



FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE:

THE CASE FOR RAISING WAGES
TO SAVE LIVES



Executive Summary

This is the third in a series of reports commissioned by Stand Up! Chicago to address the crisis of low-wage work facing Chicago's communities. This report, produced in partnership with the Workers Organizing Committee of Chicago (WOCC), provides a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between low wages, income inequality, and the current epidemic of violence in Chicago's low-income neighborhoods.

Our analysis demonstrates clearly that high levels of poverty and income inequality are strongly correlated with elevated levels of violence, and that raising wages for Chicago's low-wage workers, along with other targeted anti-poverty and employment programs, is the most effective means of achieving safer streets and stronger communities across the city.

Specifically, this report finds that:

- Gun violence in Chicago has reached epidemic proportions, with the Associated Press describing the chronic violence in the city's most marginalized neighborhoods as "a Sandy Hook Elementary School attack unfolding in slow motion."ⁱ With 506 homicides last year, Chicago had the highest number of homicides of any city in America. In 2012, there were nearly 7,700 gun-related crimes reported in the city, or the equivalent of 21 per day—including robberies, nonfatal shootings, and homicides. This violence epidemic is estimated to cost the city \$2.5 billion annually, or about \$2,500 per household per year.
- Chicago not only leads the nation in gun violence rates, but also in measures of urban poverty and income inequality. The city currently has the third highest overall metropolitan poverty rate in the nation, and ranks first in terms of African-American poverty rates.ⁱⁱ Nearly one quarter of all Chicago residents live below the federal poverty threshold, along with over one third of the city's children.ⁱⁱⁱ Meanwhile, Chicago now falls behind countries like Nigeria, Russia, the Philippines and Malawi in terms of equitable distribution of wealth.^{iv}
- Decades of research have demonstrated that there is a statistically significant link between low wages, income inequality and crime.^v Researchers have found that the majority of increases in violent crime can be explained by downward wage trends,^{vii} and The National Bureau of Economic Research reports that a twenty percent drop in wages leads to a 12 to 18 percent increase in youth crime.^{viii} Other analysis shows that a 1 percent point increase in the Gini index (a measure of wealth inequality) produces, on average, a 3.6 percent increase in the homicide rates for a population.^{ix}
- The link between low wages, income inequality and violent crime is clear in Chicago: 89 percent of all homicides and other violent crimes in 2012 were concentrated in the south and west sides of the city, in predominantly African-American and Latino communities that are marked by high rates of poverty, unemployment and violence.

In 2012, Chicago had the highest number of homicides of any city in America:

506



SELINA BROWN

South Shore

As a South Shore resident, Selina worries about the safety of her three children. She does not allow her kids to play outside because of the risk of stray bullets. “Bullets do not have names on them,” she explained.

Violence is personal for Selina and her family. Her husband was shot in the back of his head during a robbery and left disabled for life. As a result, Selina is the sole provider for the family.

Selina is a skilled worker with many talents, having previous experience as a trained CNA, home care and dietary aide, customer service provider, and classroom assistant. Unfortunately, as Chicago recovers from the recession, most of the available jobs are in the low-wage service sector. Fast food and retail companies in Chicago make billions of dollars each year from their workers, but they fail to pay employees a living wage.

“Every penny I earn has to go to provide for my family, and working families deserve more. This is why I fight for 15,” said Selina.

The threat of violence continues to impact her family’s daily life. Her neighborhood has experienced 41 homicides in the last two years alone. That means that Selina worries whenever one of her children steps outside.

Given the strength of the evidence linking income to violent crime rates, this report makes the following recommendations with respect to violence reduction policy:

- Any policy efforts to curb gun violence in Chicago or in the U.S. must, first and foremost, address the issues of income inequality, unemployment, low wages and poverty that plague our communities.
- The city should adopt an anti-violence plan that centers upon anti-poverty initiatives such as raising the minimum wage and direct public job creation programs:
 - ***Raising wages for Chicago’s low-wage workers.*** Policymakers should support raising the minimum wage in Illinois, as well as campaigns, such as Fight for 15, that advocate a living wage for the city’s lowest-paid workers.
 - ***Direct public job creation.*** Direct, targeted employment programs, aimed at youth at risk of becoming involved in gang activity, have been demonstrated to sharply reduce crime rates.^x Policymakers should support and fund a comprehensive jobs plan, such as the one outlined by Stand Up! Chicago, as a means of bringing down levels of violence.



