



# OJJDP FACT SHEET

Shay Bilchik, Administrator February 1999 #93

## Strategies To Reduce Gun Violence

by David Sheppard, Ph.D.

Gun violence in the United States is both a criminal justice and public health problem. Gun-related crime peaked in the late 1980's and early 1990's. In 1997, the national homicide rate declined to a 30-year low of 7 murders per 100,000 U.S. residents. Despite this decline, however, homicide rates remain unacceptably high, and firearms are still the weapons most frequently used for murder (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1998). Firearms were the weapons of choice in nearly two-thirds of all murders, and handguns accounted for over half the gun-related homicides in 1997.

The impact of gun violence is even more pronounced on juveniles and young adults. For persons between the ages of 15 and 24, the homicide rate of 15.2 per 100,000 U.S. residents is higher than the combined total homicide rate of 11 industrialized nations (Peters, Kochanek, and Murphy, 1998). Between 1984 and 1993, the firearm homicide rate for this age group increased 158 percent, which contrasts with a 19-percent decline in murders among those age 24 years and older for the same time period. In 1997, about 2,100 murder victims were below the age of 18. This level was 27 percent below that of the peak year, 1993, when 2,900 juveniles were murdered (Snyder, 1998).

As previously noted, gun violence is a public health problem. Firearm injuries, suicides, and unintentional gunshot injuries claim the lives of some 38,000 Americans each year. Firearm injuries are the eighth leading cause of death and the fourth leading cause of years of potential life lost before age 65. A teenager today is more likely to die of a gunshot wound than of all natural causes of disease (Fingerhut, 1993).

### Promising Strategies

In response to this national crisis, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has developed *Promising Strategies To Reduce Gun Violence*. This report describes 60 strategies and programs that jurisdictions can use to address gun violence. *Promising Strategies* is the product of an extensive national survey of more than 400 local programs to reduce firearm violence. From that survey, 89 programs were identified as promising or innovative. In July 1998, DOJ assembled a focus group of more than 40 experts on gun violence (including mayors, researchers, police officials, and prosecutors) to review these 89 programs and strategies and

provide input on the development of this report. Followup interviews and site visits were conducted to identify those programs using promising or innovative gun violence reduction strategies and those demonstrating an impact on reducing firearm violence.

The strategies and programs featured in the report focus on three points of intervention:

- ◆ Interrupting sources of illegal guns.
- ◆ Deterring illegal possession and carrying of guns.
- ◆ Responding to illegal gun use.

Strategies focusing on sources of guns include Federal and local initiatives that disrupt the flow of illegal firearms through gun tracing and monitoring of both licensed and illegal gun dealers. Strategies limiting gun sources also include educational initiatives to prevent at-risk youth from accessing firearms.

Strategies focusing on illegal possession and carrying of guns include interventions designed to take guns from adults, juveniles, and others at risk for violence, such as probationers, gang members, and drug traffickers.

Strategies focusing on illegal gun use include criminal and juvenile justice interventions designed to aggressively prosecute and sentence those who commit gun violence and those who illegally sell weapons to juveniles and adults. These strategies include court-related programs encompassing sentencing and educational options for gun-involved youth.

### Communities Implementing Comprehensive Strategies

*Promising Strategies* describes how several communities are implementing comprehensive gun violence reduction strategies that address multiple risk factors associated with the illegal use of firearms. These communities include Atlanta, GA; Baltimore, MD; Baton Rouge, LA; Birmingham, AL; Boston, MA; Buffalo, NY; Indianapolis, IN; Minneapolis, MN; Oakland, CA; and Richmond, CA. These jurisdictions have developed comprehensive plans that focus on reducing sources of illegal guns, limiting possession and carrying of illegal firearms by those at risk for

violence, and providing appropriate sanctions for those using guns illegally.

Comprehensive gun reduction strategy sites have developed partnerships through which the community, law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, and social service agencies:

- ◆ Identify where gun violence occurs and by whom it is being perpetrated.
- ◆ Develop a comprehensive vision and plan, grounded in an understanding of the risk factors associated with gun violence.
- ◆ Create strategies to convince those who illegally possess, carry, and use guns that they can survive in their neighborhoods without being armed.

## For Further Information

To obtain a copy of *Promising Strategies To Reduce Gun Violence*, call the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, 800-638-8736.

## References

Federal Bureau of Investigation. 1998. *Crime in the United States 1997*. Uniform Crime Reports. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Fingerhut, L.A. 1993. *Firearm Mortality Among Children, Youth, and Young Adults 1-34 Years of Age, Trends and Current Status: United States, 1985-1990*. Advance data from Vital and Health Statistics, No. 231. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics.

Peters, K.D., Kochanek, M.A., and Murphy, S. 1998. *Deaths: Final Data for 1996*. National Vital Statistics Report (47)9. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Vital Statistics.

Snyder, H. 1998. *Juvenile Arrests 1997*. Bulletin. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

---

David Sheppard is a Program Manager with the COSMOS Corporation, which is supported by an OJJDP grant.

FS-9993

FS-9993

Fact Sheet



Official Business  
Penalty for Private Use \$300

Washington, DC 20531

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Office of Justice Programs

U.S. Department of Justice

PRESORTED STANDARD  
POSTAGE & FEES PAID  
DOJ/OJJDP  
PERMIT NO. G-91