

**EDUCATIONAL GUN SAFETY PROGRAMS**

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# **EDUCATIONAL GUN SAFETY PROGRAMS**

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## **Abstract**

### Educational Gun Safety Programs

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## **Statement of the Problem**

Tens of thousands of Americans either die or fall victim to criminal misuse of guns each year (Braga, 2010). It is particularly concerning when violence involves a youth aggressor with a gun that was stolen to commit his/her crimes. Research indicates that in year 2000 alone there were more than 10,000 Americans killed with guns, and findings reveal that guns are much more likely to be used in homicides with teens and young adults than in homicides of any other age category (Braga, 2010). Although local, state, and federal agencies and legislation across the United States have undertaken creative measures in dealing with gun violence, the problem still remains a concerning issue.

Legislation and law enforcement agencies must recognize that complexity in advancing laws is failing to obtain compliance by non-law abiding citizens and educational youth gun programs is a viable solution. Current gun control measures in addressing gun violence are not making an impact on those that are the primary perpetrators. Therefore, society must correct ways in which both youths and adults learn about gun violence and safety.

The intention of this paper is to provide policy makers and law enforcement agencies with empirical literature and documentation to the benefits of gun safety programs. Furthermore,

community leaders may find this document as a critical component in adopting youth gun safety programs in their city.

### **Methods of Approach**

The main method of approach is thorough empirical literature review and analysis of secondary data. Information on gun violence, gun control measures, and associated programs will be used to justify a need to increase educational gun programs. Based on the analysis of the various collected data and resulting conclusions, recommendations will be emphasized and developed based off of empirical evidence and theoretical ideas of the social bonding and differential association. In doing so, this will address the problems with violence and current gun controls used in relation to both educational gun programs and proactive gun measures.

### **Findings**

Current trends in gun violence, lack of proper gun control measures, and failing to implement an educational gun safety program significantly exposes communities to the vulnerability of gun violence. Through an increased focus of program implementation and leadership, youths will have a law abiding understanding of guns and responsibility that will contribute to a reduction of youths resorting to gun violence. Youth educational gun programs will enhance the community's mission to protect vital law abiding members while addressing gun violence through the social bonding and differential association theory that must be utilized in devising and implementing intervention programs and legislative gun laws.

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## **SECTION I. INTRODUCTION-DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM**

### **Educational Gun Safety Programs**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Control measures enacted to address the gun problem have made little impact on street level gun violence. Research demonstrates a strong positive effect of illegal gun availability towards violent crime rates that lends credibility to the importance of stolen guns in the manifestation of youth gun crime (Stolzenberg & D'Alessio, 2000). While there are currently several national legislative methods being used to curtail gun violence through stringent firearm laws such as: National Firearms Act, Firearm Owners Protection Act, Gun Free School Zones, and Brady Hand Gun Law, they have all provided great intentions without first providing an educational foundation for youths and young adults. Research indicates that firearm laws have been found to have insufficient evidence to determine whether current laws reduce or increase specific violent outcomes (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003). The laws in legislation today have little to do with keeping firearms out of the hands of those that use the tool for criminal enterprises. Local, state, and federal agencies have also adopted gun reduction programs with great anticipation that guns at risk of being used for the commission of a crime will be turned in through amnesty programs. Current programs and legislation are blanketing a problem while providing a false sense of security to society and depleting resources.

There still remains an unprecedented amount of guns being trafficked within the United States and imported illegally (Koper, 2007). Although there are laws in place to regulate gun ownership, guns are being inherited through family members or obtained in other ways. It is



quite difficult and nearly impossible to constrain and regulate gun transactions between private party and non-dealer when they are bought, sold, traded, parted out, and given away to friends, family members, acquaintances, and strangers (Moorhouse & Wanner, 2006). Efforts put forth to eradicate gun violence are providing marginal impact in yielding desired results. In spite of all the gun laws, there is an unknown availability of guns to those who wish to possess firearms. Legislation and law enforcement agencies must recognize that complexity in advancing laws is failing in obtaining compliance by non-law abiding citizens (Shaw, 2005). Society must course correct ways in which individuals learn about gun violence and safety.

Resources and funds are being utilized to further legislative means which is directly impacting law abiding citizens and not necessarily the overall problem. Political support in response to high crime rates are often cited as a justifiable measure for additional stringent gun control legislation (Moorhouse & Wanner, 2006). Measures implemented and enacted are applicable to compliant individuals while non-law abiding citizens continue to obtain and pull the trigger on gun violence; therefore, law abiding citizens fall victim to laws that are formed to target overall gun measure issues and problems. Society is reacting to an uncontrollable issue rather than taking a proactive educational stance against gun control measures. Those responses to gun violence are not making an impression of impact on those that are the primary perpetrators.

Society in the past has placed very little emphasis on educational programs pertaining to gun safety and tailored specifically for youth. Historically, crime rates and incidents of gun related violence are indicative of a strong political debate on gun control that provides a rationale for more restrictive gun laws instead of training (Moorhouse & Wanner, 2006). Legislatures and communities need to recognize the underlying problem and address it at the street level.

Endemic problem is quite evident with high-risk offenders having an increased tendency to be socialized on the street to poses illegal guns for criminal enterprise within the general population (Lizotte & Sheppard, 2001). The importance of gun safety is an immediate crisis that must be stressed by predecessors so youths understand and respect a tool that is and can be deadly.

### **Significance of the Problem**

Gun violence has for a long time been a nationwide concern, it can be said that in some ways it touches everyone. Society has seen the repercussion of gun violence from: gang use, school shootings, bank robberies, and innocent children being struck by stray bullets. Criminals have created terror and fear in law-abiding society as a means of criminal gains. The burden of gun violence comes at a heavy cost to those victimized along with the community at large. Gun violence comes at no small price tag to tax payers as one estimate reveals that it costs \$80 billion dollars annually that encompasses medical expenses, enforcement of gun laws, detection of those in possession of illegal guns, prosecution of criminals, and ultimately incarceration (Braga, 2003).

Violence involving youth and guns is quite concerning and worthy of society's attention. According to the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the most recent data presented of 2008 reveals that juvenile apprehensions accounted for 16% of all violent crime arrests (Puzzanchera, 2009). Research reveals that the rationale of youth crime is that they are exposed to or possess multiple risk factors such as living in a disorganized community with a low level of involvement in family activities, whose parents are abusive to each other, who does poorly in school, who associates with delinquent friends, and who enjoys taking risks are extremely susceptible to offending (Esbensen et al., 2009). Research findings reveal that from 2002 to 2007 homicides involving black male juveniles as victims rose by 31% and as

perpetrators by 43% (Fox & Swatt, 2008). Taking a different approach to gun violence where legislation has failed is worth seeking. Approximately one-third of U.S. homes have children residing where firearms are on the premises of which 14% to 30% of those firearms are loaded (Obeng, 2010). Addressing the problem of gun violence will involve a curriculum that encompasses a multidisciplinary and concerted effort that involves teachers, nurses, physicians, police, and parents.

