies that often perpetuate victim-blaming and instead advance proactive, community-centered responses that emphasize systemic accountability, collective healing, and the long-term vitality of communities.





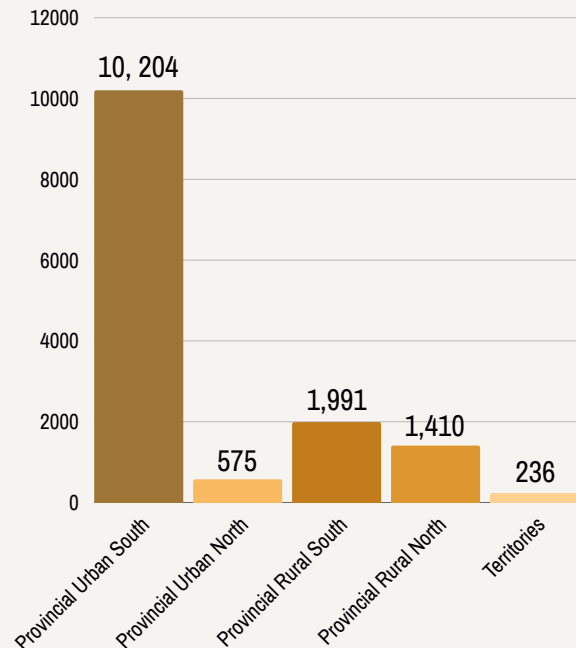
# Gun Violence on the Rise in Canada

In February 2025, Statistics Canada released national data on gun violence from 2023 (Conroy, 2025). The findings show that firearm-related violence continues to increase, with 14,416 incidents reported in 2023. These incidents are 176 more than in 2022, which itself marked the highest total in the past fifteen years. **While the 2023 incident rate of 36.9 per 100,000 population represents a slight decline from 2022, it remains 22% higher than in 2018 and nearly 56% higher than in 2013.** Gun violence rates were highest in Canada's territories, with 180 incidents per 100,000 people, compared to just 32 per 100,000 in the Urban South, the densely populated southern corridor of the country that includes major cities located along or near the U.S. border. However, due to its much larger population, the Urban South still accounted for over 70% of all firearm-related crimes in Canada, including nearly three-quarters of firearm-related homicides.

In 2023, most firearm incidents were linked to physical assaults, robberies, and firearm-specific offences, together accounting for roughly 80% of all cases. While some offences decreased such as robberies (down 14%) and firearm-related homicides (down 17%), others rose. Firearm-specific offences showed notable increases, including the use of a firearm in committing an offence (+7.5%), discharging a firearm with intent (+3.1%), and pointing a firearm (+2.9%). Firearm-related assaults also increased by 3%, primarily due to a rise in major assaults, and incidents involving threats, extortion, or intimidation with a firearm grew by 11% compared to 2022.

**Canada is experiencing a persistent upward trend in gun violence. The data underscore the complexity of firearm-related harm and the urgent need for coordinated responses that go beyond reactive enforcement alone.**

Gun Violence Incidents in Canada (2023)



Statistics Canada

**A lot of community members are put into this position where it's like you pick up a gun to feel protected or protect yourself. You may face consequences later on but at least you have a tool that can, I wouldn't say guarantee your life, but at least provide some sort of comfortability in that you're able to protect yourself as opposed to just dying.**



# Gun Violence and Homicide

**Firearm-related homicides remain a critical and escalating public health concern in Canada, accounting for about 40% of all homicides, most often involving handguns.** In 2023, 289 people were killed by firearms, a decrease from the 343 recorded in 2022. While this decline may appear encouraging, it must be viewed within a broader context: the 2022 total represented the highest number of firearm homicides since national data collection began in 1961. Over the past decade, firearm-related homicides have risen by nearly 90%, even when adjusted for population growth, underscoring the persistence and severity of this crisis.

