



# Community-Academic Collaboration to Prevent Violence in Chicago

## VIOLENCE RESEARCH AGENDA

While rates of violence are decreasing on average across Chicago, violence inequality is increasing.<sup>1</sup> The declines in violence are experienced disproportionately in communities on the north side of the city, while many predominantly African-American or Latino communities on the south and west sides experienced steady or increased rates of violence in recent years.<sup>2</sup> Because different communities, and different populations within them, perceive and experience violence differently, those differences must be recognized and understood to effectively prevent violence. Often violence prevention research is developed and carried out with little to no input from the people who live in the communities most affected by violence. The **Community-Academic Collaboration to Prevent Violence in Chicago (CACPVC)** enhances connections between academic, philanthropic, and community partners to build capacity to develop, implement, and evaluate strategies to reduce health disparities related to violence in Chicago.

A series of community meetings, including Open Community Forums and Organization Networking Gatherings, was convened across the city to solicit input from residents, community organizations, researchers, and local funders about the role of research in preventing violence in their communities. The goal of this project was to identify the highest priorities of community residents to improve knowledge about violence in Chicago using community-based participatory research (CBPR). CBPR is an approach that involves all partners in the process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR focuses on a topic that's important to the community aiming to combine knowledge with action to achieve social change.

The project was guided by the direction of an Advisory Board comprised of representatives of community-based organizations, researchers, and funders whose work and expertise focus on issues related to violence prevention in Chicago. A Community Research Collaboration Workgroup was convened to create a Community-Based Participatory Research agenda for violence prevention that reflects the diversity of Chicago neighborhoods and develop a series of recommendations to support community engagement in violence research.

The project was led by Strengthening Chicago's Youth (SCY), a violence prevention collaborative convened by Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. SCY is Chicago's largest violence prevention collaborative and a catalyst for innovation. Its mission is to connect and mobilize the community around a public health approach to violence prevention. SCY encourage partnerships that strengthen existing efforts so youth can reach their full potential.

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<sup>1</sup>Illinois Violent Death Reporting System (2016) Homicides in Chicago:2005, 2010, and 2015. Accessed: <https://www.luriechildrens.org/en-us/research/areas-of-research/programs/child-health-research/Documents/LCH-883-ivdrs-data-brief-july-2016.pdf> on November 26, 2017.

<sup>2</sup>Hertz, D. (2013) We've Talked About Homicide In Chicago At Least One Million Times But I Don't Think This Has Come Up. City Notes, Accessed: <http://danielhertz.wordpress.com/2013/08/05/weve-talked-about-homicide-inchicago-at-least-one-million-times-but-i-dont-think-this-has-come-up/> on October 2, 2014.



## DEVELOPMENT OF THE VIOLENCE RESEARCH AGENDA

This Violence Research Agenda was developed over the course of the 4-year Community-Academic Collaboration to Prevent Violence in Chicago. Input was provided by hundreds of stakeholders including community residents and representatives of community-based organizations, academic researchers, and funders. Further detail about any aspect of this process is available on request.

1. A literature and web search were conducted to identify any existing research agendas, conference proceedings or similar documents describing a research agenda related to violence in Chicago. Although national violence-related research agendas were identified, no Chicago-specific research agendas were located. *Although not every question on this research agenda is written to be specific to Chicago, the intent is that Chicago would be the frame or lens through which the recommended studies would be conducted.*
2. In each of seven communities, an Organization Networking Gathering (attended primarily by people who work at organizations in the community) and an Open Community Forum (attended primarily by community residents) was held. Small group discussions with participants included the question “When you think about violence in Chicago and specifically in your community, are there important questions that no one is asking?” Small group discussion responses were recorded by the project’s youth scribes, and the Principal Investigator thematically coded and grouped the responses.
3. A report on the findings from the community meetings was shared with the Community Research Collaboration Workgroup. The Workgroup further grouped and refined responses from the community meetings into potential research questions.
4. A survey was conducted of the SCY membership regarding what they consider the highest priority topics for violence research in Chicago. These results were used by project staff to ensure that all of the highest priority topics were included on the research agenda.
5. Project staff reviewed the research agenda and eliminated questions for which straightforward answers already exist in published literature.
6. The Workgroup reviewed and finalized the Violence Research Agenda.



## VIOLENCE RESEARCH AGENDA

### Root Causes/Cycle of Violence

Violence does not just happen, but often stems from complex set of root causes—including previous and intergenerational exposure to violence.

- What are the root causes of different types of violence in different neighborhoods?
- What are the different factors that play a part in contributing to or interrupting cycles of violence?
- What underlying structural factors (e.g. prison, law enforcement, school discipline) perpetuate violence?
- How is sexual and gender-based violence reflected in the cycle of violence?
- How is the justice system related to the cycle of violence at individual, family, community levels?
- What economic drivers promote or deter violence?
- What is the relationship between violence and poverty? How can the violence-poverty cycle be interrupted?

### Racism and Bias/Structural Violence

Conditions of racism and bias, along with structural or institutional forms of violence, can create a context in which violence festers (e.g., the school-to-prison pipeline, mass incarceration of people of color).