FELIX MENDEZ

East Garfield Park

Felix makes minimum wage working at a downtown Subway and struggles to provide the necessities for his two children. “The neighborhood I live in is not the greatest. My kids have to see things that they should not have to see,” he said. “I don’t even let them go outside to play. It’s too dangerous.”

Introduction

In the wake of the tragic mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, in December of 2012, the U.S. is now engaged in a national discussion on how to prevent gun violence in our communities. Much of this debate centers upon the question of whether policymakers should enact stricter gun control legislation in order to prevent future gun massacres that would claim the lives of innocent victims and threaten the safety of our communities.

In many ways, Chicago has become the center of the gun violence debate, with the city leading the nation in gun homicides and the recent shooting of Hadiya Pendleton, a 15-year-old Chicagoan who was caught in gun crossfire just days after performing at President Obama's inaugural festivities.^{xi} While Chicago has been spared a high-profile mass shooting, the tragedy of chronic gun violence in the city has been described by the Associated Press as "almost a Sandy Hook Elementary School attack unfolding in slow motion."^{xii}

In the summer of 2012, Chicago's homicide rate skyrocketed by 38 percent from the previous summer, with a spate of murders in the city's poorest neighborhoods that claimed children as young as six as victims.^{xiii} Last year, Chicago saw more than 500 deaths from gun violence, and so far in 2013, the city has averaged more than one gun death every day.^{xiv} Of the homicides last year, an estimated 80 percent were gang-related and 80 percent of the victims were African-Americans.^{xv}

This persistent violence on the streets of Chicago brings with it tremendous costs, beyond the tragic loss of life and the trauma experienced by communities victimized by violence. Taking into account both direct costs, such as hospital and court costs, and indirect costs, such as businesses and residents moving out of the city from fear of gun violence, University of Chicago researchers estimate that the city's gun violence epidemic costs on average \$2,500 per household per year.^{xvi}

Chicagoans naturally are searching for answers and ways to bring down this unacceptably high homicide rate. While national discussions have focused on stricter gun control measures as a means of preventing gun deaths, the city of Chicago has also taken strong measures to limit access to handguns—and in fact currently has some of the toughest gun control laws in the country. While these efforts are certainly worthwhile, they fail to acknowledge the root of the problem of gun violence on our streets: poverty and income inequality in our communities.

Just as Chicago leads the nation in gun violence rates, it also leads the nation in many measures of urban poverty and income inequality. The city currently has the third highest overall metropolitan poverty rate in the nation, and ranks first in terms of African-American poverty rates.^{xvii} Nearly one quarter of all Chicago residents live below the federal poverty threshold, and extreme poverty is even more pronounced among Chicago's children, over one third of whom live below the federal poverty threshold.^{xviii} Meanwhile, a recent analysis of income inequality in major U.S. cities found that income inequality in Chicago is comparable to that in El Salvador—and the city lags behind countries like Nigeria, Russia, the Philippines and Malawi in terms of equitable distribution of wealth.^{xix}

80%

of 2012 homicide victims were African-American

Economists have long recognized the close correlation between labor market conditions and crime rates in communities. Researchers have found that the majority of increases in violent crime can be explained by downward wage trends,^{xx} and other studies have determined that a 1 percent increase in the population of poor people produces, on average, a 2.5 percent increase in the number of homicides.^{xxi} Furthermore, the National Bureau of Economic Research reports that a twenty percent drop in wages leads to a 12

to 18 percent increase in youth crime.^{xxii} There is also a significant positive relationship between income inequality and crime rates,^{xxiii} particularly homicide rates,^{xxiv} with research showing that a 1 percent point increase in the Gini coefficient produces, on average, a 3.6 percent increase in the homicide rates for a population.^{xxv}

Given the relationship between economic conditions and violence, it is not surprising that Chicago's violence crisis plays out mostly in the city's most impoverished neighborhoods. In 2012, 89 percent of all homicides and other violent crimes in the city were concentrated in the south and west sides of the city, in predominantly African-American and Latino communities that are marked by high rates of poverty, unemployment and violence.

