

The Initiative for Better Gun Violence Reporting Summit Notes

November 8, 2019

WHYY Studios

Host: **Errin Haines**, National Writer, Race & Ethnicity, Associated Press; Ferris Professor of Journalism, Princeton University

Covering Gun Violence: How We're Trying to Do It Better

The Trace will coordinate a critical session with leading journalists covering gun violence across the nation. The Trace's nonprofit journalism has spurred bipartisan legislative proposals, law enforcement reforms, congressional inquiries, and new academic research. In 2018, The Trace received General Excellence honors in the micro newsroom category of the Online Journalism Awards. Its more than 75 national and local media partners include The New Yorker, Slate, The Atlantic, NBC News, BuzzFeed, HuffPost, and Politico.

- *Moderator:*

James Burnett, Editorial Director, The Trace, New York

- *Panel:*

Jonathan Bullington, Investigative Reporter, Courier Journal, Louisville

Abené Clayton, Reporter, The Guardian, Guns and Lies in America, Oakland

Nadege Green, Reporter, WLRN Public Radio, Miami

Akoto Ofori-Atta, Managing Editor, The Trace, New York

- *Audio:*

<https://soundcloud.com/user-907769035/covering-community-gun-violence-how-were-trying-to-do-it-better>

James Burnett: *First stories and lessons learned?*

Akoto Ofori-Atta: First story: "Shot and Forgotten," wish they had been more conscientious around language and assumptions, assumptions were made; wish callout had been localized instead of a broad, national callout. Example of language used: "Tell us your story."

Abené Clayton: First story: Ceasefire walk in Oakland story, missed opportunity by covering it only as an event instead of deeper and broader implications. Glossed over stories that were there because of a need to "pump the story out."

Nadege Green: First stories: based story on police narrative, incomplete, a part of the narrative but not the whole narrative, names of victims not always known or reported, waiting is important. Police narrative leaves out personal details, people impacted.

Jonathan Bullington: First: parachuted in and parachuted out, talked to family, got quotes, in

and out for only a short time.

Recap: importance of language, whose story is being told, sourcing, commitment and time to deliver depth and representative.

James Burnett: *How to build trust and relationships?*

Abené Clayton: Being present even not when reporting a story as a community member; develop relationships and stories which are beneficial at later times. Sources' value being seen and heard when they aren't attached to an organization. Going somewhere in the community to learn, not for a story.

Nadege Green: Levels of sources: policymakers, organizations, institutional people, community voices. Community voices hardest to get but most important. Raised in area she reports in, but being a community member doesn't give you a free pass. Tries to tell stories more effectively as opposed to how it should be done. Goes to church because best sources are pastors. Funeral home directors, too. Thinking about experts and not just institutional experts but also community experts who can't be Googled. Going to church, picnics and not wanting anything. Embedding in the community. Trust is critical. Expectation that they owe us something is wrong. We need to come with something in hand. Community doesn't know you. Take into account to who you are reaching out to and how. Try to give grieving family time. Trust is one of the biggest factors.

Jonathan Bullington: In New Orleans, wanted to look at the effect of gun violence on kids in particular. Realized as white reporters going into black neighborhood would be difficult. Spent significant grant money to open bureau in neighborhood. First month spent without notebooks or recorders to avoid parachuting in and instead engaged in dialogue with community. Explained what they wanted to do and ended every conversation with: Who else should we be talking to? Let folks interview them and ask questions. Followed kids football team for a year. Looked at effect on kids who grow up in neighborhoods where gun violence is a daily event. The time they took went a long way to build trust.

James Burnett: *What about language? Words with negative effect.*

Akoto Ofori-Atta: The phrase "war zone" isn't accurate. Avoid sensationalizing communities. Moved away from "urban" gun violence and move to "community" gun violence to avoid dog whistling and also localize.