Based on current research and statistics, gun violence continues to be a topic of concern. Guns used in the commission of crime have claimed many lives. The U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention reveal statistics in 2008 that 67% of murdered victims killed by a firearm is 50% more likely to be a method executed of juvenile homicide (Puzzanchera, 2009). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), crime in the U.S. estimated that 66% of the 16,137 murders in the year 2004 were committed with a firearm (2007). The FBI indicates that in 2005, incidents involving a firearm represented 9% of the 4.7 million violent crimes of rape and sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated and simple assaults (2008).

There has and continues to be an increased aim at the fear of gun violence by the public press, politicians, media rhetoric, as well as policy implications that seeks to adopt legislative restrictions on gun ownership (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004). Subsequently, this has led to a huge level of public pressure to create and demand new strict legislation on gun control measures as well as added funding to curtail gun violence. However, very little empirical evidence has been presented suggesting that current laws and reactive methods are effective in preventing gun violence (Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003).

Gun control programs must focus on effective measures that impact long term benefits rather than short-term results. Seeking to eradicate gun violence among youth at risk requires sustainability that education will provide. Educating our youth of guns offers long term benefits as they understand the parameters firearms have within a law abiding society by addressing problems that are inherent of social exclusion of youth from mainstream society (Shaw, 2005). The teachings will provide a foundation of knowledge and discipline that can be passed along to the new generations of youth and promote participation of those at risk in responding to social inclusion and develop effective interventions. In return, society must change the course of action of soliciting short-term results that continues to deplete public resources and provides marginal impact to those non law-abiding citizens. Despite legislation that is continually enacting laws as a means of gun control, gun violence remains prevalent, that instills fear throughout society. With laws in place to circumvent gun violence it still happens. In order to be effective in controlling gun violence, gun control measures must address not just reactive programs, but multiple factors that are found to be the source associated with gun violence and moving in the direction of taking a proactive educational stance to gun violence with those at risk youth. Addressing this pandemic will take a concerted effort of community leaders and law enforcement.

### **Purpose of the Paper**

The purpose of this research paper is to provide recommendations to correct gun control measures that utilize proactive forms in driving gun prevention programs. Recommendations mentioned will place much needed emphasis on continuing current educational gun prevention programs. This paper will thoroughly analyze educational gun prevention programs such as Project Safe Neighborhoods, Eddie Eagle, Weed and Seed indicatives, and Operation Ceasefire.

Through identifying, continuing, and planting proactive educational gun prevention program recommendations toward at risk youths, young adults, and communities, law enforcement agencies can shift funding and resources that can provide positive changes to reduce and or eradicate gun violence.

This research paper will emphasize the importance of successful educational gun programs that provide long term measurable and realistic changes for those individuals prone to gun violence. The goals are then tangible as the program works in and amongst communities to build stronger relationships and foster crime free cities through community leaders and agency partnerships. Each community must strategically employ a mix of complementary tactics in executing educational means when considering gun violence reduction strategies. The end result is an implementation of gun safety programming that is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely in reaching the overall goals of crime free communities, states, and the nation through additional resource measures while promoting unity in problem solving and resolution.

In addition, this research paper will also emphasize the importance of responsible gun ownership by adults modeling proper safe gun controls. Parents who legally own a firearm play a key role in developing safe gun practices and are ultimately responsible for the behavior and safety of their children (The National Rifle Association, 2010). Through sponsored law enforcement programming for parents, society can contribute to proactive educational gun prevention training that is significant in the upbringing of law-abiding youths.

### **Significance or Implications of the Study**

Very little emphasis is placed on educational programs pertaining to gun safety for youth. Legislatures and communities need to recognize the underlying problem and address it at the

street level. The importance of gun safety is an immediate crisis that must be stressed by predecessors so youths understand and respect a tool that is and can be deadly.

It is essential to utilize a successful educational gun prevention program for communities prone to be at risk. It is of vital importance to consistently and uniformly institute proactive gun program methods if the goal of prevention of gun violence is ever to be reached. It is important to remember that in order for proactive gun programs to make any strides there must be a shift in funding and resource allocation so such methods can obtain desired outcomes.

Legislation is currently and has pushed for increased stringent gun laws, while at the same time it has made little impact on non law-abiding citizens that are resorting to gun violence. Making laws more stringent in hopes of reducing gun violence appears to have little, if any, impact on gun availability (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001). In 2005, San Francisco, California voters gained national attention when they enacted Proposition H based on an unfounded belief that the more guns there are, violence will prevail (Kates, 2005). This proposition required law enforcement to confiscate all legal ownership and purchasing of firearms. Within one year the city government ordinance was found in violation to California state law. Society must therefore realize that guns will always be availability by some alternative means, and driving enforcement has gained very little ground in addressing the overall goal.

Over recent years, legislation and criminal justice agencies have pursued multiple forms of gun prevention programming to curtail gun violence that are both indoctrinated into laws and assume active community oriented policing strategies. The results in these methods has proven to be irregular, that requires a change with the constant pursuit, integration, and utilization of programs that best be used in regards to those most at risk of resorting to gun violence. There must also be an ongoing pursuit of finding new ways to reassure the public by producing

successful results and maintaining community safety in regards to gun violence. Lawmakers and criminal justice professionals must become more open to educational gun prevention programming offered within communities, in order to obtain the goal of prevention.

### **Methodology**

This research paper consists of analysis encompassing case studies, theories, and the use of secondary empirical literature. Government publications on gun violence reduction programs will be used as an important source of information. Research relevant to the social bonding and differential association theory will reveal how youths become delinquent and learn through their subcultural norms in acting out in extreme gun violence. An analysis of educational gun programs for youth as well as adults and their potential impact on American society will be addressed to justify the need for increased focus of educational gun programs for at risk youths and crime ridden communities. Gun control policies, studies regarding their use, and effective deployments will be reviewed for proper program implementation at the state and national legislative levels.

### **Contribution to the Field**

This research paper will be an educational tool for criminal justice academics as well as agencies of the criminal justice system. Proactive prevention tactics that can be deployed by local, state, and federal institutions include: gun buy-back programs to run history checks on weapons rendered to authorities, which will determine effectiveness of programming, educating youth of gun safety through community awareness and school curriculum, increased focused deterrence of hot spots with directed police patrols, implement bounty programs for unregistered guns, and emphasize the importance parents and guardians have in properly teaching kids the

dangers of guns. Gun prevention strategies that parents and guardians can implement will also be proffered.



## **SECTION II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review consists of three main sections. Section one begins by illustrating the prolific problem of gun violence. Section two then provides an examination of the consequences of gun violence which has placed severe significance on gun control measures. Section three covers legislative gun control policies and their contribution to stringent gun control to those abiding to laws enacted. The literature review concludes by identifying gun reduction programs that seek to provide an overall foundation to the basic components needed in controlling gun violence.

### **Foundation of Gun Violence**

Controlling gun crime continues to be a controversial challenge for policy makers and practitioners throughout the United States. Incidents of extreme brutality continually gain attention of media outlets that places gun control on high alert. Incidents of gun violence end in catastrophic disarray and immediately place scrutiny on gun laws (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004). The impact of gun violence to society breeds fear amongst citizens as incidents resonate in local neighborhoods and areas frequented by innocent residents. Identifying the foundation of gun violence will reveal societal concerns, devastating effects of gun violence, and non-law abiding citizens obtaining firearms through nonconventional means for criminal enterprise.