The analysis presented in this paper makes it clear that when a city's economic conditions improve, violent crime rates go down. Based on our research, we recommend that any policy efforts to curb gun violence in Chicago or in the U.S. address the issues of persistent poverty and income inequality. Specific policies, such as raising the minimum wage to a living wage and creating good jobs for the unemployed in Chicago's hardest-hit neighborhoods, are the best tools at our disposal to decrease gun violence in our city, and implementing these policies is the most effective way to create safer, stronger communities.



There is a strong correlation between violent crime and low wages

Poverty and Income Inequality

For the purposes of this report, the term “poverty” refers to lack of sufficient or secure income and/or access to services to meet the basic human needs of food, shelter, healthcare, education, and information.^{xxvi} Commonly, policymakers use the U.S. federal poverty guidelines to determine if an individual or family is considered “poor.” However, many households that are not officially considered “poor” using this traditional measure of poverty nonetheless demonstrably lack enough income to cover essential expenses.^{xxvii}

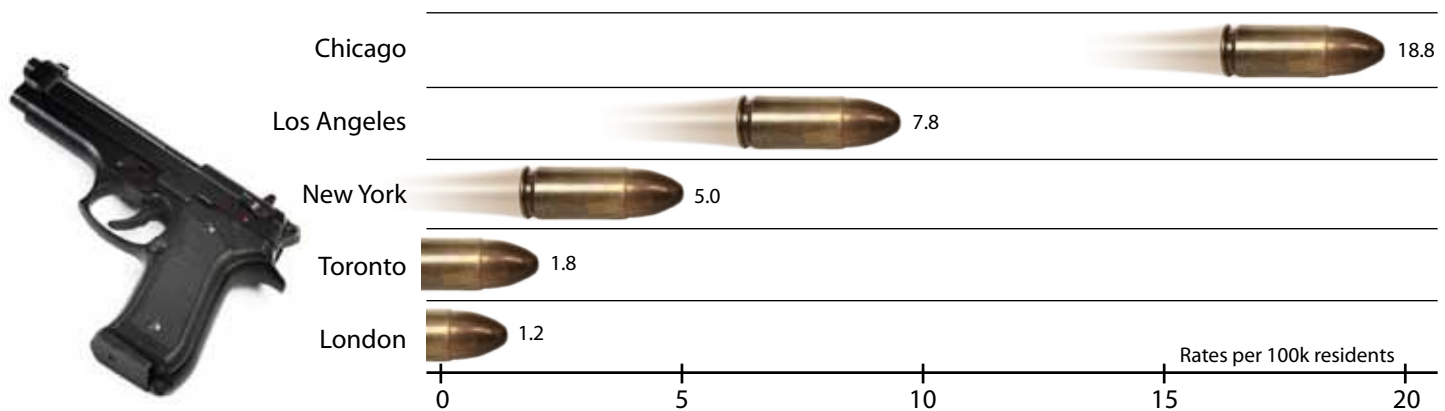
In Chicago, a one-adult, one-child household would have to earn at least \$35,859 annually, or the equivalent of about \$17.24 per hour for a full-time worker, to meet their basic expenses.^{xxviii} Notably, this is more than double the amount a full-time minimum-wage worker would earn, and \$20,000 more than the official poverty threshold.^{xxix} Therefore, the terms “poverty,” “poor,” “low-income,” and “low-wage” used throughout this report may be understood to refer generally to falling below this threshold.

Whereas “poverty” is a description of absolute deprivation, the term income inequality refers to relative deprivation, or how material resources are distributed within a population.^{xxx} In this paper, income inequality is measured by the Gini coefficient, which ranges from a value of 0 (representing “perfect equality,” or a case in which everyone within a certain population receives the same income) to 1 (representing “perfect inequality,” or a case in which all income goes to the share of the population with the highest income).^{xxxi}

The Current State of Violence in Chicago's Communities

In 2012, there were a total of 506 homicides in the city, more than in other city in the U.S.^{xxxii} At a rate of 18.6 homicides per 100,000, Chicago's homicide rate was more than double that of Los Angeles (7.8 per 100,000) and more than triple that of New York (5 per 100,000).^{xxxiii} Compared with other international cities of similar wealth and stature, such as London or Toronto, the contrast is even more striking, with Chicago's homicide rate about ten times higher than either of those cities.^{xxxiv} Sadly, Chicago has become the murder capital of America, and even much of the world.