These deaths are not evenly distributed. Nearly 80% of firearm-related homicides in 2023 occurred in provincial urban centres, major cities or densely populated areas within a Canadian province that serve as central hubs for economic, social, and administrative activity. This concentration reflects both the availability of firearms and the broader social and structural conditions that shape vulnerability to gun violence. Addressing these trends requires community-informed, place-based strategies that elevate the voices and needs of those most affected. Unlike non-fatal firearm injuries, firearm homicides result in irreversible loss that destabilizes families and communities for generations. Beyond profound grief, survivors often face economic hardship, chronic traumatic stress, and disruptions to community cohesion (Sharpe et al., 2024).



**I'm a mother of five children, one of whom is deceased due to a homicide. He was murdered in 2005.**

**He was attending his friend's funeral, who was murdered the week before. And he was shot and killed at that funeral.**



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Demographic data reveal that young men and boys are disproportionately represented as both victims and perpetrators of firearm homicides, underscoring the complex interplay of intergenerational trauma, systemic inequities, and restricted access to preventive supports. These **structural disadvantages not only deepen existing vulnerabilities but also perpetuate cycles of violence within communities already burdened by historical harm.**

Addressing this crisis requires more than reactive or enforcement-based measures: it demands a comprehensive public health approach that centers culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and restorative practices. Such an approach must prioritize grief and bereavement support, sustained trauma care, and youth-centered interventions that foster conflict resolution, community connection, and opportunities for healing and growth. **Ultimately, meaningful prevention depends on confronting the root causes and consequences of gun violence and investing in the social conditions that allow individuals and communities to thrive.**





# Racial Dimensions of Firearm-related Homicide

In Canada, limited race-based data on gun violence reveal significant inequities. **In 2022, Indigenous peoples made up 17% of firearm homicide victims, which is over three times their share of the national population.** More broadly, racialized communities experienced disproportionate harm, with 48% of all firearm-related homicide victims among these groups, who represented just 26.5% of the population in 2021.

The most pronounced overrepresentation was observed among **Black populations, who made up 25% of firearm homicide victims while constituting just 4.3% of the national population.** Other racialized groups, including South Asian individuals, also experienced rates of firearm-related homicide that exceeded their demographic representation. The racial disparities in homicide victimization underscore the urgent need for targeted, equity-informed responses to gun violence that address the chronic exposure to traumatic grief and loss, the intersecting impacts of race, structural violence, and systemic neglect.

**I was so immune to people dying.**

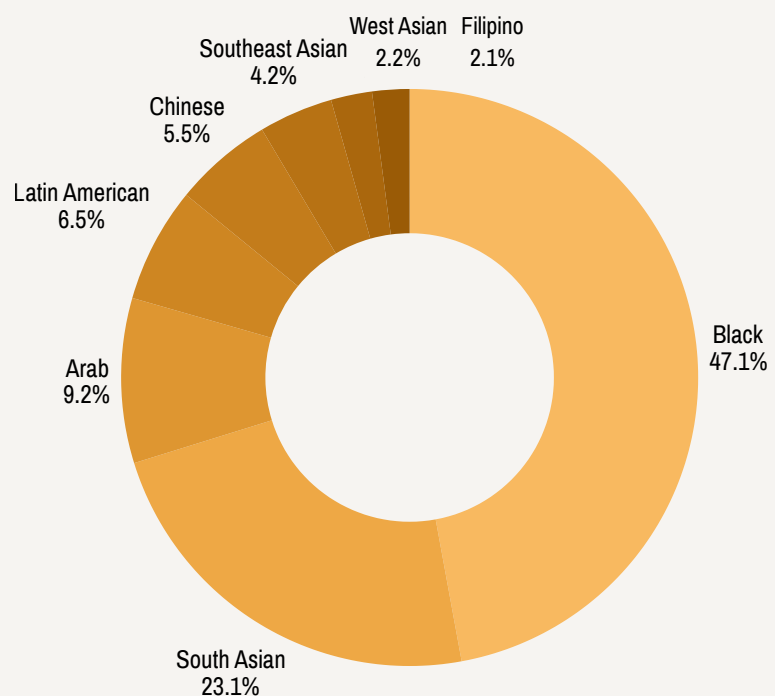
**It wasn't until my white friend, in 2017, said to me - 'This isn't normal. Like you should not be saying that every year, you know somebody who died by the gun.'**