#### *Concerns of gun violence*

Gun violence is a nationwide concern, it affects everyone. Society has seen the repercussions of handgun violence from: gang affiliation, school shootings, bank robberies, and innocent children being struck by stray bullets. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2007), offenders used firearms in 68% of the nation's murders, 44% of robberies, and 21% of aggravated assaults. Criminals have created terror and fear in law-abiding society as a means of

criminal gains. Guns have found their way into the hands of criminals at all levels from preteen gang members to the most violent terrorists.

Rand (2009), reports that there were 303,880 incidents of violent crime involving a firearm in 2008. It is not uncommon to look in the media and find another victim who has been shot or killed by someone with a firearm. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), crime in the U.S. estimated that 66% of the 16,137 murders in the year 2004 were committed with a firearm (2009). The FBI indicates that in 2005, incidents involving a firearm represented 9% of the 4.7 million violent crimes of rape and sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated and simple assaults (2008). Guns have been used to harm and intimidate many innocent people.

### *School shootings*

When extreme violence involving a gun occurs on school property it has the potential of sending a general perception that schools are no longer considered a safe zone. A national organization that tracks school shootings reveals that since 1992 there have been 371 incidents involving a firearm at the time this research was conducted (School Shooting.org, 2011). When incidences of gun violence occur, society is quick to place blame on America's culture of violence, it's failing schools, a lack of family values, hate-filled political rhetoric, financial cuts to mental health services, a lack of security for lawmakers, and easy access to assault weapons, just to name a few culprits (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004). Learning of school shootings reveals a need to provide and administer to the youthful generation, the dangers and proper mechanical uses of a firearm.

Society is reminded of the dangers and tragedies that firearms cause when an incident with guns takes place on school campuses. Although there is a low risk associated with being a

victim of gun violence on a school campus, there is an increased exposure to a diversity of youths that come from homes that keep guns unsecured (Swezey & Thorp, 2010). In a study to determine a parents' belief in firearm storage and firearm safety training, Howard (2005) reveals unprecedented findings of 82 surveys returned that indicate 85% of parents do not practice safe gun storage practices despite reporting that safe gun storage in homes are important. It is safe to assume from this survey that a majority of parents with guns at home have an unrealistic perception about how their child would respond to an unsecured firearm. The lack of safe gun handling practices gives that much more reason to place greater emphasis on educating society's youth and drive awareness for responsible gun safety measures of parents.

On April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1999 a horrific massacre at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado claimed fifteen lives and wounded twenty-three other students. This story alone generated far more media coverage than any other social event since 1996 (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004) and claimed the phrase "school shooter". The guns of choice for the aggressors, 18 year old Eric Harris and 17 year old Dylan Klebold, were a Tec-DC9 semiautomatic handgun, a 9mm Hi-point semiautomatic carbine rifle, and two sawed-off shotguns. Only days after a catastrophic crisis with convergence of media coverage and Congress on gun control measures did President Bill Clinton announce a "Safe Schools Bill" that not only centered around guns but popular culture (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004). Congress was trying to unravel a sophisticated problem instead of addressing the high-profile suburban mass shootings. The rifle and shotguns were legally purchased at a gun show by Klebold's girlfriend and the handgun was purchased through a 21 year old friend of theirs (Redding & Shalf, 2001). This is a classic example of straw purchasing by circumventing the conventional means in obtaining a good that would otherwise be illegal.

March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2005 at approximately 3pm Jeff Weiss age 16 a student at Red Lake High School, Red Lake Indian Reservation acts out in criminal violence as he guns down eight individuals. The day began by taking his grandfather and grandfather's companion's life at which point Jeff then headed to school where he gunned down the unarmed security guard and five classmates. Jeff gained unsecured access to his grandfather's police-issued firearms for his weapon of choice (Morales, 2005).

Gun violence by juveniles is of great concern. Research indicates that youths who live in neighborhoods in which firearms are readily available are extremely prone to engaging in violence than those not susceptible to accessibility (Esbensen et al., 2009). A research report provided by The Safe School Initiative that studied 37 school shootings revealed that such incidents had similarities and were preventable (Swezey & Thorp, 2010). Practicing responsible gun safety measures at home would have avoided such a catastrophic event that legislation has no part of.

#### *Guns used for the commission of crime*

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (NCVS), in 2005, 477,040 victims of violent crimes stated that they were faced by an offender with a firearm (2007). This statistic clearly indicates that firearms are used for the purpose of erroneous intentions to further criminal enterprise and kill. It is indicative that guns are in the hands of the wrong people. When firearms are used in the commission of crimes, victims who are unarmed are more prone to submit to the criminals. In spite of all the gun laws, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2009) reports indicate that in 2008 alone there were 6,755 homicides caused by handguns. Sherman (2000), states that most of those homicides are committed with handguns and are often obtained illegally.

### *Guns for criminal use*

Gang affiliation is a major contributor of those individuals that possess firearms illegally. According to the 2006 FBI Supplementary Homicide Report, 94% of the 626 gang-related homicides in California resulted from the use of a firearm (The Violence Policy Center, 2009). Gangs are enticing for vulnerable youths as it provides desirable advantages associated with status, excitement, power, praise, profit, protection, mentoring and opportunity for advancement in unhealthy ways (Fox & Swatt, 2008). Gang members are much more likely to possess guns for the mere fact of defending status threats (Braga, 2003). Gang members contribute to gun violence as it makes their gang stronger and shows authority of their turf. One research study found that two-thirds of urban juvenile arrestees revealed that their primary reason for owning and carrying a firearm was self-protection and viewed status just as important as self-protection (Lizotte & Sheppard, 2001).

The Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, is a gang that originated out of Los Angeles, California in response to El Salvador's Civil War of the 1980's (Triplett, 2004). MS-13 is one of the most violent and dangerous gangs in the nation and is known for their shootings, stabbings, hackings, beatings, and rapes as it's brazen specialties. MS-13 is no different from other street gang affiliations that lure in juveniles that put in their work so acceptance can be achieved. Gang members are not your everyday citizens buying a gun from a licensed gun dealer. Survey research has indicated that guns have become a central feature of adolescent life for at risk youths (Braga, 2003). Gang members are either stealing or acquiring guns under the radar of legislation.

### *Guns obtained illegally*

Criminals have many opportunities to circumvent conventional means of owning a gun. Criminals who are using guns for criminal activity many times have a history of criminal enterprise with a felonious background that disqualifies them from legally purchasing and affording the privilege of owning a firearm. Criminals that choose to possess guns utilize nonconventional means to acquire their weapon of choice. A study conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics revealed that criminals acquire a handgun from a close relative or family member and as well as off the street (as discussed in Schmallegger, 2009). An additional study harmonizes the findings mentioned that illegal gun possessors obtain guns through social networks rather than retail networks that are acquired through heavily supplied local gun diversions (Koper, 2007). There are an estimated 258 million guns in private hands and millions more produced each year (National Research Council, 2005). Therefore, this allows for many sources and alternative means through which non law-abiding citizens can obtain guns despite legal restrictions on gun purchasing and ownership by convicted felons, juveniles, and other high-risk groups (Koper, 2007).