Comparison of 2012 Homicide Rates



Through 2012 and into 2013, headlines describing violence in Chicago were at times almost indistinguishable from those describing a war zone. In 2012, the average number of homicides per weekend was 3.8, though the number reached as high as 8 or more on particularly violent weekends.^{xxxv} So far in 2013, violence in the city has continued to escalate. In the first month of the year, there were a total of 42 homicides in the city, the highest number for a January since 2002.^{xxxvi} There have also been a number of high-profile news stories related to homicides, including that of a woman who lost all of her four children to gun violence and the murder of Hadiya Pendleton, the 15 year old who performed at President Obama's 2013 inauguration. While homicides are the most tragic of gun crimes, they make up only about 6 percent of all the gun-related crimes that occur in the city.^{xxxvii} Nonfatal shootings, which do not receive nearly the same kind of media coverage as homicides, totaled

nearly 1,900 in 2012. Like homicides, most shootings tend to happen on the weekends. In 2012, there was an average of 13 shootings every weekend in the city, though in particularly bloody weekends the number of victims exceeded 50.^{xxxviii} In total, 2012 saw close to 7,700 reported gun-related crimes in the city, a figure that includes not just homicides, but also nonfatal shootings, aggravated battery with a firearm, and robberies. On average, last year there were 21 gun-related crimes committed in Chicago each day.

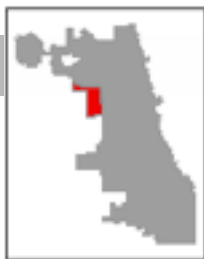
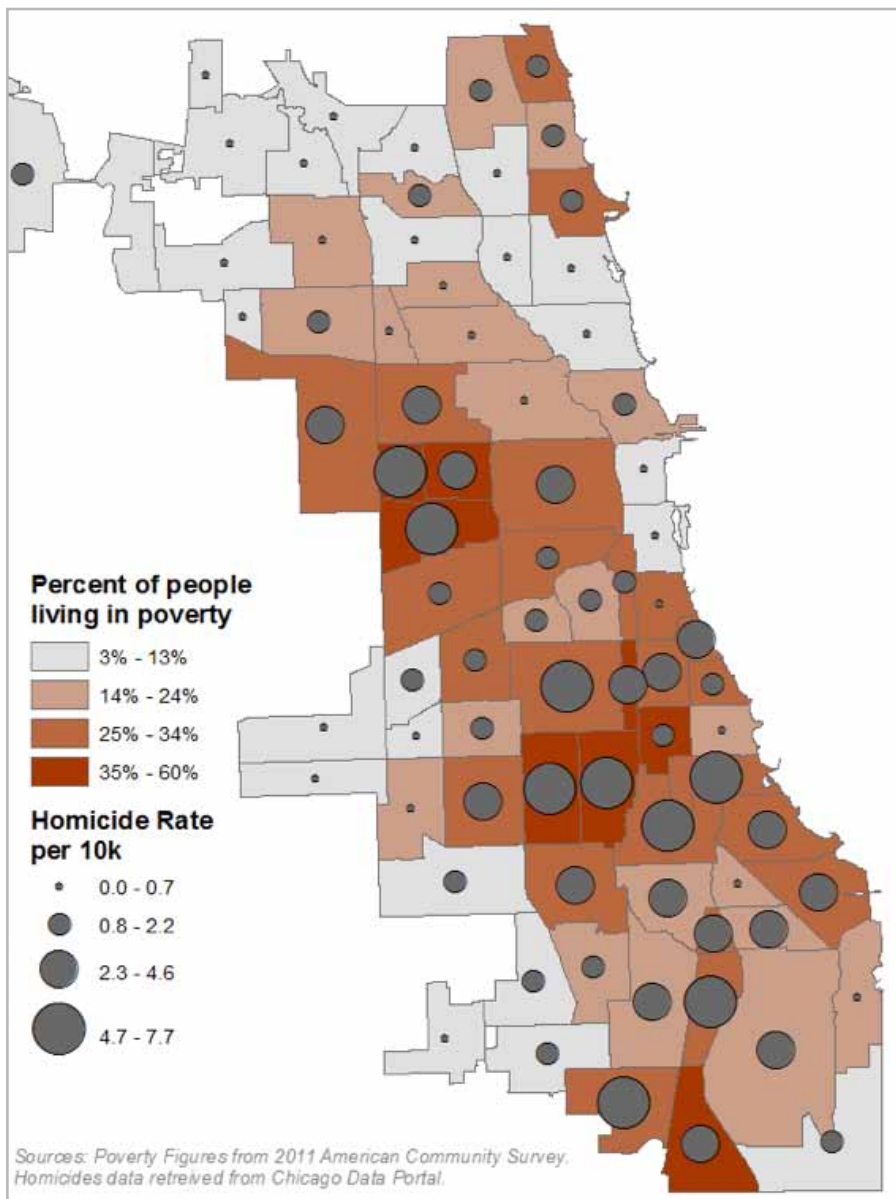
While the violence that has occurred in the city over the past year has received a considerable amount of media attention, the problem of violence in Chicago has persisted for years. From 2002 to 2012, there were 5,429 people murdered in the city, which is higher than the number of U.S. armed forces killed in the Afghanistan war.^{xxxix}