Abené Clayton: Agree about "urban," it's racist dog-whistling. In Facebook groups about people who have experienced gun violence. Realized effort and energy of parents who try and reverse narrative about their kids who were victims of gun violence. "Gang related" also problematic as racist dog whistle. Avoids "gritty," "urban," and "gang related." Makes comparison to a new restaurant wouldn't open in a "gritty" neighborhood" but "up and coming." Flags to editor any words or phrases that might be problematic. Editor support is important. Covered shooting in

California and asked that all the victims' names be used in every story she filed on it. Asks community what missteps they've seen in reporting.

Nadege Green: Echoes using names. Every shooting should be approached with the same care and concern as mass shootings are. Center the narrative around the victim. Hierarchy of death is promoted by media. The older the victim (as young as 14 or 16 years old) the less energy put into. Assumptions are made when victims are young and black. Parents feel like they need to reverse the narrative often put forth about their children. Does "In Their Own Words" which is the families of young men who were victims of gun violence telling their stories in their own words. Families have to defend their children's portrayal. Referenced coverage of shooting dubbed "zombie apocalypse" and the repercussions reverberated in Haitian community that no funeral home would bury him. Turned story into clickbait.

Jonathan Bullington: Police narrative usage of "suspect" or "convicted felon" when describing victims, as well as "brazen," "senseless."

James Burnett: *Balance between increasing awareness, accountability, empathy, and interventions and accountability. Challenge between research suggesting what might work, experts or advocates versus what a community says will work. How to balance that. (Solutions?)*

Nadege Green: Issue of mental health and the relationship and impact to gun violence connection not always made. Parents won't put beds or furniture near windows and implications not often talked about. Parents with PTSD. Research exists and if more time was spent in communities there would be a better connection to and personification of problems and solutions. "We don't point out the holes" in the institutions that are supposed to help. Community members to go to therapy or create self help groups.

Abené Clayton: Sees a lot of local coverage day of, but not coverage of in-between moments and not regular coverage of (solutions) those trying to do something day in and day out, in the days in and days out. Woman who facilitates active shooter drills in her apartment building. Community not lazy or complacent, they are doing what they can day in and day out. Narrative that gun violence continues without intervention isn't true.

Akoto Ofori-Atta: Balance with continuing to understand how the violence impacts people's lives but also hold people accountable by reporting what is working.

Q&A

How have you seen a shift in public consciousness since employing techniques?

Nadege Green: Didn't have a gun violence beat, I created. Audience mostly white. Audience is in positions of power; super rich guy couldn't relate to reporting but was inspired to contribute. Her audience includes people who don't know gun violence is their problem. Hard to quantify impact. School of Public Health and Public Housing use my stories to inform teaching. Miami kids protesting wanting to be able to play outside story was seen in Brooklyn, which resulted in a pen pal program between students.

James Burnett: Needs better community coverage but also seeing shifts in policy which put more resources into community for prevention.

“No notoriety” in reporting on gun violence?

Nadege Green: Most shootings aren’t solved so this is a nonissue for me.

When gang activity is a factor, what is the most responsible way to report on this?

Abené Clayton: First, admit it’s a reality and try to understand the community context. Characterizing it as a gang shooting can be dismissive of what’s actually happening. There’s a lot of hurt still there, people exploiting kids. Go off of facts, if there are official files, or names I recognize and reaching out to those people. I don’t defer to police perspective. Reach out to contacts in local neighborhoods. “What’s your interpretation of all this?” Police perspective is fear based and instead goes directly to community affected. Don’t just go off police narrative.

High school students’ teacher: *Any advice to use in how to be responsible reporters?*

Akoto Ofori-Atta: For Parkland, hired 200 student reporters to report on gun violence and write profiles on victims. Get good verifying information online. Verifying and fact checking. Human details about victims important, beyond the details of death. Orient yourself to think about how to humanize the victim first.

Errin Haines: *What advice would you give journalists and what should be standard reporting practices?*

Akoto Ofori-Atta: Recognize own biases are baked in and requires active learning to undoing and unlearning.