**And I'm like 'Really? You don't know nobody that got shot?'**

**And she was like 'No!'**

**And I'm like 'How do you not know somebody like that...?'**

Percentage of Homicide Victims by Racialized Identity Group  
2024



Statistics Canada. Table 35-10-0206-01



# Gender and Age Dimensions

Men and boys continue to be significantly overrepresented as both victims and individuals accused in incidents of gun violence in Canada. **In 2023, males accounted for 66.5% of all victims of firearm-related violence, including 11% who were boys aged 17 and younger.** In contrast, females represented just over 30% of gun violence victims. Among young adults aged 18 to 24, the incident rate for male victims was 86.4 per 100,000, nearly twice the rate for females in the same age group (46.4) and 2.34 times higher than the overall population rate. These figures highlight the disproportionate vulnerability of young men to firearm violence. Patterns in victim-perpetrator relationships highlight key gender differences.



**If I was to ever find out I'm pregnant with a son, I would contemplate having an abortion 'cause I don't wanna have a Black boy in this city.**

About half of victims were harmed by someone unknown to them, while roughly 15% were victimized by a family member or intimate partner. Notably, women were far more likely than men to experience firearm violence within domestic settings, accounting for 84% of victims in intimate partner incidents and 67% in firearm-related family or intimate partner cases.

Similarly, those accused of firearm-related violence were overwhelmingly male, comprising nearly 90% of all accused individuals in 2023, a trend consistent with previous years. Youth involvement in gun violence remains a growing concern. **Among those accused, 23% were between the ages of 12 and 17, reflecting a firearm-related charge rate of 126.6 per 100,000 for males in this age group, compared to just 10.6 for their female peers.** Despite men continuing to make up the vast majority of those involved in gun violence, both as victims and accused, the proportion of women involved has steadily increased. Between 2013 and 2023, the rate of female victims rose by 41.5%, while the rate of females accused of gun violence increased by 42.3%.



# Victim-Offender Overlap and Polyvictimization

Although Canadian administrative data do not systematically track the overlap between victims and offenders of gun violence, research consistently shows a strong connection. Numerous studies confirm the victim-offender overlap: individuals who engage in violent behavior have often been victims of violence themselves, and vice versa (Broidy et al., 2006; Sandall et al., 2018). A review of 37 studies from 1958 to 2011 substantiated this link (Jennings et al., 2012). **A Canadian study involving 27,233 individuals reported to the Peel Regional Police Service found that those identified as both victims and offenders caused significantly greater overall harm than those identified solely as one or the other** (Hiltz et al., 2020).

Closely connected is the concept of **polyvictimization, whereby individuals experience multiple, intersecting forms of violence across time and settings** (Turner et al., 2016; 2019). For communities disproportionately affected by gun violence, particularly Indigenous, Black and other racialized groups, polyvictimization is common. For example, a U.S. study found that 58% of Black male victims of violent injury had been hospitalized more than once for violence-related injuries (Richardson et al., 2016). In Quebec, a study found that 16% of children and up to 82% of adolescents had endured multiple forms of victimization (Cyr et al., 2017). Recognizing these patterns is critical for three reasons:

**1**  
Overlooking  
polyvictimization  
risks missing  
opportunities for  
early prevention  
& tailored  
intervention

**2**  
Repeat exposure to  
violence, especially  
during childhood &  
adolescence, has lasting  
impacts on psychological,  
emotional, and physical well-  
being (Ford & Delker, 2018)

**3**  
Public & media narratives  
often reduce individuals to either  
“victims” or “offenders,” masking  
the reality that many who engage in  
violence have also survived significant  
trauma shaped by systemic inequities,  
poverty, and racism

Findings related to victim-offender overlap and polyvictimization highlight the need to rethink responses to gun violence. Beyond criminal justice measures, a comprehensive public health approach is essential, one that offers trauma-informed care, recognizes overlapping forms of victimization, and prioritizes prevention alongside emotional and social recovery.

