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New Survey Reveals Scope of Gun Violence's Severe Impact on Pittsburgh-Area Youth

400 At-Risk Youth Were Surveyed by a Coalition of Anti-Violence Organizations

Pittsburgh — In the wake of a [doubling of youth homicides in Allegheny County between 2020 and 2021](#), and amid a more recent 25% increase in homicides in the City of Pittsburgh from June 2021 to June 2022, a new survey of at-risk youth released today sheds further light on the disturbing impact of gun violence in Allegheny County. Among the findings: more than half of youth have lost a family member to the gun violence epidemic. The research, conducted by CeaseFirePA Education Fund and The Greater Pittsburgh Coalition Against Violence, finds that statistics showing the rise in shootings only tell part of the story. For most surveyed youth, the gun violence crisis has them regularly concerned, and many directly impacted.

“We are witnessing the mass traumatization of a generation, with long-term individual and societal consequences. It’s a tragedy – but with many shootings preventable through life-saving gun safety policies from Harrisburg – it’s also a man-made catastrophe,” said **Josh Fleitman, Western PA Manager for CeaseFirePA**, a statewide gun violence prevention organization that helped lead the survey initiative. “If the bloodshed so far has not shaken the conscience of many state legislators, I hope this survey’s chilling results will spur them to take urgent action.”

“The survey results are more than troubling and should bring a laser light to all of us as to how deep the pain of gun violence has impacted the lives and minds of our youth,” said **Tim Stevens, Co-Convener of the Greater Pittsburgh Coalition Against Violence**, another leading organization involved in the survey. “Hopefully, this report will lead to state legislators to pass much-needed legislative reform, and to do so expeditiously!”

Key findings from the survey include:

- **57% have lost a family member to gun violence.**
- **Almost half – 46% – have personally witnessed gun violence** at least once. Of that group, 22% have witnessed gun violence *4 or more times*.
- **86% are concerned that gun violence will impact them and their family’s health and safety.**
- **84% feel that *nothing at all* or only a little is being done to address the violence** in their neighborhood, school, or classroom.
- **The majority of youth generally feel safe in their school/classroom (60%) and neighborhood (56%),** with a little less than a third saying their feeling of safety depends on the day.

An infographic and report on the full survey results can be accessed [here](#).

“Forgotten mourners – our voices left in the shadows of tragedy. When will we be heard? When will we be supported? When will we be healed?” pleaded **Cierra, a teenager from Forest Hills** who participated in the survey and whose sister was murdered with a firearm in 2021.

To address the drivers of this violence, advocates called for policies to reduce the number of illegal guns that are used in the majority of youth violence, such as: pending legislation in Harrisburg to require the reporting of lost and stolen firearms, and strengthening enforcement inspections of certain firearm dealers who studies show are the source of many crime guns. Boosting funding for trauma-informed youth violence prevention and intervention programs was also urged as a community-based strategy to prevent gun violence.

“Gun violence is more of a reality in our children's everyday lives than in the older segments of society,” said **Rev. Eleanor Williams, President of the North Side Partnership Project**, a youth-serving nonprofit organization that partnered to distribute the survey to the young people in their program. “We purposely get teenagers and young adults more involved in their own survival by talking to them, we teach them tools required to survive in their level of society.”

“While the results of this survey are not surprising to those who work with young people and know how frequently gun violence plays into their lives, this effort to engage youth to better understand the impact is essential to developing meaningful solutions,” said **Michael Yonas**,

Vice President of Public Health, Research and Learning at The Pittsburgh Foundation, which provided grant support for this project. “The finding that 57% of nearly 400 youth surveyed reporting a family member being killed by a gun demonstrates the imperative to address the trauma. This is nothing short of a public health emergency.”

CeaseFirePA Education Fund and the Greater Pittsburgh Coalition Against Violence collected 391 responses via online and paper surveys, in partnership with two dozen youth-serving community partners. The age of survey participants ranged up to 24. The surveys were collected across Allegheny County between June 7, 2022 and August 10, 2022. More details and data are available [here](#).

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As the Commonwealth’s leading gun violence prevention organization, CeaseFirePA works to ensure everyone can live a life free from gun violence. We organize with communities closest to the issue, hold those in power accountable, and maximize the strengths of every member in our broad coalition.

The purpose and the role of the Coalition Against Violence is to identify and facilitate the implementation of strategies and initiatives addressing the issues of violence and crime that plague many of the neighborhoods and communities throughout the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. The coalition is committed to boldly and actively supporting as well as collaborating with organizations, agencies, initiatives, and programs already working quietly and diligently to help reduce violence.