Nearly **7,700** reported gun-related crimes in Chicago – 2012

The Demographics of Violence in CHICAGO

Community Demographics

In 2012, homicides affected most areas of the city, with 62 out of the 74 community areas in the city reporting at least one homicide.^{x1} However, 89 percent of these homicides were concentrated in the south and west sides of the city, in predominantly African-American and Latino communities that have struggled with decades-long socioeconomic maladies of poverty, unemployment and income inequality. In some communities with high levels of gun violence, the percentage of families living below the federal poverty line can reach almost 60 percent. The graphic “Poverty Rates and Homicides: 2012” illustrates how the majority of homicides occurred in the city’s poorest neighborhoods.



Austin Neighborhood

Austin stands on the far west side of the city and struggles with a combination of poverty and violence. With an unemployment rate of 22 percent—more than twice as high as that of Chicago as a whole—the predominately

African-American neighborhood has more than 27,000 people living in poverty. The 36 total homicides in Austin in 2012 surpassed all other Chicago neighborhoods that year.

Hundreds of Austin residents work in the retail and restaurant industries downtown. Compared with other community areas, Austin has the second highest number of people working in the Loop’s retail stores and restaurants. Furthermore, it ranks number one in people working in downtown department stores. The connection between low wages and violence in Austin is clear: with a high number of low-wage workers and an alarming number of homicides, Austin exemplifies how extreme poverty can turn neighborhoods into war zones.

Victim Demographics

While violence in Chicago impacts individuals and families from all ages and ethnic backgrounds, an analysis of victim demographic data from 2012 demonstrates a clear pattern amongst victims of violent crime^{xli}:

- Homicide most commonly occurs in the victim's community: about 79 percent are killed less than half a mile away from home^{lxxxv}
- By far the majority of homicides in 2012 (69 percent) were African-American males
- About 46 percent of homicide victims are under the age of 24; about 10 percent are under the age of 18



Much of this violence stems from gang rivalries and fighting; the Chicago Police Department categorizes about 80% of homicides as "gang-related." However, some community leaders and crime experts claim that law enforcement has wrongfully applied this label to many circumstances,^{xlii} and that overestimating the significance of gangs in lethal shootings has the potential of dehumanizing the killings and dismissing some of the socioeconomic circumstances that are fueling the violence.

In a number of the homicides classified as "gang-related," victims are not part of gangs, but are simply victims of stray bullets intended for other targets, such as seven-year-old Heaven Sutton who was shot dead at her mother's candy stand last July;^{xliii} six-year-old Aliya Shell who was shot several times as she was sitting in her front porch last May;^{xliv} and 14-year-old Alejandro Jaime who was mistaken for a gang member and shot in the back as he was trying to run away from his attackers.^{xlv} Still other slayings were the result of armed robberies, with victims such as Raymond Jerz, 24, who was killed in Little Village last March,^{xlvi} and Akeem Morris, 22, who was shot in the face after resisting a robbery in West Garfield Park last May.^{xlvii}



New City Neighborhood

New City is a community on the south side of Chicago that includes the Back of the Yards neighborhood and Canaryville. While it is a majority Latino community, it is relatively mixed, with a population that is roughly 57 percent Hispanic, 29 percent African American, and 11 percent white.^{xlviii}

New City is plagued by high levels of unemployment and poverty. At 18 percent, the jobless rate in New City is almost twice as high as the city's overall unemployment level, and more than one third of New City residents live below the poverty line. The neighborhood suffered from 25 recorded homicides in 2012, ranking second only to Austin.

