Black & Brown Collective
for Community Solutions to Gun Violence

The Case for More Equitable and Community-Engaged Research to Address Firearm-Related Violence in Black and Brown Communities

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DECEMBER 2024

Acknowledgment

This report was supported by the Joyce Foundation. We are grateful to them for making this report possible, specifically Timothy Daly and Louisa Aviles who provided helpful feedback on earlier drafts. We also appreciate the assistance of members of the Black & Brown Collective who engaged with earlier drafts and whose insightful feedback made this a stronger paper. Thanks to Anamika Dwivedi for research and editorial support.

See the companion report: ***"Guiding Research Principles and Priorities."***

Introduction

The **Black & Brown Collective for Community Solutions to Gun Violence** ("B&B Collective") is a newly established nonprofit organization composed of over two dozen multidisciplinary scholars from various academic and research institutions. Our mission is to enhance community safety and wellness in communities throughout the United States, with a particular focus on the firearm-related violence that has plagued Black and Brown neighborhoods for decades. By fostering intentional collaboration across and within our various disciplines, we aim to improve the efficacy of research, policy, and practice on firearm-related violence and community violence.* Our goal is to chart a path for generating knowledge and action in service to the prosperity and health equity of all communities.

The B&B Collective strives to advance safer communities by engaging in and promoting rigorous, equitable, culturally responsive, and community-engaged research on gun violence. We are committed to building and elevating the thought leadership of Black, Brown, and historically underrepresented gun violence prevention researchers; and informing public and media narratives and policy and practice responses to the causes, consequences, and solutions to gun violence based on rigorous research. This report ***makes the case for the importance of more equitable and community-engaged research to address gun violence and the need to invest in and grow the field of Black, Brown, and historically underrepresented scholars committed to centering equity in the research process.*** Drawing on existing literature and our professional experiences, this report provides the rationale and motivation for the B&B Collective. It also proposes a set of concrete action items and recommendations for the B&B Collective and other stakeholders in the gun violence prevention field, which we believe can meaningfully advance safer communities.

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*In this report, we use the terms *firearm-related violence* or *gun violence* and *community violence* to reflect our focus on each issue and the structural drivers underlying both. When we use the term community violence without specifying firearms, we are referring more broadly to interpersonal violence, including intimate partner violence and state-sanctioned violence.

The Harms of Community Violence

Firearms are the leading cause of death for children & adolescents ages 1-19*

Gun homicide has been the leading cause of death for Black boys & men ages 10-34 since as far back as the 1980s*

For decades, gun homicide has been the second leading cause of death for Hispanic boys & men and Black girls & women ages 15-24*

*In the United States

Community violence—defined as intentional acts of interpersonal violence that occur between non-intimately related individuals, usually in public spaces[1]—affects millions of people annually in the United States.[2] This violence often has far-reaching and long-lasting effects, increasing not only the risk of harmful physical and mental health consequences for those directly involved or who are spatially or socially proximate to an incident,[3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11] but also leading to deleterious economic and social ramifications, even for people living miles away.[12,13,14,15,16,17] These harms are particularly prevalent when firearms are involved[18,19] due to the potential morbidity, lethality, and range of a bullet. The statistics associated with firearm-related community violence are staggering. From 2012 to 2022, firearm-related homicides increased from 1,622 to 19,651 deaths.[20] Firearms are now the leading cause of death for children and adolescents ages 1-19 in the United States.[21] In fact, on June 25, 2024, the U.S. Surgeon General declared firearm violence in the United States a public health crisis.[22]

Nearly everyone in the United States is directly or indirectly affected by community gun violence, yet the risk of exposure—and, therefore, the risk of harmful consequences—is grossly disparate across populations. In 2022, the Black community endured the highest firearm homicide rates across all age groups, and Black youth accounted for about half of all firearm deaths among youth, despite making up only 14% of the U.S. youth population.[23,24] While gun homicide became the leading cause of death for all U.S. children and teens in 2020, it has been the leading cause of death for Black boys and men ages 10-34 since as far back as the 1980s.[25] Black adolescents and young adults also face higher risk of aggravated assaults and fights with injuries compared to white adolescents and young adults.[26] For decades, gun homicide has been the second leading cause of death for Hispanic boys and men and Black girls and women ages 15-24.[27] Per-capita firearm mortality rates increased by nearly 40% between 2014 and 2021, with Black and American Indian or Alaska Native

U.S. residents seeing the largest per-capita increases among all racialized groups in the country.[28] The impact of these exorbitant and consistently high rates of violence exposure cannot be overstated, contributing to rates of continuous traumatic stress in some communities that match or exceed those experienced by soldiers in war.[29]