Abené Clayton: Report on stories of resilience. Stories of moms and dads and families of gun violence victims who become active in community to have a say in where resources go. Helps reporters build relationships and gain trust.

Nadege Green: Complicate the narrative. Go deeper than surface level. One story could end up being a series. Invest and spend time with one person. Think of survivors. 90% of people who get shot survive. But these aren’t the stories.

Jonathan Bullington: Take as much time as possible. This work is really hard, so much is seen and heard in the reporting, take care of yourself and your colleagues.

James Burnett: Philly partnership model between different organizations and models should be replicated in other places.

Gun Licensing, ERPO Laws & Violence Prevention: Public Health Researchers Explain

This session will provide an overview of the Center’s research and policy work, specifically its efforts around gun licensing. It will delve into the research and implementation of the Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs), a leading initiative that enables those on the front lines to ask a

court to prevent a person who is at risk of violence against themselves or others from purchasing or possessing firearms. Webster and Frattaroli will discuss how these issues are covered in the news, and how they could be better understood by the public.

- *Presenters:*

Daniel Webster, ScD, MPH, Bloomberg Professor of American Health in Violence Prevention, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; Director, Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research

Shannon Frattaroli, PhD, MPH, Associate Professor of Health Policy and Management, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; Core Faculty, Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research

- *Audio:*

<https://soundcloud.com/user-907769035/gun-licensing-erpo-laws-and-violence-prevention-public-health-researchers-explain>

Daniel Webster:

(PRESENTATION DECK)

Feels applicant should go to law enforcement center. Distinct from states without licensing where dealer is responsible for vetting.

Comprehensive background checks are not oppositional to licensing. Licenses may be valid for up to 10 years.

Focus on licensing.

When looking at data, states that have licensing and CBC, fewer guns originate from these states.

States with requirements have fewer guns diverted for criminal use.

Longitudinal change in data is important. Recent change in Maryland Firearm Safety Act and found best indicator showed 76% reduction. More and more guns came from out of state.

Connected Gun Trace data with survey data and found that laws made obtaining a gun more difficult.

Missouri repealed laws requiring license, saw two-fold increase almost instantaneously of guns used and also guns were from Missouri. Missouri saw increases in gun related trends with repeal, including suicides.

Stricter licensing impacts mass shootings (56% lower rate) and law enforcement shot in the line of duty. Wants to look into police shootings.

Support growing for handgun purchaser licensing. Support from those who have gone through licensing. 77% of adults in the U.S. support handgun purchaser licensing laws. 61% of gun owners support licensing.

Shannon Frattaroli:

(PRESENTATION DECK)

Need to get stakeholders together.

ERPO Laws

Do not use the term “red flag laws.” Use extreme risk protection orders.

ERPO is a civil order which allows specified people to petition the court that someone may be an immediate threat to themselves or others and can prevent guns from being purchased or guns can be removed. Temporary, civil order for people who are behaving dangerously.

17 states and Washington D.C. have ERPO style laws.

At least 40 states have introduced ERPO style laws since 2014.

Where did ERPO come from?

Post-Sandy Hook and hearing policy proposals around idea of mental illness and gun violence. Concern that this would derail policy conversations around guns and based on no evidence. Desire to be comfortable about gun violence explanations.

Josh Horowitz gathered 30 people who were researchers, clinical folks, survivors, law enforcement to review evidence around mental illness and gun violence to see if emerging narrative was rooted in evidence. Consensus was a national conversation was not rooted in evidence. If all mental illness was cured overnight, this would only lead to a 4% reduction in violence in the country. Not effective.

Needed to bust the myth and fill the policy gap. Wanted to offer an alternative. Dug into literature to identify what to look for gun ownership policy. Found dangerous behaviors (previous violence, talking about violence, other risk factors). Made sense in focusing new policy recommendations. Consensus recommendations, including states enact ERPO laws.

Evidence that informed ERPO: defining problem of gun violence; dangerous behaviors predictors of risk, and identifying solutions to match solutions.