**I think that's an underrated thing about gun violence is there's a lot of people who are isolated and lonely, and that kind of breeds anger, and sometimes people will take out their anger on others. Sometimes they'll use a gun.**



# Ontario

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Among all provinces and territories in Canada, Ontario experienced the most significant increase in gun violence between 2021 and 2022, with a 24% rise representing 1,016 additional incidents. Despite a subsequent decline of 6.6% (or 180 incidents) in 2023, the overall trend remains concerning. **Over the ten-year period from 2013 to 2023, Ontario's rate of gun violence rose by 66.5%, even after adjusting for population growth.** When compared to Canada's other most populous provinces, Quebec and British Columbia, Ontario had a lower rate of gun violence between 2010 and 2015. However, since 2016, Ontario's rate has consistently surpassed both. **Within the province, gun violence is heavily concentrated in the urban south, which reported 4,394 incidents in 2023, accounting for more than 94% of all firearm-related violent incidents in Ontario.**

# Toronto

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Among the three Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs), Toronto, Montréal, and Vancouver, Toronto has recorded the highest rate of gun violence since 2016. This marks a reversal from earlier years, as Toronto had the lowest rate among the three CMAs prior to 2014. **By 2023, Toronto's gun violence rate reached 40.4 incidents per 100,000 population, an 80% increase from 2013 (22.4).** In contrast, both Montréal and Vancouver saw declines over the same period, with Montréal's rate dropping from 29.7 to 25.6 and Vancouver's from 26.9 to 20.1.

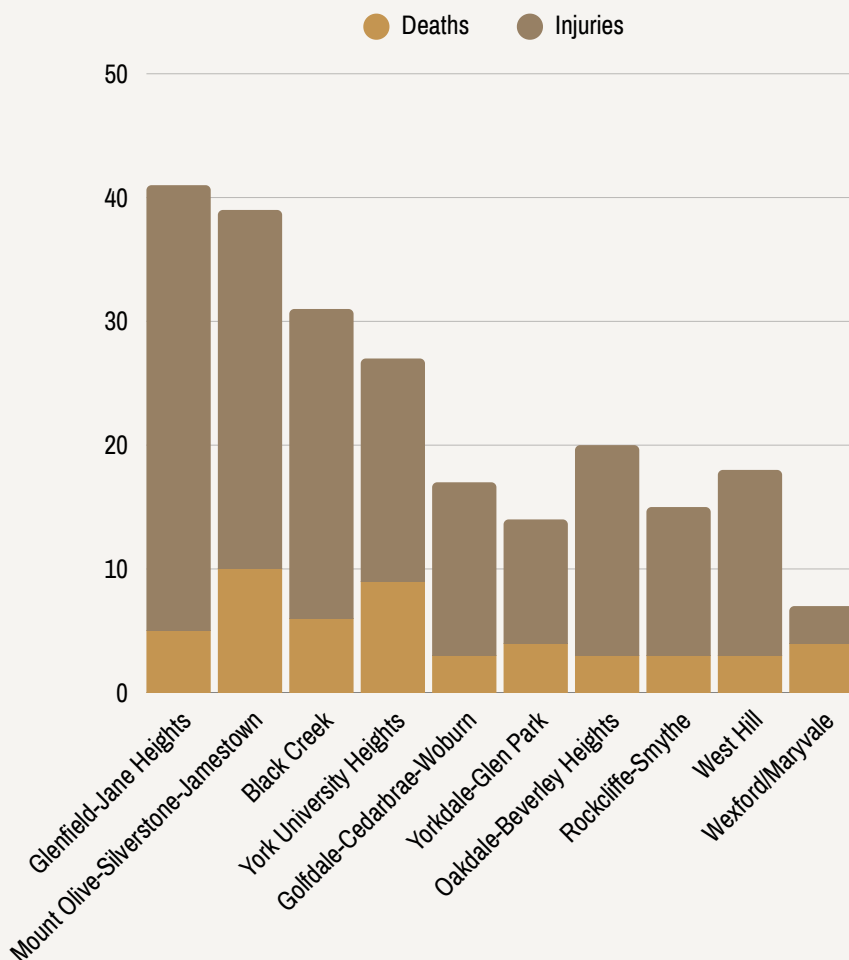




In 2023, Toronto accounted for 17% of all gun violence incidents in Canada and 52% of Ontario's total, with 2,449 firearm-related incidents\* reported. The upward trend continued in 2024: the Toronto Police Service reported 461 shootings and firearm discharges, a 33.6% increase from 2023. Gun-related deaths also rose, from 29 in 2023 to 43 in 2024. **Overall, Toronto reported 2,057 shootings between January 2020 and December 2024, resulting in 202 deaths and 750 injuries over the five-year period.**

Of the city's 158 neighborhoods, the ten listed below had the highest number of shootings and firearm discharges between January 2020 and December 2024.