Many individuals who engage in interpersonal violence in marginalized communities have also experienced being survivors and/or witnesses of interpersonal violence.[30,31,32,33,34] While community violence is both a cause and consequence of injury, death, and despair, its root causes are associated with residential and economic segregation and marginalization, concentrated disadvantage, income inequality, poverty and un(der)employment, and disinvestments in basic requisites of life. Inequities in social determinants of health—such as economic opportunity, environmental health, education, housing, transportation, social mobility, health care, mass incarceration, and state-sanctioned violence—have led to decades of disproportionately high rates of community trauma in racially and ethnically marginalized (i.e., "Black and Brown") neighborhoods across the United States.[35,36] As a result, an inordinate share of the death, injury, and collateral trauma caused by community gun violence has been, and continues to be, shouldered by communities that have also been subjected to historical and present-day structural racism, exclusion, and other forms of inequitable policies and social oppression.[37,38,39,40,41,42,43,44,45] Persistently high levels of community violence diminish economic prospects, housing stability, and the ability to build a robust tax base to support high-quality, well-resourced schools and recovery from trauma exposure. This situation also leads to increased weapon carrying[46] and investments in policing and punishment-based policies rather than social and support services.[47] The ensuing instability further increases the risk of community-level interpersonal violence, creating an injurious cycle.[48,49]

That community violence both influences and is influenced by contemporaneous forces related to disadvantage, inequity, and marginalization and exclusion does not minimize the devastating experience of interpersonal violence felt by survivors, loved ones, and communities. More accurately, it highlights the necessity of acknowledging these deeply rooted inequities and contextualizing violence to inform policy and practice approaches that can sustainably and equitably reduce both interpersonal and structural violence, while improving wellness, safety, and health.[50,51,52]

Limitations in the Current Research

1 Limited Research Funding
2 Limited Scope and Duration of Research Projects
3 Underrepresentation of Black and Brown Scholars Among Research Leads
4 Consequences of Research Limitations

Scientific inquiry into the causes, consequences, and responses to community gun violence can help uncover and amplify potential policy and practice solutions to this complex and inequitable crisis.[53] Yet our understanding of the causes, consequences, responses, and solutions to community gun violence based on research and evidence has been limited for several reasons.

Limited Research Funding

Funding for gun violence research, and the corresponding volume of research publications, has been woefully inadequate considering the tangible and intangible burdens community gun violence imposes. An analysis of 2004-2015 data on federal research funding and peer-reviewed publications relative to mortality rates found that **gun violence received only 1.6% of the expected funding, and just 4.5% of the expected publication volume if the research were funded at a rate commensurate with the problem.**[54] Though congressional authorizations have dramatically increased the total dollars for gun violence research in recent years ($25M annually, split between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) since FY 2020),[55] and while other funders, particularly philanthropic donors like the Joyce Foundation, the California Wellness Foundation, and the National Collaborative for Gun Violence Research, have contributed millions to offset this funding shortfall,[56] the field of research on all forms of gun violence, including community violence, continues to lag behind the need.

Limited Scope and Duration of Research Projects

Moreover, the community gun violence research that *has* been produced and touted to date often fails to address the issues most pressing to families in Black and Brown communities who navigate fear, ongoing trauma, and disillusionment about the potential for genuine neighborhood safety. For example, much of the academic and policy discourse around violence tends to pathologize Black and Brown survivors of violence—especially if those survivors have also engaged in violence—by focusing on individual deficiencies and promoting law enforcement or carceral strategies for violence mitigation. This approach often excludes thoughtful consideration of structural and sociopolitical inequities[57,58] or the well-documented historical and contemporary racial inequities within policing and the criminal-legal system.[59,60,61,62,63,64]

Academic research has frequently excluded or minimized the perspectives, priorities, questions, and needs of people most proximal to and harmed by community violence. This is, in part, because those individuals are often not meaningfully involved in the research process.[65] For example, research has found that none of the NIH-funded studies of violent fatal injuries between 2009 and 2019 focused on individuals victimized by violent crime,[66] despite evidence that violent victimization increases the risk of future violent injury[67] and has ripple effects on homicide survivors, loved ones, and community members. Additionally, individuals in marginalized communities are too often not consulted nor given the opportunity to interpret, critique, review, or respond to research findings or implications before or after publication.[68] The national philanthropic organization Chicago Beyond describes this common experience in their report, "*Why Am I Always Being Researched*," as a two-pronged issue: **individuals in marginalized communities are both overstudied as "subjects" and undervalued once the study is complete, often receiving limited or no information on the findings and seeing no tangible changes or improvements in their life experiences.**[69] Furthermore, research projects are typically limited in duration (e.g., funded for 1 to 3 years), which leaves little time to develop relationships with community members or to seek meaningful input, buy-in, or feedback throughout the research project. This limited duration can do more harm than good and undermine the goals of the research inquiry, given the tumultuous history of research and the lack of responsive action to durably reduce interpersonal violence in Black and Brown communities.