#### *Nonconventional means of obtaining guns*

A source of obtaining a gun through nonconventional means for criminals are available and is the leading cause to exposure of gun violence amongst youths and young adults. A survey of confined juvenile offenders revealed that 50% of the respondents had stolen at least one gun in their lives (Stolzenberg & D'Alessio, 2000). Criminals have the connections they need to possess a gun. Criminals have the option of obtaining their handguns on the streets from other offenders. Therefore, sources of obtaining guns for criminal use is not through legalistic ways, as supplementary means are more convenient and resourceful.

Ways in which criminals receive their firearms is by a process of illegal transactions. Straw purchasing is one way in which a gun can be purchased and illegally trafficked. A legitimate gun buyer purchases a gun for a non-legitimate gun owner. The transaction is conducted in exchange for money, drugs, and other valuable commodities.

An additional source of an illegal transaction is when corrupt gun and pawn shop dealers are willing to sell weapons to criminals “on the side”; in this way, a criminal would not have to go through any legal measures to own a gun. This can account for a secondary market of gun traffickers that are just trying to make money.

Gun trafficking is an additional method and enterprise that criminals use to obtain their illegal firearm. According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms 2000 New York, New York firearms request trace report indicated that 6,284 handguns were crime related and 85.9% of traced guns came from outside the state (2002). Weak state legislative firearm laws are just one reason to blame for where illegal firearms originate from. Findings from the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that since the enactment of the Brady Bill from 1994 to 2009, the FBI and police agencies combined have denied nearly 1.9 million of the 108 million firearm request transfers (as cited in Bowling et al., 2010). Although getting tough on gun laws is not going to successfully keep guns out of the hands of criminal gang affiliates, the denials of purchases may better deter criminals who do not want to have a paper trail established in order to purchase a firearm.

### **Curbing Gun Violence**

Gun reduction methods in the United States have taken a proactive approach in an attempt to control, combat, and eradicate crime rates. Various cities and states have, in various

ways, adopted measures with great intentions of reducing gun violence and the means of obtaining illegal firearms.

#### *Amnesty programs throughout the United States*

Amnesty programs aimed at gun controls have been used for persons to voluntarily render a firearm to authorities that would preclude arrest or prosecution of any charge of violating gun laws. Gun buyback programs have been a commodity by many agencies to drive amnesty of guns that would otherwise be potentially used or accessible for crime. A gun buyback program is a sponsored event through community agencies and businesses that provide a small monetary gift card for a gun handed over to authorities. The overall intention is for people to hand over guns with anonymity and no questions asked with the goal of allowing fewer firearms available to be used for violence. Although gun buyback programs have what seem to be great intentions in reducing gun violence, research indicates otherwise. Sherman (2000) conducted an evaluation of the gun buyback program in St. Louis, Missouri in 1991 and 1994. The gun buyback program yielded 7,500 guns in 1991 and 1,200 guns in 1994. Sherman's (2000) program evaluation indicated that neither year showed any reduction and some evidence of a slight increase in gun homicides and assaults relative to the same offense types committed without guns. A research report by Stuewe-Portnoff and Solomon (2004) found conclusive evidence of a Philadelphia gun buy-back event in January of 2004 that found no subsequent reductions in homicides.

#### *Strategic intervention partnership programs*

Programs have been implemented by many communities and states to educate and reduce youth firearm violence. A survey of male juvenile inner-city high school offenders revealed that the main reason for carrying a gun was for self-protection (Stolzenberg & D'Alessio, 2000).



Besides the informal reduction measures to reduce firearms and their accessibility on the street, proactive programs like Project Safe Neighborhoods, Weed and Seed, Operation Ceasefire, and strategic enforcement programs and measures have been implemented to eradicate firearm violence.

### *Project Safe Neighborhoods*

Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), used as both a formal and informal control mechanism, is a coalition for the betterment of the community. This program initiative, located in the Eastern and Western District of Michigan, is aimed at reducing gun violence. This program is funded by earmark grants that are awarded to community districts throughout the U.S. The purpose of this program is to supercharge law enforcement agencies to target and prosecute illegal firearm crimes and gang offenders.

Since the implementation of the program in 2002, cities have seen excellent results in a short period of time. According to the National Institute of Justice, researchers analyzed cities with more than 100,000 people that were under this PSN initiative saw a 4% reduction in violent crimes compared to the non PSN cities with only a 1% decrease (2009). Program implementation is making significant public health and safety differences in at-risk metro areas of Atlanta, Georgia. When comparing research data from the third quarters of 2002 to 2003, 9-1-1 firearms calls dropped by nearly 33% and another 39% the fourth quarter each year (Duffy, 2004). In addition hospitals experienced a 28% reduction in shooting victim admissions in 2003 compared to 2002 (Duffy, 2004). This success, according to the Project Safe Neighborhoods, has placed emphasis on the three prong approach: prevention, enforcement, and public awareness (2009). The program uses a best practice model called the Tactical Intelligence Driven

Enforcement (TIDE). Their goal is to see if a program with this approach can be reciprocated in other cities.

Identifying a problem, responding and addressing the issue, and assembling resources are strategic ways to reduce firearm violence. The problems the Eastern District of Metropolitan Detroit, Michigan was faced with were: a large number of illegal guns, drug trafficking, abandoned houses, an inadequately funded and staffed police force, and noticeable unstructured time during summer months that contributed to driving up crime rates. In response to these issues, community members came together and organized a workshop called Project Sentry that educates youths of the dangers of guns and violence and the consequences. Students finish this ten week program having learned how to resolve conflicts, as well as increase their attention span and reasoning skills. The enforcement component of this program encompasses federal prosecutions of felons with guns, and targeting repeat offenders with federal sentences with no chance of parole (Project Safe Neighborhoods, 2009). This initiative requires participants from the community to local and federal law enforcement personnel. It also requires an abundance of attention given to the youths from the volunteer community members along with city, state and federal funding. This program has proven successes and will continue with much continued support (National Institute of Justice, 2009).

#### *Weed and Seed*

Another gun reduction program of interest is a community based strategy called Weed and Seed. According to the Community Capacity Development Office (2009), sponsored in part by the Office of Justice Programs, the Weed and Seed program aims to prevent, control, and reduce violent crimes, drug abuse, and gang activity in designated high-crime neighborhoods across the country.

The Weed and Seed program strategy takes on a two-prong approach in regards to law enforcement. It first prosecutes in the hopes of “weeding out” violent offenders. The second step are public agencies and community-based private organizations joining forces to “seed” areas in much need of human services including: prevention, intervention, treatment, and neighborhood restoration. As of 2008, there were approximately 300 Weed and Seed programs in use throughout the United States. The Weed and Seed program strategy is a multi-level strategic plan that includes four basic components: law enforcement and community policing, prevention, intervention and treatment, and neighborhood restoration (Community Capacity Development Office, 2009). One strategy of the law enforcement partnerships requires a proactive community-oriented policing constituent in bridging the weeding and seeding fundamentals. Along with the basic components previously mentioned, there are four fundamental principles that inspire the Weed and Seed strategy: collaboration, coordination, community participation, and leveraging community resources to law enforcement partnerships (Community Capacity Development Office, 2009). Along with the commitment of the law enforcement, there needs to be a commitment on behalf of the residents in the neighborhood to revitalize the community.