### Toronto neighborhoods with the highest number of shootings and firearm discharges



Eight of the ten Toronto neighbourhoods with the highest rates of shootings and firearm discharges are designated by the City of Toronto as **Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs)**. This designation is based on the Neighbourhood Equity Index, which measures factors such as economic opportunity, social development, civic participation, physical environment, and health outcomes.

Many of these high-incident areas rank well below the city's equity benchmark, reflecting broader evidence that structural inequities, such as economic marginalization and limited access to resources, are major drivers of gun violence (McMillan et al., 2024; Thomas et al., 2022; Uzzi et al., 2023).

\* Firearm-related incidents refer to cases where a firearm was present and relevant to the crime, regardless of whether it was discharged.



# Physical Harm and Healthcare Costs

The most immediate and visible impact of gun violence is physical harm, which can result in injury, long-term disability, or death. **A population-based cohort study of survivors of police shootings in Ontario found that individuals who survived firearm-related injuries incurred healthcare costs three times higher than those with non-firearm-related injuries** (Raza et al., 2023). Although comparable cost analyses are not yet available for Ontario more broadly, data from the U.S. provide a stark reference point.

In New Orleans, Louisiana alone, hospital charges related to firearm injuries between 2016 and 2019 totalled USD 262.4 million (Silver et al., 2023). These figures did not account for the additional long-term costs associated with mental health services, rehabilitation, and care for both survivors and families of the deceased.

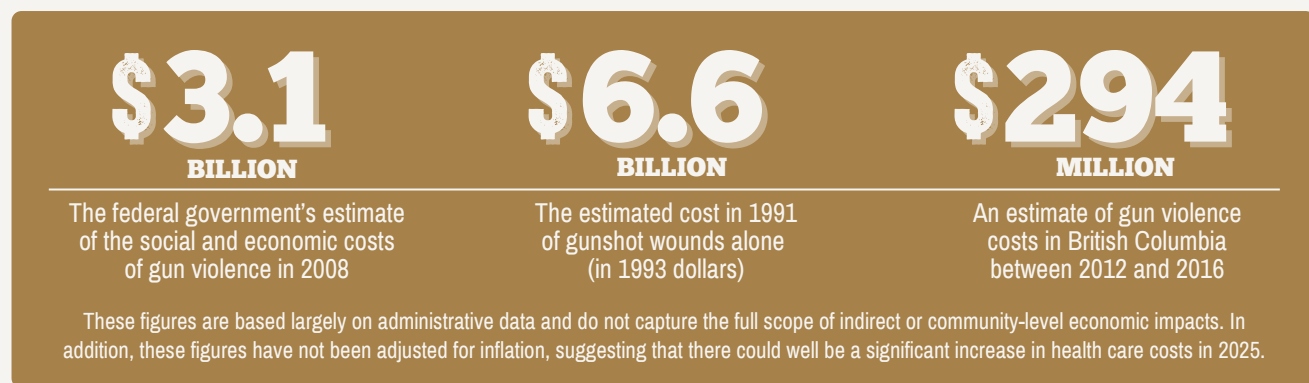
Given the rising rates of gun violence, there is an urgent need for targeted research in Toronto to evaluate its full impact on the healthcare system and guide effective allocation of resources.



# Financial Burden and Community Degradation

According to data from Statistics Canada, individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 are disproportionately affected by gun violence, with this age group more likely to be victims than others (Conroy, 2025). The median age of those accused in firearm-related incidents is slightly higher, at 26 years. These figures highlight a troubling reality: many of those impacted by gun violence are in the most pivotal stages of their lives. As a result, their involvement, whether as victims or accused, carries significant consequences not only for their futures but also for the families and communities that may depend on them for financial and emotional support (de Oliveira et al., 2022).