If you remove guns from people who are behaving violently and dangerously, reduces risk of violence ending in death. States with similar laws related to domestic violence, see a decrease in deaths. Also places where police had the ability to remove guns, saw decrease. Risk warrant infrastructure in Connecticut and Indiana.

Considered scaling the domestic violence type of firearm removal. Why not do this proactively on a wider scale?

Idea behind legislative suggestions: Why not remove opportunity for people in that state of mind. "Why don't we empower people" and give them a tool to go to the courts.

Bloomberg American Health Initiative: Implement ERPO

Now looking at implementation of laws.

Opportunities traditionally lie on the coast but are starting to see change and move to ERPO in middle America.

ERPO: What we are learning:

Research showing potential for laws to impact suicides, intervention tool. Majority of gun deaths in US are due to suicide. Anecdotally hearing stories where ERPO was used and may have prevented mass shootings. Implementation is critical, and too often overlooked.

Looked at all ERPOs in Seattle King County. Sees people who in crises, need help and should not own a gun.

Need better means to temporarily dispossess people of their guns while they are in crises.

More info coming about how to successfully implement.

Reporting on ERPOs:

Dangerous behaviors not mental health diagnoses. Stay away from false narrative of mental illness and violence, stick to dangerous behaviors; avoid red flag language (code for mental illness). Implementation is critical, and too often overlooked. Most gun deaths are by suicide, ERPO's are an intervention tool. Researchers happy to talk to us, call them.

Watch for evolving policy issues around who should have the right to petition, (Maryland: physicians and clinicians can petition, as can D.C.; Hawaii, New York authorizing school admins; Hawaii, co-workers)

Nervous about expansion of ability to petition before research, believes it should be families, significant others and law enforcement for now.

Q&A

High school student: *Why is it a bad idea to get a license online? How does your research help teens who are presenting violent behavior?*

Daniel Webster: Point of background check is to know the identity of person applying; no verification process. Ease of connecting ID to criminal records is best through fingerprints. This is a public safety issue, so best to go into law enforcement and have identity authenticated.

Shannon Frattaroli: Dan spoke about Youth Violence Prevention Institute. One of the most rewarding things I can do is to train people about policy and as a long-term solution to gun

violence, policy is something accessible you can and should be engaged in.

Daniel Webster: On the extreme risk side, teenagers have been identified.

What is the main reason other states are dragging their feet. In drafting ERPO laws?

Shannon Frattaroli: Policy should move faster than it does. The progress we have seen recently as far as policy-years in unprecedented. Have had conversations of these laws in almost every state, has led to legislation. Some states are more aggressive, others may be holding back to see how things unfold.

Some gun owners think of ERPO as confiscation. How do you address that?

Shannon Frattaroli: Hears this is a ruse to take away guns from gun owners. As someone who has looked at these incidents closely, there are strict guidelines, it is temporary, and strict parameters about when this type of intervention can occur. Strict due process in place.

What are funding sources since federal funding isn't available.

Daniel Webster: Myth busting: federal funds available. Has received Center for Disease Control funding, but doesn't do research that threatens gun owners. Private funding sources like Joyce Foundation, Arnold Ventures and other foundations. Private funding up, needs more federal funding and with less restriction.

What problems do you have getting Gun Trace data?

Daniel Webster: Legislation (The Dickey Amendment) slipped in that restricts granular details ATF can release. Now relies on aggregate data released on ATF website. Needs better details. With better data, could do more to find out where the guns are coming from and hold people accountable.

How is someone who is thinking of suicide not mental illness?

Shannon Frattaroli: All interpersonal violence not linked to mental illness, while suicide may be. When thinking about best indicator, demonstration of dangerous behaviors are a stronger indicator.

How do you respond to concerns that regulations will affect POC?

Daniel Webster: This is the most difficult problem. Most of these go through the court where racial biases exist. There are racial biases throughout these systems. This is concerning. The solution to gun violence in part comes from reforming these systems. There should be processes to restore rights. A lot of risk is temporarily in one's lives and its concentrated when we are young. Instead of stopping this approach because there are inequities in the system, but instead address the inequities in the system. The data bears out that these are effective measures, and also benefit black and brown communities.