Implementing and possessing an attitude to drive change is necessary in overcoming a societal challenge. According to the Justice Research and Statistics Association (2003), from 1996 to 2001, the 220 Weed and Seed programs evaluated saw a 34% reduction in homicide rates compared to the host jurisdictions of 38%. It is important to note that one third of the decrease in homicide rates can be attributed to the Weed and Seed sites of the wider jurisdiction rate. The crimes were cross-verified by the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports for validity purposes. By targeting youth and mentoring them in an environment free from violence and providing the

essential resources that are delinquent in their homes will foster a community with a sense of acceptance as well as free of fear and crime.

### *Operation Ceasefire*

As a problem-oriented policing initiative expressly aimed at homicide victimization, Operation Ceasefire holds great promise in creating a strong response to crime, fear, and public safety problems. Operation Ceasefire targets gun crimes in areas notorious for gang killings. The program uses data-driven research to identify problems and design interventions, obtain the commitment of disparate criminal justice agencies to work together on a discrete problem, and secure the support of an array of partners in the community in a pledge to eradicate firearm violence. Implemented in Boston 1996 this initiative has experienced unprecedented evidence in gang violence with guns. A research report conducted by Braga, Kennedy, and Piehl (2001) from the Boston gun project found that the Operation Ceasefire revealed an unparalleled result of a 63% decrease in youth homicides per month, a 32% decrease in shots-fired calls for service per month, a 25% decrease in gun assaults per month, and a 44% decrease in the number of youth gun assaults per month in the highest risk district. Since the Boston gun project Los Angeles has followed suit in targeting hardened criminals with guns as well but yielded contrary results.

### *Eddie Eagle*

Eddie Eagle is an educational program launched in 1998 by the National Rifle Association that is committed to teaching and keeping America's young children safe. A 2005 research study revealed that there are an estimated 1,692,000 children and youths living in households with loaded and unlocked firearms (Action for Children Health Brief: Gun Safety, 2006). The agenda is to convey to youths gun accident prevention and to stay safe should they encounter an unattended gun. Youths are taught that guns are neither good nor bad based on a

nonbiased stance of the controversy. Eddie Eagle is among the gun safety programs mentioned earlier that has contributed to the 91% decline in fatal firearm accidents among children since 1975 (Action for Children Health Brief: Gun Safety, 2006). Education is an avenue in teaching youth's gun safety; however it needs to be reinforced by responsible parents who show concern for all safety issues surrounding their children.

Program implementation in addressing gun violence may have varying results due to cultural and sub-cultural demographics. In the case of the Los Angeles, California, Operation Ceasefire was initiated as a possible gun intervention program but endured opposing results for what was anticipated. Perpetrated by a notorious monstrosity of gun violence in suburban neighborhoods of Los Angeles a two prong approach of suppression, then deterrence was replicated from Boston's experiment. Based on the near land mass surrounding Los Angeles, a strategic approach was taken that identified five districts. Research revealed that the decline in violent crime of 34% was consistent with the other five surrounding districts and that the intervention was most effective during the suppression stage (Gonzalez et al., 2005). The take away is that program implementation must be tailored to the existing conditions and may not be replicable to some environmental conditions and attributes. Therefore the goal is to provide strategic program intervention and implementation that will yield long term sustainability within a particular environment that is specific to the problem and not just replicated off of results from another community.

### **Firearm Legislation**

Numerous gun related incidents have brought attention to gun debate but response to such laws has differed considerably between states and nations (Cooke, 2004). Attitudes toward gun use are diversified by association of the response to outcomes of gun violence. America has

responded with the dilemma of citizens to exercise the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution as the right to bear arms.

Firearm control mechanisms have become the forefront of legislation in the past 75 years. Based on current social conditions laws are constructed and enacted that contain content and substance that is intended to regain control of normalcy (Grana et al., 2002). Many legislative measures have been put into effect to control the sales and ownership of firearms.

### *Legislative landmarks*

A pivotal legislative landmark date was set in 1791 as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment became ratified allowing a “well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep of bear arms, shall not be infringed” (Solum, 2009, p. 926). The first handgun control law began in 1934 with the National Firearms Act (NFA). It came into place due to the rise in the misuse of guns in gangster culture and organized crime during the prohibition era (National Rifle Association – Institute for Legislative Action, 2010). It required registration and imposed a tax stamp on the making and transferring of those firearms under the NFA along with a special tax on persons and entities engaged in the business of importing, manufacturing, and dealing with firearms.

In 1968, the Gun Control Act (GCA) went into affect requiring firearm dealers and manufactures to be licensed. Licensed dealers required buyers to show identification and to complete a form of eligibility. An additional purpose was to keep firearms out of the hands of persons who are denied possession due to criminal background, age, mental incompetence, or other prohibitions. This legislation also provided better control over interstate trafficking of firearms.

As a result of the GCA the Omnibus Crime Bill came about that set forth additional gun control restrictions. A direct reflection of the bill was on the part of the national upswing in crime and concern for safety. This bill prohibited interstate trade in handguns, increasing the minimum age to 21 years for buying a handgun, and also established a national gun licensing system.

Legislative action continued to implement and revolutionize the legal ownership of a handgun for private venture. In 1986, the Firearm Owners Protection Act came into effect, prohibiting felons from owning or possessing firearms and ammunition. In 1991, the Gun Free School Zones became effective forbidding the possession on or within 1,000 feet of a school.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed into legislation the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act mandating a five-day waiting period and a criminal history background check on any person who attempts to purchase a firearm from a Federal Firearms Licensee (Kleck, 2003). This law makes it illegal for convicted felons to be eligible to purchase a gun legally. In addition, individuals are not eligible to own a firearm if they have been charged with a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence. This law also encompasses transferring of a firearm from one person to another through a National Instant Criminal Background Check System maintained by the FBI.

#### *Setbacks and misconceptions of legislation implementations*

Gun law legislation has great intentions to interdict illegal gun purchases at the cost of exposing vulnerable law abiding citizens. In 2005, San Francisco voters enacted Proposition H that required law enforcement to confiscate and ban all purchases of handguns (Kates, 2005). The proposal was a perception on the speculative belief that the more guns in an area the more violence will occur. In this respect it reduced control to those law-abiding citizens while non

law-abiding citizens remained in control and widened the disparity of criminality. If this were true, the United States, with approximately 280 million guns today, should have a far higher murder rate than after WWII when we had approximately 48 million guns (Lederer, 2003). Instead, the murder rate has hovered 14,000 deaths annually from 2004-2009 by firearms (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009).

Non law-abiding citizens have and utilize their capabilities to obtain guns without resorting to conventional means. Criminals have been able to circumvent such laws as the Brady Bill provisions by using fake forms of identification (Schmallegger, 2009). These provisions and bans alike have made it much more unappealing for criminal offenders to purchase handguns within legal means. Criminals do not want to wait five days to purchase a handgun. Then again sellers at gun shows are not required under federal law to perform a background check unless they have reason to believe the buyer would not be able to pass the test. Gun legislation also does not have any restrictions on the dangerous intersection of mental illness of a potential gun buyer. Although federal law prohibits a sale or transaction of a gun to a felon, illegal immigrants, and drug abusers there are also no sanctions imposed for transferring a gun between individuals. Ultimately, these laws are ineffective and insinuate gaps and loop holes in keeping criminals from acquiring guns legally.