Beyond the immediate costs associated with healthcare, policing, and physical damage, gun violence has far-reaching economic implications. **Communities affected by rising gun violence often experience decreased business activity, reduced property values, and financial strain on both residents and local enterprises** (Yasemin et al., 2017). As economic conditions decline, wealthier residents and businesses often relocate, further eroding local job opportunities, weakening social networks, and deepening neighborhood disadvantage (Hemenway & Nelson, 2020). This pattern is particularly concerning, as research consistently shows that gun violence both results from and reinforces a cycle of disinvestment and economic instability. Factors such as unemployment, eviction, and housing insecurity not only heighten vulnerability to firearm violence but are also exacerbated by it. Studies have found that household poverty and residence in structurally disadvantaged neighborhoods remain among the strongest predictors of exposure to firearm-related harm (Kravitz-Wirtz et al., 2022).



In Toronto, where gun violence is concentrated in neighborhoods with low scores on the City's Neighbourhood Equity Index, it is especially important to examine how economic and social disadvantage intersect with exposure to violence. Structurally marginalized populations face heightened risk, yet few studies have explored the long-term financial and social toll of gun violence on individuals, families, and communities. More comprehensive data are needed to assess the ongoing economic impacts of gun violence. **Evidence on economic impacts of gun violence would strengthen the case for sustained investment in survivor support, economic development, and violence prevention. This would help to shift the response from short-term crisis management to long-term stability and recovery.**



# Accessibility to Mental Health Services

A systematic review of 58 studies found that exposure to gun violence is significantly associated with a range of mental health challenges, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Abba-Aji et al., 2024). Among adolescents, exposure was also linked to increased behavioral issues and a higher likelihood of carrying firearms. A multi-city U.S. study found that individuals exposed to gun violence fatalities were at elevated risk of suicidal ideation and psychotic experiences (Smith et al., 2020). Additional studies have reported symptoms such as psychological distress, sleep disturbances, social withdrawal, and desensitization to violence (Garbarino et al., 2002; Semenza et al., 2024). **Over time, the impacts of exposure to gun violence extend beyond individual mental health, contributing to a broader climate of fear and insecurity.** This often leads to reduced physical activity, and social isolation (Han et al., 2018; Hemenway & Nelson, 2020). Furthermore, research has linked exposure to gun violence with physical health consequences such as obesity, asthma, and increased cardiovascular risk (Kuehn, 2019; Ramratnam et al., 2015; Semenza & Stansfield, 2021).

Despite the severity of these outcomes, access to appropriate mental health support remains limited, particularly in structurally disadvantaged communities where gun violence is most prevalent.

**In Toronto, long-standing barriers to mental health care disproportionately affect low-income and racialized populations, including systemic underfunding, stigma, and a lack of culturally safe, trauma-informed services** (Sadavoy et al., 2004; Thomson et al., 2015; Wang & Ariwi, 2021; Sharpe, Aqil & Donkin, 2024). For many survivors, particularly those who were not physically harmed but remain deeply affected by exposure, the lack of accessible, relevant care leads to prolonged suffering in silence. **The challenges related to healthcare utilization are often heightened in racialized communities, where access to culturally responsive services is limited, and factors such as mental health stigma and mistrust of service systems further discourage engagement** (Adu et al., 2025; Berardi, 2018; Fante-Coleman & Jackson-Best, 2020; Sharpe, Bailey & Richardson, 2024). **Given the rising incidence of gun violence in Toronto's most marginalized neighborhoods, it is critical to invest in a citywide mapping and coordination of services for survivors.** Strengthening the connection between affected individuals and available supports, especially those that are trauma-informed, community-based, and culturally responsive, is essential for preventing long-term adverse outcomes and promoting collective healing.