There is also a general preference among some private and public funders for research that examines causality, for research that can

credibly estimate what causes community violence to increase or decrease and for identifying what violence prevention policies or practices "work" to decrease crime. This research is important. However, funders having a preference or prioritizing this type of research inquiry limits funding and opportunities for other areas of inquiry that are also needed. This includes research that helps to better understand the complex nature of interpersonal violence and its prevention, research that documents and assesses the implementation and outcomes of violence prevention policies, practices, and interventions, or research that interrogates the harms of violence prevention interventions. Furthermore, a focus on isolating causal pathways can be too narrow given the complexity of community gun violence.

To effectively translate research into equitable and impactful policies and practices, it is essential to interrogate the complexities and nuances surrounding harm and victimization, situating them within the historical, structural, and environmental contexts that shape their magnitude and influence. With the goal of increasing protective and resilience factors within families and communities while reducing interpersonal violence, research must then

seek to understand, access, and negotiate for strength-based resources and support within community ecosystems to create spaces of safety and health. However, these objectives can only be achieved through meaningful engagement with the very communities that researchers and policymakers aim to serve. In other words, if we want to leverage science to illuminate the real-life struggles and successes experienced by the individuals and communities most affected by community gun violence, we must intentionally seek the input and experiential wisdom of these constituents.

Underrepresentation of Black and Brown Scholars Among Research Leads

Furthermore, most research investigating crime and violence in predominantly Black and Brown communities has not been carried out by scholars who represent and, perhaps most critically, are accountable to those communities. Beyond simply sharing skin color or racialized categorization, Black and Brown scholars bring unique perspectives to their research due to their positionality—the intersections of lived experience, racial and ethnic and cultural identity, and social proximity to the issue, combined with their commitment to peace and liberation for families that are or resemble their own. This relationality also increases the potential for scholars' awareness, empathy, and problem-solving for addressing issues like fear and mistrust among individuals from marginalized communities about the real and perceived harms of research (especially in a historical context), power imbalances between researchers and participants, the necessity of building credibility and trust over time, data collection and use, culturally-relevant practices for increasing recruitment and retention, stigma related to research involvement, and concerns about whether the research will genuinely drive policy or practice changes that lead to discernable improvements in research participants' safety, health, and quality of life.[70,71,72,73,74,75,76] The benefits to this relationality are mutual, as many individuals in marginalized communities are inclined to engage with researchers and providers with whom they can identify and relate.

Despite a long history of Black and Brown scholars examining interpersonal crime and violence in the United States, going back to W.E.B. Du Bois in the 19th century, their contributions have been consistently overlooked by researchers, policymakers, media, and the general public in favor of white researchers' work.[77,78] Structural barriers limiting the number of Black and Brown researchers particularly at R01 institutions, explicit and implicit bias that devalues their

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scholarship, and discrimination within media are among the myriad factors contributing to this disparity. However, one area of concern that has received more recent attention is inequity in research funding.

Historically, **the lack of federal investment in gun violence research has restricted the overall pool of available grants, further exacerbating inequities for researchers from marginalized backgrounds.** Although published research on funding equity specific to gun violence research has yet to be produced, existing literature has explored the broader context of inequitable funding practices within public health research. A 2011 *Science* study found that Black scientists were systematically less likely than their white counterparts to receive an R01 award from the NIH, even after controlling for educational background, country of origin, training, previous research awards, and employer characteristics, which are standard measures of scientific achievement.[79] NIH awards more than $40 billion in research dollars annually; among the NIH R01 grants awarded in 2018, approximately 1% were awarded to Black scientists.[80] Further research into this disparity found that topic choice accounted for 21% of the funding gap;[81] Black applicants tend to propose research on topics that involve human subjects and that disproportionately impact Black and other racial and ethnically marginalized communities. These scholars are also more likely to examine structural causes and solutions to interpersonal violence rather than individual-level solutions.[82,83,84,85] Other systemic challenges identified include the fact that **Black scholars are more likely to be employed at less resourced institutions**,[86] which affects administrative support for grant applications and mentorship opportunities that could increase publication numbers, partially explaining the funding gap.[87] Additionally, several studies indicate that biases within the peer review process for federal funding favor established peer networks, which often exclude scholars from underrepresented groups.[88,89] Researchers from racially and ethnically marginalized backgrounds also spend twice as much time grant writing to achieve the same funding levels as white researchers[90] while performing substantially more service to support students and mentees,[91] reducing time for grant applications, publications, and other institutional indicators of academic strength.[92]

