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One in five parents report children's mental health is impacted by gun violence exposure

Exposure to gun violence is having a negative impact on the mental health of Chicago's youth, according to the latest study by Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

The latest survey from the hospital's [Voices of Child Health in Chicago](#) found:

- More than one in four parents said their children have heard gunshots when at home, varying significantly by city region.
- One in five parents said their children's mental health has been impacted by exposure to gun violence, the most common symptoms were feeling more scared and worried.
- Parents supported a number of solutions to reduce gun violence exposure for youth, such as increasing community-based violence intervention programs and job opportunities for youth.

Chicagoans have been experiencing an uptick in gun violence and this is resulting in negative effects on youth, as violence exposure is associated with post-traumatic stress disorder and other internalizing symptoms, such as anxiety or depression. Many respondents in the survey indicated that their children have seen or heard news about gun violence (nearly 48 percent), while 27 percent said that their children have heard gunshots when at home.

The impact on children's mental health is apparent. The survey also revealed that 20 percent of parents said their children's mental health was impacted by gun violence. This finding aligns with findings of the Child Welfare League of America, which also reported that more than 25 percent of U.S. children witnessed an act of violence in their homes or schools within the past year.

"We know that both gun violence and youth mental health are top-of-mind concerns about child health among Chicago parents," said Matthew M. Davis, MD, MAPP, Chair of the Department of Medicine at Lurie Children's, Executive Vice-President and Chief Community Health Transformation Officer at the Patrick M. Magoon Institute for Healthy Communities at Lurie Children's and Chair of Pediatrics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "It is clear from this latest survey that many youth in Chicago are exposed either directly or

indirectly to gun violence, and we must work together to reduce the impact on their health and well-being.”

The consequential toll on youth has created a differential impact across the city. Children who lived on the South side were over three times more likely to hear gunshots when at home compared with children who lived on the North side, something that aligns with prior research.

“Parents should be sure to maintain open communication with their children and have ongoing dialogues to help process any violence exposure and trauma,” said Karen Sheehan, MD, MPH, Associate Chair for Advocacy in Pediatrics at Lurie Children’s and Medical Director of the Patrick M. Magoon Institute for Healthy Communities, and Professor of Pediatrics, Medical Education, and Preventive Medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. “Having a safe space within the community is essential for youth.”

On a day-to-day basis, parents, caretakers and community leaders can help to provide space for trauma healing and mental health support for youth. When asked about potential solutions to reduce gun violence in our city and its mental health impact on youth, 57 percent of parents supported solutions such as community-based violence intervention programs, 55 percent supported increasing job opportunities for youth, 53 percent supported increasing mentoring opportunities for youth and creating more safe outdoor places for youth, while 52 percent supported increasing after-school opportunities for youth.

This report is based on data from the Voices of Child Health in Chicago Parent Panel Survey. The survey is administered to a sample of Chicago parents by Lurie Children’s and NORC at the University of Chicago via internet and telephone. The survey is administered to our panel of parents three times each year. The data in this report was collected from May through July 2022. The sample consisted of 1,068 Chicago parents, step-parents, or guardians who had at least one child under 18 years of age in the household (referred to as “parents” in this report). Parents were from all 77 community areas in Chicago. The survey completion rate was 43% and the cumulative survey response rate was 2.2%. All analyses were conducted with statistical weighting so that the results are representative of the parent population in the City of Chicago during the time period of data collection. For more information about the VOCHIC Parent Panel Survey, visit luriechildrens.org/ParentPanel and our page on Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/cjz82/>.

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