#### *State legislation*

States vary in regulatory gun laws. For instance, the state of Illinois has implemented the Firearm Owners Identification Card (FOID), a system of identifying citizens who are qualified to own and possess firearms and ammunition. It also prohibits businesses from selling firearms and ammunition to non FOID holder. In addition, this law prohibits a FOID holder to sell or transfer a gun or ammunition to a non FOID holder.



States have also gone as far as authorizing citizens worthy of owning and carrying a concealed gun on their person. Of the 50 states, 37 states have a right to carry, 9 states may issue, 2 states are unrestricted, and the remaining 2 states their rights are denied (National Rifle Association, 2009). Of the states that warrant a citizen the right to carry, they call for further review upon granting the permit. States may restrict conceal carry due to the mere fact that the individual does not hold a position of authority to exercise such need to deploy a gun. Depending on the state, many require citizens to be 21 years of age, successfully pass an extensive background check, handgun safety course, and pay an annual concealed weapons fee. Successful completion of these statutory steps by no means guarantees a citizen the right to carry in that state. Law-abiding citizens have to obey all the laws in order to own a weapon legally.

### **SECTION III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Many theories have been applied in explaining why youths revert to extreme gun violence and their motive in using firearms as an accessory. The application of theoretical findings relies heavily on the viewpoint of the researcher and how they identify the relationship between delinquent youths and gun violence. Social bonding and differential association theory provides substantial insight into why youths are exposed to at-risk factors that cultivate extreme violence involving firearms. These theories in turn should guide the development of program intervention, improvements, and implementation where incidents of gun violence involving youths are concerned.

#### *Social bonding theory*

Travis Hirschi's social bonding theory is an extension of the self-control theory that premises the idea that people make their own decisions to become law-abiding citizens by how they integrate themselves into society (Hirschi, 2003). This theory suggests that youths who engage in or are at-risk of delinquency is free of intimate attachment, commitment, involvement, and moral beliefs that attach them to a conventional and law-abiding way of life (Conklin, 2004). All of these principles are related in some respect, and if one of these four principles is deficient they all suffer due to their interconnectedness.

Attachment involves the relationship and emotional connection one has with a parent, teacher, caregiver, or friend. If such relationships exist, it will present youths with a presence of caring about what the others think of them. If the relationship and connection is strong in the youth, the deviant act has a good chance of not being committed due to the fact that they do not want to disappoint or disrupt the relationship. Hirschi (2003) contends that the mere involvement in conventional activities facilitates control. Parents, community, or school can

indirectly control the situation by instilling attachment and teachings into the child which will decrease the likelihood of them committing a delinquent act. The youth will be less likely to disappoint the relationship they have made by the connection they have forged and vested in.

Commitment is the next part which is essential in confiding to social norms through the mere time one has vested in their future. Juveniles that are not doing well in school, and have behavioral problems with other students find themselves not concerned with what the future has provided for them. On the other hand, those youths that are engaged and work hard to earn good grades, attend school every day, and get along with friends at school see benefits of abiding by social norms which will not jeopardize their future goals.

Involvement represents the level at which the individual participates in “conventional” activities (Akers & Sellers, 2004). Involvement pertains to the mere presence of interest a youth has in an activity (Hirschi, 2003). Conventional activities may include educational attendance, communal participation in group memberships, or sports related activities. A pivotal role of parents is establishing self-control of their children (Esbensen et al., 2009). Juveniles are so full of energy that it is the parent’s responsibility to see that they are getting involved in activities that interest the liking of the communal norms which leaves little if no time for deviant behavior to occur. Ultimately, this level of involvement evolves into commitment and attachment which further strengthen the social bonds of that individual. This involvement yields little time for participation in non-conventional or deviant activities. Youths with weak attachments to their parents increases the likelihood that juveniles will engage in deviant acts due to measly fact that they lack important indirect controls on their behavior (Esbensen et al., 2009).

The last element of the social bonding theory is the sheer belief one has in cultural deviance and how it pertains to the norms of society that are accepted as generally valid. Beliefs

represent the conviction in “conventional” norms and values (Akers & Sellers, 2004). If the social norm belief is abided by the rules of society then people will be less likely to deviate and violate from the common law. This tenet suggests that the individual accepts that the values and morals presented by society should be obeyed (Hirschi, 2003).

#### *Theoretical application of social bonding theory*

The emphasis of this theory and tenets towards extreme youth violence involving guns is that strong social bonds can deter an individual from participating in improper gun handling through direct attachment, commitment, involvement, and beliefs of parents, community, and schooling. Therefore, the weakening of those social bonds in turn, promote or enhance exposure to the improper utilization of firearms. Failure to provide adequate supervision and monitoring of youths whereabouts and activities leads to low self-control that provides opportunities for juveniles to engage in deviant behavior as well as the ability to participate in unlawful behavior (Esbensen et al., 2009). Households with unsecured guns, parents not providing guided discussions about gun safety, and the community’s failure to provide structured interventions all contribute to the disappointment in youth’s social bonding theory. Parents, community, and legislation must take a proactive stance on youth gun safety programs. The four basic tenants are vital to the development and sustained strength of those bonds that will provide gun safety discussions to those at-risk youths so there is conformity with social norms.

Each of the four principal reasons that youths deviate and act out in extreme gun violence is due to the mere fact that the social bonding process is weak or missing. Youths coming from broken homes are already unfortunate in receiving the proper upbringing and mentorship that indoctrinates them with discussions about guns and violence. Family criminality, poor childrearing, and child-abuse history are found to be the single best immutable predictor of

youths that are at-risk for gun violent behavior (Daley & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Violent family relationships are the most detrimental to forming social bonds, potentially creating a situation where the juvenile does not feel comfortable establishing bonds with anyone even those outside of their family element. Unstable home and parental environments can cause a rift between parents and youth that is the driving force of gun violence and gang involvement. Youths that are either lacking the proper firearm teachings of cultural expectations from the community or parents, or fail to adapt will suffer when social nurturing does not take place. Juvenile's escape weak social bonds and gravitate toward stronger bonds that are beneficial whether conducive to social norms or not ultimately involving unconventional gun use for personal gratification.

Social bonding theory provides explanation to why youths resort to gun use in illicit ways. Parents are the first line of defense in protecting their children from handling guns. If there is insufficient bonding at the parental level of potential at-risk youth's then guns will find a way into a young offender's hands. The community must comprehend the level of bonding between parent and child so right blend of intervention can be implemented. In return the youth social bonding is formed in correlation to the social norms learned and legislative gun law applications.

#### *Differential association theory*

Causes of gun violence can also be looked at from Edwin Sutherland's differential association theory that stems from the social learning theory (Akers & Sellers, 2004). As human beings we all come from diverse backgrounds and up bringing as it pertains to financial, educational, and social norms ingrained in us. The differential association focuses on the difference in crime rates among various groups and why a particular person does or does not

become criminal. Sutherland uses nine principles to explain the very behavior learned that leads to youth deviance that at times involves the miss use of firearms.

