

Gun violence touches nearly 60% of Black Americans—and predicts disability

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Roughly 60% of all Black Americans are exposed to some form of gun violence, and such exposures predict elevated rates of disability, according to Rutgers Health research.

Survey data from 3,015 Black Americans linked specific disabilities ranging from trouble concentrating to difficulty dressing or bathing with

exposure to various types of gun violence: being shot, being threatened with a firearm, knowing a shooting victim, and witnessing a shooting or hearing of one nearby.

"Traditionally, the majority of efforts related to gun violence have focused on reducing homicides, but this study indicates that we need to provide more support to those who face such exposures to violence beyond homicide," said Daniel Semenza, an associate professor at the Rutgers School of Public Health's Gun Violence Research Center and lead author of the study.

More than 40% of survey-takers knew a shooting victim, while 12% of them reported at least three exposure types, according to the study [published](#) in the *Journal of Urban Health*. Men reported higher exposure to direct threats than women—30% versus 15%—and being shot, 4% versus 2%.

"These numbers are striking because this was a nationally representative sample, matched to all Black Americans as a whole by age, sex, income, education and area of residence," said Semenza, whose co-authors included Nazsa Baker, a postdoctoral fellow at Rutgers' New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center.

Semenza added, "The survey shows that roughly 60% of all Black adults in the US have faced exposure to gun violence and that 40% of them personally know a shooting victim, which is staggering."

Exposure predicted elevated rates of disability in both sexes, but different exposure types connected more significantly to various disabilities in men and women.

Men who witnessed or heard about shootings had a 53% greater rate of suffering from a [functional disability](#) than men who reported no

exposure. They also were more than twice as likely to report trouble concentrating, walking stairs, dressing or bathing.

For women, being directly threatened was associated with a higher risk for disability. Women who reported gun-related threats had a 48% greater rate of reporting a functional disability than other women, a 75% greater likelihood of reporting difficulty concentrating and were at least twice as likely to report difficulty walking, climbing stairs or running errands.

Exposure to three or more types of gun violence predicted even higher disability rates. Women who reported such exposure were nearly six times as likely as [women](#) with no exposure to report difficulty running errands.

"This kind of survey-based study cannot prove causation, but it suggests that exposure to gun violence might shape functional disability and everyday well-being through mental trauma, even when it doesn't disable people directly via physical injury," Semenza said.

"We need to continue efforts to reduce gun violence, but we also need to make sure that when [gun violence](#) does occur, there are resources available where affected people can go to help manage the trauma that such exposure creates."

More information: Daniel C. Semenza et al, Firearm Violence Exposure and Functional Disability among Black Men and Women in the United States, *Journal of Urban Health* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s11524-024-00866-8](#)

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