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The funding disparities between racially and ethnically marginalized scholars and white scholars extend beyond the NIH. Similar analyses have found disparities in funding rates and amounts for these scholars compared with white scholars at the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and other funding bodies.[93] These racial gaps in research funding are themselves a form of structural racism. Federal agencies like the CDC, NIH, and

NIJ have acknowledged general disparities in public health and gun violence research funding and have started implementing initiatives to diversify the pool of researchers and ensure that funding priorities reflect the needs of marginalized communities.[94,95] More up-to-date research is needed to understand how research investments across federal agencies have continued to examine and respond to inequitable funding.

Private foundations like the California Wellness Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, and the National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research have begun funding projects that explicitly aim to reduce disparities in gun violence research.[96] However, while these efforts are promising, they are nascent and have yet to create a balanced funding landscape. **To ensure that research processes and methodologies used in community gun violence research are valid, culturally appropriate, beneficial to communities, and inclusive of the historical and cultural contexts essential to understanding and redressing inequities and power dynamics, efforts towards creating more equitable funding practices must be expanded and sustained.** Inequitable funding decisions shape the science and signal which topics and research strategies have scientific merit. This, in turn, influences how other scholars understand the world and frames the perspectives of the next generation of scientists.

Consequences of Research Limitations

One unintended consequence of limited funding, lack of representation, and a narrowed scope of research is that it hinders innovation and solutions to intractable problems. **Black, Brown, and racially and ethnically marginalized scholars are more likely to be interested in conducting community-engaged research and investigating the root causes of health inequities.** They are also uniquely positioned to interrogate intersecting forms of violence in marginalized communities, including the intersectionality of intimate partner violence, community gun violence, state-sanctioned violence, and/or self-inflicted violence. This perspectivity shapes how these scholars approach and investigate the complex and multi-faceted issues of community gun violence. Growing and investing in the field of racially and ethnically underrepresented researchers committed to using an equity lens are critical steps in producing the knowledge needed to inform impactful policies and practices that can reduce violence in Black and Brown communities, where community violence and criminal-legal system involvement are dually concentrated and interrelated. **Researchers from underrepresented communities bring a unique perspective and a deep sense of urgency for radical change that ensures safety for families like their own.** Investing in and amplifying these voices is essential for advancing impactful knowledge and developing effective, evidence-informed solutions that can serve prosperity and health equity of all communities.

Recommended Solutions

To address the lack of equity in research and research funding, we propose several solutions for those in positions to support and invest in community gun violence research, including state and federal policymakers, as well as private and public funders. A number of these recommendations have been detailed in other publications examining harmful practices in funding public health projects *(for example, see Chen et al 2023)*.[97] We also propose several recommendations for research scholars and research institutions, including those of which we are a part. These solutions would be a step toward addressing the inequities in research and addressing the structural and systemic factors that perpetuate violence in racially segregated and disinvested communities.

For Policymakers and Private and Public Funders

- **Increase funding and support for Black and Brown scholars:** Allocate dedicated funding for Black, Brown, and historically underrepresented scholars, as well as those with lived experiences of community violence and specifically firearm-related violence.
- **Invest in Black and Brown-led research centers:** Support research centers led by Black and Brown gun violence scholars, including collaborations with community organizations focused on community gun violence in Black and Brown communities.
- **Leverage influence as funders, decision-makers, and stakeholders:** Advocate to other funders and policymakers for intentional, equity-focused funding for Black and Brown scholars in the community gun violence prevention space.
- **Expand research on community gun violence:** Increase funding and support for gun violence research focused on Black, Brown, and historically disinvested communities that have been systematically impacted by various forms of violence, including research focused on those who have been involved in violence and those who have survived violence.
- **Sponsor research examining equity in funding:** Fund projects that track public and private investments in community gun violence prevention research, including those with an equity focus.
- **Support comprehensive research:** Fund studies that explore a broad range of outcomes—including individual, community, system, policy, and structural—associated with violence intervention and prevention, beyond criminal-legal involvement or injury outcomes.

