

Perspectives

THE STATE OF PLAY

Each month, we examine how the mental health and trauma conversation is evolving, with a focus on youth, women, the justice system. In light of recent tragedies, this month's issue will focus on common themes around **gun violence, trauma, and mental health**. Our goal is not to share our point-of-view, but to bring together the diverse perspectives of our collaborators and other experts, advocates, and community voices.

TW: Gun violence

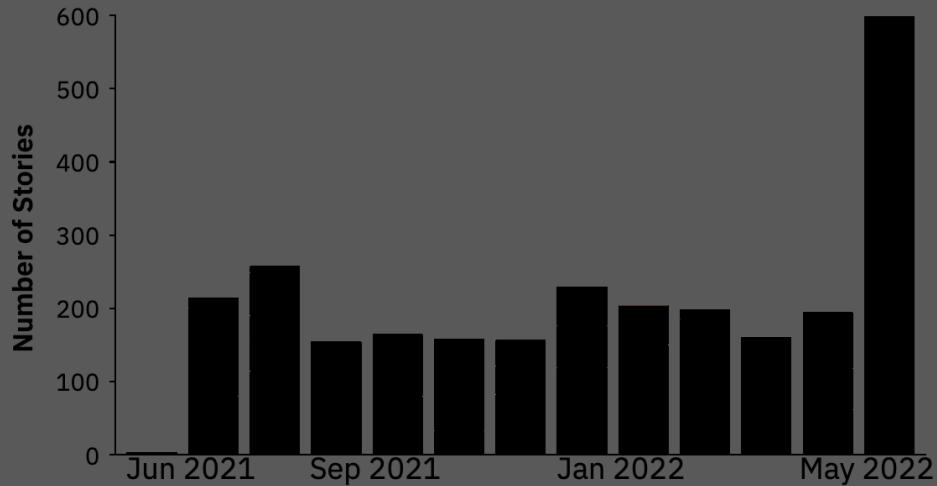
National organizations join forces to combat misconceptions around gun violence and mental illness.ⁱ

60 organizations have joined to release a shared statement outlining the harm of linking mental illness to mass shootings:

"Attempts to connect mental illness to mass shootings are a distraction that inflicts enormous damage by taking attention from solutions that could actually prevent such events. This perpetuates a false narrative that encourages stigmatization of and discrimination against the millions of Americans living with mental health conditions who are more likely to be victims than perpetrators of it."

Gun Violence & Mental Health May 2021 – May 2022

Traction in the Media



What's the Role of the Mental Health System in Preventing Mass Shootings?ⁱⁱ

In 2020, gun-related homicides reached the highest number ever recorded in the United States – surging by 35%, reaching 45,000 deaths. And while gun violence persists, so does the misconception that the majority of perpetrators can be classified as mentally ill. In a recent episode of *The Daily*, Dr. Amy Barnhorst, MD reports that **only 4% of community violence can be attributed to mental illness**, and furthers the argument to disassociate the two.

Educators' long-silent suffering: double pressure from the pandemic and gun violence.ⁱⁱⁱ

Teachers were already facing burnout due to the pandemic. 55% shared that they were planning to leave the profession. School shootings add multiple layers of emotional, physical, and behavioral pressure on teachers. A U.S. teacher survey found that teachers' job-related stress levels and symptoms of depression were higher than most workers in other industries.

THOUGHT STARTERS

A roundup of thought-provoking pieces on mental health and trauma for youth, women, and the justice system.



Youth Mental Health: Adolescent identity alters after prolonged exposure to trauma from gun violence^{iv}

Traumatic situations, such as gun violence, alter how adolescents form their identities. Annette Bailey, PhD of Ryerson University named this effect **trauma-altered identity** — a term used to describe the cumulative impacts of individual, intergenerational, and structural violence. Through a series of in-depth interviews with young Black men, Dr. Bailey found that gun violence could leave them trapped in the assumptions and biases of others, and hamper their ability to chart a healthy course for themselves. One young Black man in the study expressed this powerfully:

"A lot of Black men are disconnected from who they are. They search for themselves in gang life and through an identity as someone else, someone to be feared. At the root of that is trauma, social struggles, fear. Constant fear. All we know is struggle and racism is just the worst of all. We don't know what it means to thrive. We view ourselves how others treat us... Everyday I struggle to free myself from the trauma of life, and from the man the world tells me that I am and should be... Violence becomes seen as the norm for the young Black men who are born, live, age, learn, work, play, pray, and parent in environmental contexts."

Women's Mental Health: Guns heighten the severity of intimate partner violence^v

The impact of gun violence against women extends beyond fatal encounters. While men suffer higher rates of gun violence, women are frequent targets and victims of violence from people they know well. In the report, "**Transforming the Culture of Power: An Examination of Gender-Based Violence in the United States**" released by the Center for American Progress, it is highlighted that:

"Firearms are used in intimate partner violence more than any other weapon. According to data from the FBI's supplemental homicide reports, from 2010 to 2019, more than 50 percent of homicides of women perpetrated by an intimate partner involved the use of a gun. In 2015, 92 percent of all firearm deaths among women in high-income countries occurred in the United States. Even when firearms are not used to kill, they are used as tools to uphold the power, control, and abuse that perpetrators wield over survivors. This is particularly noteworthy because even when individuals survive gun injuries or a gun is never fired, women still pay the price emotionally, physically, and economically."

The Justice System: First responders also experience trauma from gun violence^{vi}

Jim Burch, President of the National Police Foundation, shines light on another traumatic consequence of gun violence. When a first responder witnesses a deadly shooting, feelings of anger and guilt may follow. Burch continues:

"People can't or just don't want to be exposed to that level of repeated pain and trauma. If you have a police officer who has seen this so much that they're numb to the violence, how effective can they be in understanding the community's concerns and impatience around gun violence? We become complacent over time with levels of gun violence."

THE PUNCHLIST

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WAYS TO TAKE ACTION THIS MONTH.**Call:**

This **guide** can get you started if you want to call your local legislators about gun violence.

Donate:

Organizations such as **Everytown, Moms Demand Action, and Newtown Action Alliance Foundation** are fighting for gun safety. They run on grassroot support.

Read:

Leading mental health organizations have made powerful statements about gun violence and mental illness:

- [American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#)
- [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance \(DBSA\)](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)

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nexus@highlanterngroup.com

ⁱ [NAMI Statement on Criminal Justice](#)

ⁱⁱ [New York Times. "Gun deaths surged during the first year of the pandemic"](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [ABC News. Teachers face mental health challenges dealing with school shootings.](#)

^{iv} [Everytown Research. Invisible wounds of gun violence.](#)

^v [American Progress. Gun Violence Against Women.](#)

^{vi} [Everytown Research. Economic Cost of Gun Violence.](#)