Poverty and Inequality in Chicago

Chicago not only leads the nation in gun violence, but also in many measures of poverty and income inequality. The city currently has the third highest overall metropolitan poverty rate in the nation, and ranks first in terms of African-American poverty rates.^{xlix} According to recent Census data, nearly one quarter of all Chicago residents—and over one third of Chicago’s children—live below the federal poverty threshold.^l

Much of Chicago’s poverty crisis is attributable to the problem of low wages and unemployment. According to a recent report by Women Employed and Action Now, the number of low-wage workers in Chicago, defined as those making \$12 per hour or less, increased by nearly 30 percent over the last decade. Contrary to widespread belief that most low-wage workers are teenagers working for disposable income, the same study found that nearly 60 percent of low-wage workers live in households solely dependent upon those wages.^{li} Meanwhile, unemployment among the city’s youth ages 16 to 19 reached 75 percent in 2010—the highest level since World War II—with African-American males disproportionately represented among this group.^{lii}

Chicago also suffers from extreme income inequality, with the city home to at least eighteen billionaires, thousands of millionaires, and several of the richest ZIP codes in the nation,^{liii} despite the fact that vast numbers of Chicagoans struggle to meet their families’ basic needs. A recent analysis of income inequality in major U.S. cities by The

Atlantic found that the Gini coefficient for Chicago of .47 is the same as that of El Salvador, and the city falls behind countries like Nigeria, Russia, the Philippines and Malawi in terms of equitable distribution of wealth.^{liv} Income inequality in Chicago also plays out along racial lines. Census data shows that, in 2011, the median income in Cook County for non-Hispanic whites was \$64,027, compared to only \$40,344 for Hispanics and \$34,056 for African Americans.^{lv}

Richard Kramer, a social scientist who studies youth and violent crime, explains the origins of income inequality in cities like Chicago:

“[M]any Americans in the so-called urban underclass are trapped in a system of concentrated unemployment that results in increasingly isolated poverty. Second, those who do work, primarily in the secondary labor market, earn very low wages compared to their counterparts in other countries. This creates the problem of the working poor. Finally, the United States provides fewer government benefits to either the underclass or the working poor to offset the problems of concentrated unemployment and poor wages.”^{lvi}

Failed Anti-Violence Policies in Chicago

Despite the fact that it has some of the strictest gun control laws in the country, Chicago continues to lead the nation in gun homicides. In fact, the Chicago Police Department confiscated 7,400 guns in the city of Chicago in 2012,^{lvii} and nearly 700 guns in just the first month of 2013,^{lviii} a result of weak gun control laws at the state and national levels, which undermine the impact that local gun control laws might have.

Since Chicago’s homicide rate spiked in the summer of 2012, the city has taken several additional measures to attempt to curb neighborhood violence, including making changes to the police force, and putting more cops and CeaseFire volunteers on the street.^{lix} However, high rates of gun violence have continued into 2013, suggesting that these efforts have been largely ineffective.

Access to firearms and gang activity are certainly components fueling the city’s violent crime crisis, yet Chicago’s anti-violence policies do not address the fundamental issues of poverty and inequality and

therefore have proven largely ineffective. While Mayor Emanuel’s February 2013 announcement of a \$2.5 million expansion of youth employment programs will provide 600 youths with summer jobs^{lx} and is a step in the right direction, the city should adopt a

comprehensive anti-violence policy of raising wages for low-wage workers and direct public job creation for our hardest-hit communities.

7,400 guns
confiscated
in 2012

The Cost of Violence

In addition to tragic loss of life and the trauma experienced by families and neighborhoods victimized by violence, persistent violence on the streets of Chicago places a tremendous strain on community resources and takes an economic toll on families citywide.