- Criminal behavior is learned
- Criminal behavior is learned through interactions with others via communication, with communication being both verbal and physical
- The learning primarily occurs in “intimate personal groups”
- The learning includes not only the behavior, but also the techniques of crime as well as the “motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes”
- Motives and drives are learned and related to the “definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable”
- Delinquency occurs when definitions in favor of crime outweigh those identified as “unfavorable to violation of law”
- Differential associations may not be consistent or constant, meaning they can change in duration and priority
- Learning of criminal behavior through associations “involves all of the mechanisms that are involved in any other learning”
- Needs and values may be a reflection of criminal behavior, but do not justify that behavior (Sutherland & Cressey, 2003).

Sutherland and Cressy (2003) mentions that criminal behavior particularly gun use can be learned through a combination of skills, ideas, and opportunities that is specific to that individual. Communities and neighborhoods that are infested with poverty and constant social change will deviate from the traditional society’s value system becoming weak that in turn fosters crime. Crime involving guns is an accessory to the deviance that is learned on the streets.

Youth will interact and communicate with other persons in their neighborhood and learn the appropriate and accepted activities, jargon, and lingo of criminal behavior (Triplett, 2004).

Juveniles will learn criminal behavior through intimate personal groups and gangs being the biggest influence. Even if parents attempt to indoctrinate social norms accepted in society for their child, there are multiple components in the environment that can distract the interest of the juvenile where intervention programs must interdict.

The environment one lives in has a direct influence in the way they act out in deviance. Parents, communities, and law enforcement on a daily basis are competing with a wide range of criminal influences that the youth is exposed to outside the home: drugs, vulgar language, illegal activity, gangs, and adult criminal behavior. As with any crime a technique is learned and gun use is no different. For juveniles technique can be as easy as throwing some graffiti on a building or the use of a firearm to shoot someone. One learns the behavior through their motivation of the legal code and its interpretation to them.

#### *Theoretical application of differential association theory*

The principle tenet of differential association is the contact and learning one gets from another whether they are criminal or not. A parent or guardian may interpret gun use as dangerous and essential to hunt and gather for food but others may find guns as an acceptable way of life on the streets. The way in which one foresees a favorable or unfavorable situation is quite different amongst any given person, and may be contradicting at times and in varying subcultures. Akers (2001) policy implies if community disorganization is the main source of delinquency, then the solution to crime is to organize communities. If delinquent youths are not taught suitable firearm handling modus operandi in accordance with lawful means then communities will see to meeting goals in illegitimate ways. Illicit gun use will be evident in

crimes and subcultural norms and will not become course corrected that in turn will ultimately breed throughout generations. Differential association can provide youth's cognitive understanding about proper gun handling procedures, safety, and the dangers they impose.

It has been determined that youth who present higher risk factors for extreme violence involving guns reside in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Generally, these are also the neighborhoods that are riddled with gang activity and behavior that is defiant to social norms. As the literature review points out that there is an unknown availability of guns to those who wish to possess illegally. Poverty, unemployment, the absence of meaningful jobs, and social disorganization contribute to the presence of gangs and gun violence (Esbensen et al., 2009). This relationship allows for an increased likelihood that these youths will have an association to act out in violence involving the weaponry of a firearm from the near presence and recognition of guns. In those neighborhoods with at-risk attributes, violent activity involving guns is considered commonplace, part of daily life, or a sub-cultural social norm for that particular neighborhood. Youths learn unlawful gun use through exposure and the near presence of violence as a method of survival by the perceived threat of a gun.

Those at-risk youths handling guns are not career criminals the populace sees on television or in movies, they are ordinary individuals mingling within the community and neighborhoods. Top story of the media headline may be an isolated youth gun violence act but what is concerning is the frequency gun violence is to the age of offender. Akers and Sellers (2004) identify that at-risk attributes of subculture and gang acquaintance provides long term associations that initiate increased delinquent behavior through the reinforcement of the gang's behavior and the norms found within the gang that is indicative of non-societal norms.



Therefore, society must support healthy relationship building of our youths. With the sponsorship of parents, community, and schooling this will allow for less negative reinforcements of extreme deviant gun violence behavior and gang activity, all relating directly to the differential association theory. Parents, communities, and legislatures can learn from the differential association theory of how society's youth population forms their judgment and provide intervention outreach gun programs that afford at-risk children the essential learning of social norms aligned with legislative policy.

### *Conclusion*

In summary, neither one of the theories of social bonding and differential association theories can be singled out as a complete understanding of why youths act out in extreme gun violence. Each theory provides concepts that are an important component in fully understanding the problem of guns and troubled youths that resort to deviance and ultimately deadly violence. Each of the factors mentioned plays a role in the application of theory where juveniles are concerned in regard to extreme violence involving firearms. Information provided will assist law enforcement agencies, communities, and legislatures in competently knowing how to address youth violence of those at youth at-risk. Program implementation can then be maximized in reducing and or eradicating extreme gun violence amongst youths. Youths require a structure and a blended sense of belonging through parents, community, and schooling that teach them the conventional social norms of society. Intervention strategies established through the theoretical concepts mentioned will target youth gun violence based risk factors that are the catalyst to the problem and in turn capitalize on the long term benefits of gun safety programs.

#### **SECTION IV. RECOMMENDATIONS, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION**

There is a great need for creating, continuing, and planting more effective measures in dealing with the problem of youth gun violence. Improvements may come by ways of modification of current programs, new program development, and a change in revolutionizing how society responds to at-risk factors that contribute to the concerning communal safety problem. Ultimately, prevention changes must be tailored to address the basic components that impact the youthful population. In addressing the problem of youth gun violence, prevention is a key strategy to persistent and sustained youth gun crime reduction.

In tailoring prevention recommendations, there is much needed emphasis on continued educational gun prevention programs at all levels of society. The vast majority of literature has placed prevention in the hands of legislature that has amended and implemented stringent guns laws on those law-abiding citizens. The literature review has focused on the problem of youth gun violence with uncontrolled accessibility of guns and the lack of proper gun safety handling. Through the review of PSN, Weed and Seed, Operation Ceasefire, and Eddie Eagle it becomes apparent that these approaches lead to a successful outcome. These programs both utilize some or all of the components discussed below in their approach. Therefore, society must increase focus of prevention strategies at the forefront of the direct impact of youths and their immediate community surroundings. This will allow for a diversion of increased awareness towards educating youth of gun safety.

In referencing at-risk attributes of community and youth subcultures, prevention must encompass and employ a mixture of complementary partnership tactics involving parents or guardians, community involvement through programs, and school curriculum. Therefore, gun safety can be taught in line with the norms of society that will empower youth's to be agents of

prevention and awareness of a deadly weapon that has so frequently created citizenship fear and crime amongst society. Society must realize that through proactive involvement in lawful youth development, change is inevitable.

The following proposed recommendations of parental, community, and schooling all fall in line with the tenets of both the social bonding and differential association theory. Attachment, commitment, involvement, and moral belief are all evident with the engagement, learning, and teachings of society's youth. Parents are the first line of defense and have a direct influence in the engagement and upbringing of the youth. If this component is absent in the youths life then it is imperative that the community picks up the slack and ensures cultural expectations are instilled in the youth that are in line with social norms. The last line of defense that can provide supplemental support to both parental involvement and community partnerships is school curriculum. These three every important components must ultimately work cohesively in providing a safe and secure society for our youth.

