

New Haven Public Health Department

Creating a Healthy and Safe City:

***The Impact of Violence in New Haven
Executive Summary***

Available online at www.healthmattersnh.org



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Introduction

Community violence can cause injury and death. It may also result in psychological harm to, and other adverse health effects for, victims, witnesses and other people who live in areas considered to be unsafe.

The New Haven Health Department is one of three local health departments in Connecticut that has received funding from the Connecticut Association of Directors of Health (CADH) to create a Health Equity Alliance. This Alliance of diverse partners addresses the relationship between social and economic conditions and health outcomes of New Haven residents using a novel tool called the Health Equity Index. This document presents the findings of the Alliance on community violence in New Haven.

Community violence is a significant public health problem in New Haven that calls for a united response. Although the impact of community violence can affect us all, the analysis presented here shows that certain neighborhoods, communities of color and young people bear a disproportionate burden of the effects of violent crime.

The leadership of Mayor John DeStefano, Jr. and his administration has facilitated the launch of Health Matters! an ambitious movement to improve the health status of the City of New Haven. Health Matters! aims to use local data to prioritize and assess health issues, policies and practices for long-term health impact on New Haven residents. It is intended that the information and recommendations presented in this document support the work of Health Matters! on community violence.

The Concern

Data from the Health Equity Index and other sources of information provided by researchers, residents and government officials detail why community violence is a significant public health concern in New Haven:

- In 2007-2008, deaths from assault were as significant a cause of premature death as cancer, heart disease and accidents. Death from assault was the leading cause of death among males 15 – 29. Non-fatal injury from assault has also caused a substantial health burden in the City.
- The impact of community violence on young Black and Hispanic males has been particularly pronounced. In 2007 and 2008, death from assault accounted for over a third of the deaths of Black and Hispanic males age 15 – 29. All those killed by gunfire during that period were Black or Hispanic males.
- Over 85% of deaths from assault in 2007 and 2008 were caused by handguns. The vast majority of the handgun deaths occurred outdoors in parking lots, in the street and on sidewalks.
- Violent crime is not evenly distributed in New Haven, but heavily concentrated in some districts of the City. Violent criminal behavior is also geographically associated with, though not necessarily caused by, economic distress and locations with parolees, prison releases, retail businesses, and illegal drug markets.
- The majority of city residents are unlikely to be physically injured by violent crime. However, due to a variety of potentially negative impacts on mental health, physical activity and quality of life, the indirect burden of violence on residents of a city like New Haven may be considerable.

Next Steps

The Health Equity Alliance and Health Matters! seek to identify, develop and advance policies that address the root causes of violence. Community violence prevention interventions that are currently recognized as best practices focus on the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and relationships of individuals. Best practices in community- and society-level changes have not been well-defined. In this context it is suggested that potential areas for policy initiatives in New Haven include:

- Expansion of economic and job opportunities for youth and adults;
- Physical and environmental improvements, quality housing, and enhancements to community stewardship within neighborhoods experiencing high levels of street violence;
- Improved (increased?) access to positive social activities for youth and adults;
- Further enhancements to prisoner reentry programs;
- Increased deterrents to handgun use in the perpetration of crime.

Finally, we recommend that:

- A systematic review be undertaken of community- and society-level violence prevention strategies implemented in US cities.
- The City of New Haven adopt a process, such as a health impact assessment, to guide decisions concerning the design and development of neighborhoods that support safe, healthy lives.
- Agencies including but not limited to New Haven Public Schools, the New Haven Health Department and New Haven Police Department, continue to work together in aligning priorities and identifying opportunities to reduce violence and enhance community safety in New Haven.

How can I learn more?

To download a copy of the *Creating a Healthy and Safe City: The Impact of Violence in New Haven* or to learn more about Health Matters! visit <http://www.healthmattersnh.org>.

To find out more about the Health Equity Alliance visit <http://www.healthequityalliance.us/index.php/>.