- **Promote authentic community engagement:** Increase funding and support for research that includes meaningful community engagement activities and for researchers with demonstrated histories of building such relationships in the communities where they conduct research.
- **Foster community-researcher collaborations:** Increase funding and support for collaborations between researchers and community members to ensure research aligns with community needs.
- **Establish community review boards:** Create boards composed of community members from impacted Black and Brown communities to oversee and provide feedback on research proposals and projects.
- **Implement community feedback mechanisms:** Develop methods for community members to assess and provide feedback on research projects, ensuring they are responsive to the needs and concerns of Black, Brown, and directly impacted communities.
- **Support innovative approaches:** Fund projects that have strong community support but lack an established evidence base, promoting innovation in violence-prevention solutions and strategies.
- **Invest in longitudinal research:** Increase multi-year investments in studies that can examine the long-term impacts of violence intervention and prevention efforts.
- **Invest in multiple research methodologies:** Prioritize research employing a range of methodologies such as qualitative research, mixed-methods research, narrative research, and implementation science, to add new perspectives and findings to existing literature.
- **Build capacity for Black and Brown scholars:** Invest in grant workshops, training, and technical assistance activities to help Black, Brown, and historically underrepresented scholars effectively secure, receive, administer, and maintain grant funding.
- **Develop resource hubs:** Establish centralized support hubs offering research tools, funding opportunities, and educational materials, with a focus on professional development for violence prevention researchers from historically marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds.
- **Facilitate research networks:** Invest in research networks that encourage collaboration, knowledge sharing, and professional development among researchers committed to scholarship rooted in racial, health, and social equity.
- **Provide financial support for scholars:** Establish scholarships, post-doctoral fellowships, early- and mid-career grant opportunities, loan forgiveness opportunities, and fellowships for Black, Brown, and historically underrepresented researchers.

- **Promote mentorship programs:** Develop mentorship and training programs focused on culturally-responsive and community-engaged research methods, connecting emerging researchers with experienced Black and Brown violence prevention researchers committed to research rooted in racial, health, and social equity.
- **Establish collaborative funding pools:** Create funding pools across private foundations and businesses to supplement and scale government funding for community violence research.

For Researchers and Research Institutions

- **Partner with educational institutions:** Collaborate with schools and universities to increase student awareness of gun violence prevention research opportunities, specifically students in Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and other minority serving institutions.
- **Engage with community practitioners:** Establish formal partnerships with community-based violence prevention practitioners to incorporate their insights into research.
- **Collaborate with policy advocacy groups:** Work with advocacy groups to translate research findings into evidence-informed solutions.
- **Foster interdisciplinary collaboration:** Collaborate across disciplines to broaden understanding of and narratives about the causes, consequences, responses, and solutions to gun violence.
- **Incentivize inclusive research practices:** Develop policies that encourage and incentivize inclusive research practices, promote diversity in research teams, and address the needs of marginalized communities.

- **Coordinate researchers across regions:** Work with Black and Brown researchers in different regions for real-time dissemination of findings and best practices for engaging communities and using equitable and culturally-responsive research practices.
- **Champion increased funding:** Push for more public and private funding for community-engaged and inclusive research to advance equitable solutions to safety.
- **Champion government-funded initiatives:** Push for the creation of government programs that dedicate funds specifically for research and policy development focused at reducing violence in communities most affected by the dual and interconnected devastations of structural violence and gun violence.

- **Launch public awareness campaigns:** Utilize social media, public lectures, and publications with various data modalities and visualization techniques to educate the public and academic communities on the importance of inclusive research practices.
- **Promote institutional policy reforms:** Push for the development and implementation of standards and guidelines within academic and research institutions that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion in research practices.
- **Include community members in research:** Engage community members and impacted individuals throughout the research process, from design and implementation to data interpretation and dissemination.

Conclusion

Gun violence plagues communities across the United States, and yet Black and Brown communities experience an extraordinarily outsized impact of this public health and safety crisis. The solutions outlined in this report are expected to address the lack of equity in support and resources for community gun violence research and scholars from historically underrepresented backgrounds. There is significant opportunity in **(1) harnessing the B&B Collective's existing and growing scholarship on understanding the causes, consequences, responses, and solutions to community violence**, specifically gun violence in Black, Brown, and racially and ethnically underrepresented communities; **(2) addressing the lack of equity** in support and resources for community violence prevention research, policy, and practice, and **(3) addressing the structural and systemic inequities that perpetuate community violence in racially segregated and disinvested communities.** Fully engaging a growing community of talented and highly-trained researchers who have deep connections to the communities disproportionality burdened by gun violence and use an equity lens is essential. Failing to include Black and Brown researchers will maintain the cycle of violence and perpetuate the status quo—continued reliance on law enforcement and carceral strategies that exacerbate harm and fear and maintain the cycle of violence rather than promote safety. This report is intended to not only offer recommendations for enhancing the quality and relevance of research, but also to suggest how meaningful and sustainable safety and increased quality of life is possible for all communities.

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