Shannon Frattaroli: Because this comes up around the country, it's data they pay close attention to. Places like Connecticut and Seattle, King County see overrepresentation of white people. Not seeing overrepresentation of POC. These are civil orders. Intervening early and not criminalizing further. I take some comfort in what we see from these orders is that they are initiated by families and intimate partners. This can be used to get guns out of the hands of

their loved ones when crises happen.

What about liability insurance and biotechnology? It seems both would reduce gun violence and hold people responsible.

Daniel Webster: Have not studied insurance. Economists have wanted to enter the conversation. When states start to move on these laws, we will study them. As far as technology, smart guns, there's no guns no laws and nothing to study.

Errin Haines: *What advice would you give journalists and what should be standard reporting practices?*

Shannon Frattaroli: Referred to presentation slide. Reporting on ERPOs dangerous behaviors not mental health diagnoses. Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) not red flag. Implementation is critical, and too often overlooked. Most gun deaths are by suicide, ERPOs are a tool for preventing that. Watch for upcoming issues in legislation. Call researchers, they're happy to talk with reporters.

Daniel Webster: Exploring where the guns are coming from when there's a mass shooting or an officer is shot. We can expect questions and answers about where that gun came from. We can also expect questions about apprehending the person who did it. But when it's closer to cities, we don't expect the answer. What is being done to hold people accountable. The communities most impacted, very few of those homicides and shootings are solved in part due to resources. New research shows more resources, more solved cases.

Reporting with Authority: Knowing the Research, Knowing the Vocab

Reporting on community gun violence is difficult. Guns & America, a public media reporting project covering the role of guns in American life, will present some of the empirical research they rely on to report deeper, more contextual stories.

- *Presenters:*

Jeremy Bernfeld, Lead Editor, Guns & America; Director of Collaborative Reporting, WAMU, Washington DC

Lisa Dunn, Research Editor, Guns & America, Washington DC

Alana Wise, Reporting Fellow, WAMU, Washington DC

- *Audio:*

<https://soundcloud.com/user-907769035/reporting-with-authority-knowing-the-research-knowing-the-vocabgunspt3-1108>

Jeremy Bernfeld:

(PRESENTATION DECK)

Spending two years reporting on guns in our lives. Looking at relationships between people and guns and America.

In 2017, 39,773 gun deaths:

- Suicide: 60%
- Homicide: 37%

Almost 2 in every 3 firearm deaths are suicides. Public thinks mass shootings or homicides make up majority of deaths. Guns used in 75% of homicides in the U.S.

Looks at surveys and polls to see what people believe around gun-related death versus facts. (Suicide/murder/mass shooting/accidental deaths/don't know)

2017, 14,542 homicides
37% of all gun deaths

Violent crimes are declining

Gun deaths per 1,000:

- 1974: 16.3
- 2017: 12

Handguns are primary weapon for homicides (gun data not complete, yet):

- 60% handguns
- 4% rifles

Alana Wise:

(PRESENTATION DECK)

Words, terms, journalism best practices

Definitions (or not) and notes-

Assault weapon: political term with no fixed definition, recommend: assault-style weapon

Semi-automatic: Not same as automatic weapons.

AR-15: AR doesn't stand for assault rifle but Armalite, the original manufacturer. Widely-owned semi-automatic rifle.

Machine gun: Fully automatic. Don't use this term to refer to semi-automatic rifles.

Rifle:

Automatic:

Magazine: Container either fixed to pistol frame or detachable.

High-capacity magazine: non-technical term

Mass shooting: no exact definition, affects funding and coverage. Excludes armed robbery, gang violence, domestic violence. Be careful with stats used for mass shootings since data could include previously mentioned exclusions.