**Gun shots are  
like doorbells...  
Death is like  
every other  
weekend.  
It is a different  
funeral, for a  
different youth,  
or somebody's  
getting gunned  
down. So, at the  
end of the day,  
you become numb  
to the point  
where you start  
holding the stuff.**





# Erosion of Social Capital

The trauma, fear, and insecurity resulting from gun violence have a detrimental impact on social cohesion and community connectedness among residents. This erosion of trust and collective engagement reduces social capital, which in turn increases vulnerability to further violence. **When individuals withdraw from public spaces and experience heightened mistrust, the capacity for collective action and informal social control is diminished** (Kennedy et al., 1998; Wu, 2020). A study involving youth detainees in Toronto and Philadelphia found that in the absence of stable housing and strong familial support, community-based social cohesion served as a protective factor against involvement in gun violence (Cook et al., 2022). Additional research highlights that collective efficacy, defined as a shared belief in the ability to influence community outcomes, is associated with lower levels of violence (Magee, 2020; Maxwell et al., 2018). Therefore, **strengthening social cohesion and building community resilience should be central components of violence prevention strategies and long-term recovery efforts.**

Community-based initiatives have demonstrated the potential of localized, participatory approaches to foster resilience. For example, Grant et al. (2023) led a community-based action research project in a Midwestern U.S. city, collaborating with Black youth to create a framework for community resilience. The model emphasized collective care, optimism, and the availability of supportive spaces for adolescents as key factors in reducing vulnerability to violence. Similarly, in a low-income U.S. neighborhood, residents engaged in a multi-step process to identify

**You have to start thinking twice before walking somewhere or trusting someone. It's not because they want to, it's because they have to. Also, it creates a wall between the community and the outside world. People start judging like, "Oh, this is a bad place," and stuff, and then all the stereotypes come in.**

contributors to violence and implement strategies to enhance community ties. One outcome of the project was the transformation of a vacant lot into a garden, offering a safe space for connection and shared purpose.

These examples underscore the importance of culturally informed, community-led interventions in addressing the complex effects of gun violence. Adopting a one-size-fits-all approach is never sufficient, particularly in a diverse city such as Toronto. Instead, **tailored, neighbourhood-specific models that reflect local experiences and priorities are essential for effective and equitable responses.**



# Conclusion

Gun violence continuing to rise across Canada, with Toronto experiencing some of the most severe and sustained impacts, represents an urgent and ongoing public health crisis. Chronic exposure to traumatic injury, loss, and fear imposes a profound and lasting toll on individuals, families, and neighborhoods, undermining social cohesion, economic stability, and collective well-being. Addressing this issue requires more than crisis response; it demands a sustained, systemic commitment to prevention, healing, and equity.

**To reduce harm and support recovery, we must act decisively.**

**The following call to action outlines concrete steps to build trauma-informed, community-driven, and evidence-based solutions that reflect the full scope of gun violence and its enduring costs.**

Given the legislative mandate under the provincial Anti-Racism Act, 2017, Ontario agencies must collect and make available disaggregated data on gun violence by race, including Black and Indigenous populations.

Research studies are urgently needed to assess the economic costs of gun violence in community contexts. An understanding of the enduring costs of gun violence will help resource mobilization in the interest of gun violence prevention.

Exploratory studies to map the unique needs of diverse populations most impacted by gun violence are critical to developing community-based intervention initiatives.

A mapping of existing support resources and the subsequent development of linkages among them are essential to provide wraparound support for survivors of gun violence. The City of Toronto's SafeTO Collaborative Analytics and Learning Environment (SCALE) initiative represents a strategic advancement toward enhanced system coordination. To ensure long-term impact, it is imperative that the program continues to translate its mapping framework into durable, cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms

Targeted programs for young males in gun violence hotspots must be established with a view to building the capacity of neighbourhood residents to operate these programs.

Culturally responsive and trauma-informed bereavement supports are needed for survivors of firearm-related homicide victims.

Programs addressing gun violence should incorporate an evidence-informed understanding of **polyvictimization** and the **victim-offender overlap** to more effectively support survivors. This means recognizing that individuals may experience multiple, interconnected forms of victimization.

Efforts to **prevent gun violence** must be accompanied by initiatives that **build skills, expand employment opportunities, and improve the equity scores** of impacted neighbourhoods to address the structural and socioeconomic conditions that sustain violence.



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