Direct costs of violence

The most direct and obvious costs of gun violence are the medical costs associated with treating gun victims. Nationwide, the average cost associated with the treatment of a victim is about \$30,000.^{lxi} However, the costs may actually be higher for local hospitals. The Cook County Hospital system estimates the cost per patient to be \$52,000.^{lxii} At Northwestern Memorial Hospital, where more than half of patients treated do not have health insurance, the average medical bill for a gun violence victim exceeds \$110,000. This means that the cost of covering the initial medical expenses for gunshot victims is at least \$56 million or more per year, most of which is paid for by taxpayers, hospitals and people with insurance. In addition to these costs, survivors often have to undergo long-term treatment, which can add up to more than \$250,000 and is typically paid for by Medicaid.^{lxiii}

The criminal justice system also bears a significant burden of the costs associated with violence such as increased police activity, incarceration, and court proceedings. Incarceration costs Illinois taxpayers an average of \$38,000 per inmate per year,^{lxiv} or anywhere from about \$760,000 to over \$2 million dollars for each sentence served.



Indirect costs

One of the indirect costs of violent crime includes the loss of productive citizens, who are either killed, incarcerated or may become incapable of working due to gunshot injuries. Some estimates suggest that each lost productive citizen costs society about \$1.6 million.

Communities also suffer the loss of economic activity due to residents or businesses moving out of the city or region in order to avoid the risk of violent crime in the future. Violence or the perception of violence can also result in fewer people wishing to visit or do business in the city, which is a significant economic loss for a city like Chicago that depends heavily on tourism.

When all the costs that are associated with crime are totaled,^{lxv} the violence associated with homicides, robberies, and aggravated battery costs the city of Chicago over \$2.5 billion, or about \$2,500 per household, annually.^{lxvi}

WOCC

FIGHT
FOR 15

The Workers Organizing Committee of Chicago (WOCC) is a newly formed union of downtown retail and restaurant workers who are demanding a living wage of \$15 per hour, as well as dignity and respect from employers.

The vast majority of workers in Chicago's retail and restaurant industries are paid wages that hover around the minimum wage, work on a part-time basis and are offered little to no benefits by their employers. The majority of the workers in these industries work in communities that have been severely impacted by the violence. According to a recent report by Stand Up! Chicago, increasing wages for these workers to \$15 per hour has the potential to spur about \$179 of economic activity in Chicago's working communities, leading to job creation and a stronger local economy. In turn, improving economic conditions in Chicago's communities will help relieve the violence that continues to plague the city.

\$56 to **\$94** million: Annual medical expenses for gunshot victims

Poverty, Income Inequality and Violent Crime

After many years of careful analysis, there is a growing consensus among social scientists, law enforcement officers, and others who study violent crime that the main determinants of urban crime and violence are inequality and poverty.^{lxxvii} Moreover, the relationship between poverty and violent crime is particularly strong with respect to assault and homicide,^{lxxviii} both of which, this report has demonstrated, currently plague Chicago's poorest and most marginalized communities. The following section draws upon academic research and statistical analysis to demonstrate that poverty and inequality are the most significant factors in determining violent crime rates in our communities.

Decades of research have demonstrated that there is a statistically significant link between low wages and crime.^{lxxix} One study analyzing U.S. data from 1979 to 1997 found that more than 50% of the increase in violent crime indices over this period could be explained by wage trends,^{lxxx} meaning that an economic environment with relatively high wages is a strong predictor of lowered violent crime rates, and vice versa. This relationship is particularly significant for homicides: A study of 17 Latin-American countries from 1970 to 1995 concluded that "a 1 percent increase in the population of poor people would produce, on average, an instantaneous 2.5 percent increase in the number of homicides."^{lxxxi}

It is clear that low wages are linked to violent crime rates, and there are various theories as to why this connection exists. Some economists have theorized that when individuals lack access to employment that allows them to meet their basic needs, they may have more of an incentive to select illegitimate—and, in practice, more effective—means of acquiring sufficient resources.^{lxxxii} Crime theorists have suggested that low wages may drive some individuals to "seek additional sources of income in possibly less desirable and more dangerous ways," and note that low-wage workers, if incarcerated, do not suffer as large of an economic loss as a person with economic security.^{lxxxiii} Still other social scientists have suggested that it is the disruptive effect of poverty on family structure that increases the likelihood of youth becoming involved in criminal activity.

