

FACT SHEET

Violence and Mental Health



Experiencing, exposure to and fear of violence have known emotional and mental health consequences. These consequences are often lifelong, require extensive treatment, and can, in turn, affect physical health as well as bring stress and consequences to others.

- **Youth with past exposure to interpersonal violence (as a victim or witness) have significantly higher risk for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), major depressive episodes, and substance abuse/dependence (1)**
- **Women who experience Intimate Partner Violence are 3 times more likely to display symptoms of depression, 4 times more likely to have PTSD, and 6 times more likely to have suicidal ideation (2)**
- **77% of children exposed to a school shooting and 35% of urban youth exposed to community violence develop PTSD as compared to 20% of soldiers deployed to combat areas in the last 6 years (3)**
- **Teenagers who witness a stabbing are 3 times more likely to report suicide attempts; those who witness a shooting are twice as likely to report alcohol abuse (4)**

It is generally accepted that there are emotional implications for those who are directly victimized by violence. Those who witness violence, as well as those who fear violence in their community, suffer emotional and mental health consequences too.

Current research has identified the following mental health conditions as significantly more common among those exposed to violence either directly (e.g., as a victim or perpetrator) or indirectly (e.g., as a witness):

- Multiple mental health conditions (5-9)
- Depression and risk for suicide (1,4,7,10-12)
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (1,10,12)
- Aggressive and/or violent behavior disorders (7,10,12,13)



MAKING THE CASE

So what does all this mean?

There are a number of implications from our growing understanding of the relationship between violence and mental health. Firstly, most of those who experience or witness violence require mental health interventions and supports that extend beyond the short term and recognize the longer term consequences of their experience. Secondly, when communities experience significant violence, and the fear generated by that violence, there is a need to both recognize the consequences that creates for all community members and identify strategies for addressing those consequences. Lastly, and maybe most importantly, recognizing the emotional and physical toll violence imposes on the entire community (especially children

and youth) requires that preventing violence before it occurs be a basic component and priority for all communities. There is a strong and growing science base that confirms that violence is preventable. Further, there are a number of effective strategies that not only prevent violence but also foster good mental health. These include: fostering social connections in neighborhoods; promoting adequate employment opportunities; ensuring positive emotional and social development; providing quality family support services; and making sure young people have connections with non-judgmental, caring adults/mentoring.

TO LEARN MORE

- Visit the [UNITY homepage](http://www.preventioninstitute.org/unity.html) www.preventioninstitute.org/unity.html
- Access strategies, tools and resources in Prevention Institute's [Preventing Violence & Reducing Injury focus area](http://www.preventioninstitute.org/focus-areas/preventing-violence-and-reducing-injury.html) www.preventioninstitute.org/focus-areas/preventing-violence-and-reducing-injury.html
- Read the [UNITY Policy Platform](http://www.preventioninstitute.org/component/jlibrary/article/id-290/127.html). Developed partnership with UNITY cities, the UNITY Policy Platform describes the kinds of strategies that need to be in place to prevent violence www.preventioninstitute.org/component/jlibrary/article/id-290/127.html

UNITY builds support for effective, sustainable efforts to prevent violence before it occurs so that urban youth can thrive in safe environments with supportive relationships and opportunities for success.

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