

Firearm violence exposure in Black and American Indian/Alaska Native communities linked to poorer health

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There is a widening health disparity among Black, American Indian and Alaska Native adults exposed to gun violence, according to Rutgers researchers who say these communities have more mental and physical health issues because they witness or are victimized at a higher rate.

In a [new study](#) published in *Health Affairs Scholar*, 3,015 Black and 527 American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) adults residing in the United States were surveyed between April and May 2023.

Participants were asked whether they were threatened with a firearm, shot with a firearm, had a family or friend shot with a firearm, or witnessed or heard about a shooting. The results found that these circumstances led to poorer mental and [physical health](#), especially when people experienced multiple types of [gun violence](#) exposure.

"Communities of color bear the burden of gun violence in the United States. Our research shows that exposure to individual types of firearm violence, like being shot, threatened with a gun, or losing a loved one to gun violence, is linked to poorer mental and physical health among Black and AI/AN adults," says lead author Daniel Semenza, director of interpersonal violence research of the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center. "Being exposed to multiple types of gun violence is even more harmful to health."

Firearm violence is a major public health issue in the United States, and nearly 48,000 people were victims of firearm injury in 2021. Communities of color are disproportionately impacted and exposure to firearm violence is associated with worse mental and physical health, according to the Rutgers study.

Semenza, assistant professor in the Department of Urban-Global Public Health at the Rutgers School of Public Health and in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice at Rutgers University-Camden, says reducing gun violence in the U.S. is necessary to make sure that all Americans can live a healthy life.

"Gun violence prevention needs to be an absolute priority in the U.S., not only for its own moral sake, but because gun violence damages the

health and well-being of many more people than just the direct victims," added Semenza.

Moving forward, Semenza says, future researchers need to also investigate how to reduce [firearm](#)-related violence and health issues among other groups, including Hispanic, White and Asian Americans.

More information: Daniel C Semenza et al, Firearm violence exposure and health in 2 national samples of Black and American Indian/Alaska Native adults, *Health Affairs Scholar* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/haschl/qxad036](#)

Provided by Rutgers University

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