Don't:

- Use "officer-involved shooting," obscures responsibility of shooter. Lacks substance.
- Use language that implicitly vilifies untried subjects ex. "17-year-old man arrested after shooting..."

Do:

- Focus on the survivors. Chance for quality, empathetic storytelling.

Survivors don't always realize how many other people there are who have also survived a shooting

Lisa Dunn:

(PRESENTATION DECK)

Community Gun Violence Research

Foundational and useful to covering this topic:

- The Dickey Amendment ('96): CDC funding can't advocate or promote gun control
- Later applied to National Institutes of Health
- Language added to amendment after Parkland
- Research goes on despite chilling effect
- Two states (CA, NJ) fund gun violence research, as well as private funding. Good research out there, just not all it could be without federal dollars.

"Reducing Access to Guns by Violent Offenders"

- Most guns used in crimes are obtained illegally and not from retail sources.
- Guns used in crimes are not possessed by the offender for very long.
- The underground gun market can be sensitive to legislation.

Life expectancy loss due to gun homicide.

"Cross-sectional study of loss of life expectancy at different ages related to firearm deaths among black and white Americans"

- Gun deaths have been driving down black expectancy at a much more significant rate in comparison to white Americans. Black Americans 1,245.3 days lost. Black Americans are more likely to be killed by a gun before 20 years old. African American men have the longest and biggest risk of being killed by police.

"Risk of Being Killed By Police Use of Force"

- African American men stand a 1 in 1,000 chance of being killed by police in their lifetime

Case studies: Violence Interruptions

- Boston, MA: 63% decrease in youth homicides per month and a 25% decrease in gun assaults per month
- Oakland, CA: annual gun homicide decline by 32%
- Chicago, IL: a 31% drop in homicides in two Chicago districts

Successful interventions by researchers unsure about cause and effect; know there's an association, but not finding causality.

gunsandamerica.org/furtherreading

Jeremy Bernfeld:

Priorities: focus on solutions, focus on young people, service journalism (upcoming election).
Gun violence is a leading cause of death for youth.

Q&A

I would like to see data around guns in the city and where they come from. Where to look?

Lisa Dunn: Study from Duke, the Los Angeles underground market study. Informative and depth and supply chain.

Why wouldn't a mass shooting perpetrated by gang violence not be a mass shooting?

Alana Wise: Tricky to parse out, depending on how a particular organization defines things. Affects amount of empathy, public response, official response. Words do matter. Because there is no official definition, we are left to classic understanding. But be careful in the way we are covering them. As someone earlier said, we should treat every shooting like a mass shooting.

Jeremy Bernfeld: Why we wanted to include that is because we've had to reexamine our own practices and priorities. Referenced shooting in California. Defining terms like this matter.

How do you get away from officer involved shooting in media?

Alana Wise: It's a line police will give in aftermath. It's tough. It's one of those instances where it's better to sit back and wait for the facts. Wait for more info to come out. Don't be afraid to apply and maintain pressure on officials. That also goes into building community trust. If they see the effort, it engenders a sense of trust if you are looking to put out a truth that benefits peoples' lives.

Anything learned from spending time in gun culture that was surprising or helpful?

Alana Wise: We treat white gun owners and black gun owners very different. White gun owners are often treated as a part of their culture while POC gun owners is much different narrative. Guns are accepted as a part of the culture differently in different places. Be mindful of vilifying one class of gun owners and lionizing another. Get yourself and colleagues to move away from classifying gun owners differently.

Jeremy Bernfeld: Polls found agreement on how to better regulate guns. Found strong support from gun owners for stronger gun legislation.

Can you talk about the large discrepancy when a police officer is shot versus when a young black man is shot?

Alana Wise: One thing that affects it is the rarity of an officer being shot, and the media likes that. There is also a media blind spot. If something seems pedestrian, take a deeper look. What does it mean for a person's family or community? Avoid blind spot by humanizing story and putting in effort and attention.

You say gun deaths are down since '74, but they are up in the past 10?!