Just as there is a statistically significant relationship between poverty and crime, there is also a significant positive relationship between income inequality and crime rates,^{lxxxiv} particularly homicide rates.^{lxxxv} Researchers have found this relationship to be consistent across nations: An analysis of homicide rates for 1970-1994 of 50-60 countries showed not only that the distribution of income has a positive effect

on crime, but also found the Gini index to be the only consistently significant variable impacting homicide rates.^{lxxxvi} Another multi-country analysis found that, in the short-run, "a 1 percent point increase in the Gini coefficient would produce, on average, a 3.6 percent increase in the homicide rate."^{lxxxvii}

Studies of U.S. crime rates have found that a 5 percent point change in the Gini index—which approximates the increase in income inequality experienced by U.S. families

in the 1980s—would lead to a 15 percent increase in the homicide rate on average.

^{lxxxviii} This is consistent with findings that the inequality that occurred in the U.S. in the 1980s caused an estimated 10% increase in overall crime rates.^{lxxxix}

Similarly, in a 1994 study of more than 150 cities across the country, researchers

concluded that as economic inequality increases, so do arrests of black youths for violent crimes.^{lxxx} And scholars have concluded that "[E]ven within a generally deprived population, it is the most deprived children who face the greatest risks of engaging in crime and violence,"^{lxxxii} underscoring the importance of relative deprivation (i.e., income inequality) in determining levels of violent crime.

High levels of income inequality, in which there is a small group of "haves" and a much larger group of "have nots," can lead to feelings of powerlessness and isolation, both of which are precursors to conflict and violence. Scholars Judith and Peter Blau explain this phenomenon:

"In a society founded on the principle 'that all men are created equal' economic inequalities rooted in ascribed positions violate the spirit of democracy and are likely to create alienation, despair, and conflict... Thus, aggressive acts of violence seem to result not so much from lack of advantages as from being taken advantage of, not from absolute but from relative deprivation."^{lxxxiii}

Low wages are linked to violent crime rates

Addressing Violence: Recommendations

The research presented in this report makes it clear that Chicago's disproportionately high levels of lethal violence are directly linked to the disproportionately high levels poverty and income inequality throughout the city. In fact, our research demonstrates conclusively that most of Chicago's violence crisis can be explained by the low wages, unemployment, and great disparities of wealth that define its neighborhoods and communities.

Given the strength of the evidence linking income to violent crime rates, it is evident that moving families out of poverty and ameliorating income inequality will make our neighborhoods safer and prevent additional lives from being lost to gun violence. According to Bruce Weinberg, an economist who studies poverty and crime, "Public officials can put more cops on the beat, pass tougher sentencing laws, and take other steps to reduce crime, but there are limits to how much these can do. We found that a bad labor market has a profound impact on the crime rates."^{lxxxiii}

Considering this, this report makes the following recommendations with respect to violence reduction policy:

- Any policy efforts to curb gun violence in Chicago or in the U.S. must, first and foremost, address the issues of income inequality, unemployment, low wages and poverty that plague our communities

- The city should adopt an anti-violence plan that includes as cornerstones the following anti-poverty initiatives:

o Raising wages for Chicago's low-wage workers.

Policymakers should support raising the minimum wage in the state of Illinois, as well as campaigns, such as Fight for 15, that advocate a living wage for the city's lowest-paid workers.

- o Direct public job creation.** Direct, targeted employment programs, aimed in particular at youth at risk of becoming involved in gang activity, have been demonstrated to sharply reduce crime rates.^{lxxxiv} Policymakers should support and fund a comprehensive jobs plan, such as the one outlined in Stand Up! Chicago's "Investing in Chicago Communities: A Jobs Plan for a Future that Works," as a means of curbing violence in the city's poorest communities.



As the analysis contained in this report demonstrates, when economic conditions improve in our most impoverished communities, crime rates will go down. Policymakers in the city of Chicago have a duty to take immediate and deliberate action to address the economic roots of tragic gun violence. A comprehensive anti-poverty and job creation program, targeted at families living in the city's most violent neighborhoods, will lead to safer streets for our youth, more resources in our communities, and more stable families throughout the city.

Gun violence costs the city of Chicago

\$2.5 billion annually

Endnotes

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