- How does racism/structural violence contribute to community violence?
- What do statistical data (e.g. trends across generations, geographic differences) tell us about structural violence?
- How is violence related to current and historical patterns of segregation?
- How is violence related to the legacy of slavery?

### Trajectory of Violence

Violence emerges over the course of individuals' lives, which requires asking people who are or have been involved in violence to fully understand.

- Is there a tipping point or age of intervention when it might be necessary to transition from a prevention perspective to an intervention perspective? What are the points of intervention when people are on a trajectory toward greater involvement in violence?
- What should intervention look like and when is it most effective?
- What are the effects of violence and trauma on mental health? What are the effects of mental health issues on violence?
- What affects the likelihood of involvement in violence for individuals returning to the community after incarceration?
- For what reasons do people carry firearms?

### Protective Factors and Nonviolence

To prevent, rather than simply suppress, violence, it is critical to understand what contributes to safety and thriving among individuals and communities.

- What are the key protective factors for youth who are not involved in violence? Why do some children grow up to be healthy and successful and others do not?
- What promotes thriving in a neighborhood?



## Geographic Patterns

Chicago is known as a “city of neighborhoods,” and to fully examine violence means comparing and contrasting its neighborhoods.

- Why is it historically that the same communities have high rates of violence?
- What does violence look like in suburbs that are demographically similar to Chicago neighborhoods with high levels of violence?
- Is there something unique or specific to violence in Chicago?

## Violence Prevention Strategies

The public health approach to violence prevention involves identifying effective strategies and ensuring their widespread adoption.

- How do public and private funding strategies affect violence?
- How effective are programs and policies at reducing and preventing violence?
- How well do existing programs, policies and funding align with the needs of youth, families, and communities?
- How quickly do programs and policies have an impact on violence? How long do the effects of programs and policies last?
- How do unsuccessful programs and policies affect the community?

## Youth

Although violence does not occur solely among youth, but adolescence is often when violence emerges, when prevention and intervention are most needed, and when immature decision making may have lifelong consequences.

- What do youth report as their sources of belonging and support?
- What do youth report as the biggest challenges they are facing?
- What do youth report they need?
- What do youth report are good ways to engage and empower them?
- What are the best ways for adults to support youth?
- What is the role of youth in addressing violence?

## Family Factors

Families are the first and most important source of positive or negative guidance and examples for children and youth.

- What is the impact of the intergenerational cycle of violence?
- What is the relationship between violence in the home and community violence?
- What factors contribute to effective or ineffective parenting?
- What are the best ways for organizations and institutions to support parenting?
- How are household makeup and functioning related to violence?



## Community Factors

Violence can affect entire communities—but entire communities can effect changes that prevent and reduce violence.

- How does violence in a community affect the overall health and well-being of the community and its residents?
- How do the quality and quantity of youth-supporting services and structures affect community safety?
- What is the impact of housing policy and infrastructure (e.g. tearing down housing projects, home ownership, and displacement of residents) on crime and violence?
- What strategies lead to community level change in safety?
- What are the characteristics of community leadership that contribute to safety?
- What strategies promote authentic engagement and empowerment of community residents in ensuring safety?
- How does the built environment impact community safety and well-being?

## Schools

Schools can play an important role in preventing violence through provision of high quality education and supportive programs, but inequitable access to educational opportunities may exacerbate violence.

- What is the role of schools in addressing violence?
- What is the impact of structure, quality, and funding of Chicago's education system on violence?
- How can the school-to-prison pipeline be interrupted?
- How does school policy affect violence?

## Police

Although the police department is the only city agency charged solely with addressing crime and violence, the association between policing and the level of violence in the community is more complicated.

- How do the Chicago Police Department's policing practices affect the level of violence?
- How does the level of violence affect the Chicago Police Department's policing practices?
- What contributes to relationships between police and community?

## Gangs/Street Organizations

Community violence in Chicago is often referred to as "gang violence" by the public without critical examination of what that term means and what the implications for prevention are.

- What is the relationship between gangs/street organizations and community violence and how has it changed over time?
- What is the structure of gangs/street organizations in Chicago? How has it changed over time?
- Has policy (e.g., public housing reform, law enforcement strategy) affected the structure of gangs/street organizations?



## Media and Public Perceptions

Violence affects people and communities through both their experiences of violence and their perceptions of violence—and there may be no more powerful force in shaping perceptions today than the media.

- What is the relationship between bullying/cyberbullying/social media and community violence?
- What role does media play in promoting or deterring violence?
- What role does media play in shaping public perception and community norms?
- What role do community norms play in promoting or deterring violence?
- What is the relationship between public perception of safety and what data indicate about safety? What is the impact of public perception of safety on level of violent crime in a community?
- How can awareness and concern about violence be raised among those who live in communities that are less affected by violence?



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For more information about the Community-Academic Collaboration to Prevent Violence in Chicago, the Recommendations to Support Community Engagement in Violence Research, or Strengthening Chicago's Youth, please contact Principal Investigator and Executive Director Rebecca Levin, MPH at [rlevin@luriechildrens.org](mailto:rlevin@luriechildrens.org) or 312-227-6948.

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