#### *Parental involvement*

With guns in more than one third of all U.S. households, gun safety becomes a topic of extreme importance. Whether a parent or guardian owns a gun or not it is very important to set the example of how to properly care for a firearm that is within the vicinity of children. A recommendation and intervention tactic for those responsible parents signing a rental agreement or a purchasing a new home should be required to attend a self paced online generated gun safety program teaching them the proper way to handle and store a firearm. Reduction in youth gun violence is dependent upon limiting a juvenile's access and acquisition to firearms (Redding & Shalf, 2001). It is also very beneficial for an adult or guardian to talk to their children about the potential dangers of a gun as they may visit a friend's home that has firearms. It is critical that

parents teach their children gun safety through repetition and what to do if they encounter a firearm whether it is at home or at a friend house.

This recommendation is a great way for parents to teach their child the practical application of a firearm. Through means of a toy gun or just discussing with them the consequences of mishandling a gun, the acceptable uses of a gun, and to act in a safe and responsible manner around such a dangerous weapon is imperative. A good time to introduce children to firearms is when they show interest in guns themselves. It is advisable to discuss the difference between entertainment and real life gun use. Parents should not assume that children know the difference between arcade, television, and movie gun episodes and reality.

A parent's action can dictate how their child will behave and in the case of firearm handling it is extremely crucial that safe methods are executed. Parents play a key role in developing safe practices and are ultimately responsible for the behavior and safety of their children (National Rifle Association, 2011). Therefore, parents must be cognoscente of how they handle themselves around their children so bad habits are not inherited. Parents should always provide a safe environment for their family especially if guns are present. In doing so, parents need to keep guns locked and out of reach of children where ammunition is stored separately from the firearm. Keys to the gun and ammunition storage should also be kept in a separate place from household keys.

### *Community partnership*

Partnerships between law enforcement and citizens are a great way to promote interagency community policing. Law enforcement becomes acquainted with community residents by learning about problems in neighborhoods, enlisting support for preventing crime, and improving neighborhood safety. Citizen Police Academies is a recommendation that solicits

community ambassadors in learning how citizens can cooperate with the police in combating crime problems. With the engagement of law enforcement, community residents, and leadership, intervention strategies can be implemented based on the uniqueness of the community, neighborhoods, and residents. With the involvement and buy-in from all entities a vested interest is shared within objectives that gain the support of all efforts in obtaining the goal of a community free of youthful gun violence.

An action item recommendation for community neighborhoods is to adopt or revive neighborhood block watches with the partnership of law enforcement and youth. Neighborhood block watches have the potential to promote empowerment and puts direct onus on the residents to provide safe neighborhoods from crime and violence. Getting the youth involved in community and neighborhood solutions has the potential of yielding great dividends. Youth may find a sense of self-worth and recognition which could lead them to developing a stake in their community and neighborhood. Literature reveals communities notorious of gang and gun violence are plagued with crime and physical deterioration that if well regulated with the partnership of public regulatory agencies would become inhospitable to those would-be violent gun criminals.

Communities could also provide gun safety courses, presentations, or rallies for parents and youth through sponsorship outreach and public awareness programs. Through educational tools of safe gun storage, locking mechanisms, and proper gun handling techniques youths are afforded the opportunity to accurately learn how to respond if a gun is found. Youths could also learn how to handle and shoot a gun safely under a controlled environment of adult supervision. An additional inexpensive intervention strategy for law enforcement agencies for the community

is promoting and providing free gun locks or firearm safety kits to residents so a safer home environment free of unsecured guns can be obtained.

Communities could also implement gun bounty programs. If an individual was found not properly handling a firearm they could be in violation of unsafe gun practices and the person that came forth and reported the incident would be entitled to a small gift. This would hold the resident or owner of the property, of where the gun was found, liable for exposure of a weapon that potentially saved a life or prevented a gun from getting in the hands of an unlawful person.

### *School curriculum*

School curriculum can and is a great supplemental tool in driving educational awareness of gun safety. Schools may be eligible for program grant funding that are committed to helping America's young children remain safe even in tough economic times like Eddie Eagle. Calling upon local law enforcement agencies in developing anticrime curriculums with the schools will encourage vigorous personal protection strategies and will promote healthy community anticrime action by the youthful students.

The expansion of youth clubs can provide young children the structure they may be looking for in gaining respect and leadership. Programs like school assembly, youth-led projects, health, science, and job fairs, communitywide or school media campaigns, youth counseling sessions, and gun-free zones can all contribute to proper youth development.

School program avenues are a proactive way in delivering a message that may be filling a void to weak parental and community controls. The school setting provides youths that are not receiving adequate knowledge of gun safety the proper ways to protect themselves and others if and when guns are mentioned or found. Effective educators on gun safety and violence prevention provides opportunities to educate youth about the personal and community

consequences of gun violence as well as legal and safety restrictions on guns. Through such school programs it can equip youths with personal safety skills that teaches them positive alternatives to illegal behavior that in turn fosters a crime free community.

Another approach to effective program implementation is youthful victims of gun violence. Having victims of youth gun violence share their testimonials, through personal example, puts into reality the consequences of illegal gun use or being struck by a stray bullet has caused due to criminal gun use. The impact of presentations with personal encounters could have a lasting impression that may have students rethinking their approach on guns or the severity that misuse of guns really is.

#### *Summary of findings*

Ultimately, the literature review details that youth gun violence and the concern for community safety is a serious problem. Addressing youth-specific programs towards the dangers of guns and the focus of gun programs is lacking legislative attention. Provided here is a summary findings of the literature review, identified conclusions, and program recommendations.

It is essential to utilize a successful educational gun prevention program for communities and youth prone to be at-risk. It is of vital importance to consistently and uniformly institute proactive gun program methods if the goal of prevention of gun violence is ever to be reached. It is important to remember that in order for proactive gun programs to make any strides, there must be a shift in execution, placing extreme emphasis on education while allocating more funding and resources so such methods can obtain desired outcomes.

Legislation is currently pushing for increasingly stringent gun laws. As this push is going on, there has still been little impact made on non law-abiding citizens that are resorting to gun

violence. Making laws more stringent in hopes of reducing gun violence appears to have little, if any, impact on gun availability (Bureau of Justice Statistics (2001). Society must therefore realize that guns will always be available by some alternative means, and driving enforcement has gained very little ground in addressing the overall goal.

Over recent years, legislation and criminal justice agencies have pursued multiple forms of gun prevention programs to curtail gun violence that are both indoctrinated into laws and assume active community oriented policing strategies. The results in these methods have proven to be irregular. That requires a change with the constant pursuit, integration, and utilization of programs that best be used in regards to those most at risk of resorting to gun violence. There must also be an ongoing pursuit of finding new ways to reassure the public by producing successful results and maintaining community safety in regards to gun violence. Lawmakers and criminal justice professionals must become more open to educational gun prevention programs offered within communities, in order to obtain the goal of prevention.

### *Conclusion*

At present, the criminal justice system is trying to combat and remedy a problem of such magnitude that is uncertain at best. The primary concern to the public is that gun violence is killing innocent people. It is anticipated that the outcomes of this research paper will verify that proactive educational gun control measures provide long term violence prevention understanding for those who are susceptible and exposed to at risk youths and communities. Through educational gun control programs, youths that receive awareness will have a significantly lower rate of gun violence than their counterparts who are not afforded such opportunity through local, state, and federal resources and funding.



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