Lisa Dunn: Agreed, increase in gun deaths especially in cities, yes there's a recent increase.

There's evidence it may be leveling out, over the long haul we are markedly down. Expecting CDC to release its mortality data for 2018 coming next month.

The term "gun control" is used by the public. Do you use that term?

Alana Wise: This is tricky. It's similar to abortion. Gun-control is an inherently loaded term because no one wants to think of themselves or their rights being controlled. It depends on the story and circumstances which dictates the language used. Tries not to use language that will politicize.

Can you talk about the best way to talk about shooters without talking about shooter?

Alana Wise: The victims didn't have a choice and should be remembered. There is rightful concern that by mentioning names it might be inspiring. I try to limit the person's name as little as possible. Once immediately after the story and not again. The following stories should be focus on the victims.

Lisa Dunn: Research suggests contagion effect, at least in relation to mass shootings.

Can you point out times where research was used in a story?

Jeremy Bernfeld: Kids and fake toy guns v. real toy guns. Reporter talked to parents about their thoughts on the research.

Alana Wise: Story about center in D.C., Trayvon Center, after school program in an apartment complex. A 17-year-old was shot and many of the kids in the afterschool program saw the body. What are the lasting effects of trauma on kids?

Errin Haines: *What advice would you give journalists and what should be standard reporting practices?*

Alana Wise: You're reporting on your community. It should be your community. Go to events. Spend time in the community, before and after an event, getting a sense of who these people are apart from any act of violence. Embed yourself as much as possible. Leads to more empathetic coverage.

Lisa Dunn: Get steeped in the research as it relates to community gun violence. As much as journalists can bring facts in informing the public and finding solutions. Bring richness to stories and inform readers.

Jeremy Bernfeld: Focus on solutions.

New Tool Makes Philadelphia Gun Violence Data More Accessible (Demo)

- *Presenter:*

Jim MacMillan, Director, Initiative for Better Gun Violence Reporting; Fellow, Reynolds Journalism Institute, University of Missouri

Philadelphia Shooting Victims Dashboard:

<http://ibgvr.org/philadelphia-shooting-victims-dashboard/>

(PRESENTATION DECK)

What One Community Wants Journalists to Understand about Gun Violence

Journalists are faced with the difficult task of reporting on gun violence in a manner that serves the public good but does not compound the trauma of victims. Debates about how to strike this delicate balance take place continually in newsrooms and journalism classrooms. Yet, too often the direct input of those most affected by gun violence are not included in these discussions. In this session, Dr. Midberry will present findings from a focus group study that explores how victims of gun violence in Philadelphia perceive local media coverage of the issue and how they think such reporting can be improved.

- *Presenter:*

Jennifer Midberry, PhD, Assistant Professor, The Media School, Indiana University
Bloomington

- *Audio:*

<https://soundcloud.com/user-907769035/communities-affected-by-gun-violence-what-they-want-journalists-to-understand>

(PRESENTATION DECK)

Jennifer Midberry:

Referred to SPJ Code of Ethics.

How to balance duty to inform with the ethical charge to cause no harm?

- Conversations among journalists in newsrooms and classrooms.
- People most affected left out of conversation.

Four research questions given to community members at previous event.

Talked about methods. Natural, semi-structured interview guides.

Analysis: read transcripts repeatedly and looked to commonalities.

Talked about participants:

- 18 women, 9 men
- Majority black participants
- Ages 19-76.

Findings:

- Frustration with negative news coverage of their communities. "Never talk about the success stories." Gives neighborhoods bad reputations and make others fearful of coming into their communities.
- Dehumanized portrayals. Should represent people more holistically.
- Lack context and structural issues ex. unequal education.
- Usually reported as an isolated incident as opposed its relationship to a larger story.

- Person who's accused shouldn't be "tried" by newspaper.
- No follow-up Two participants shared stories where the lack of follow-up destroyed reputations and ruined potential future employment.
- Outsider perspective: parachuting in and out.

All contribute to stereotypical coverage and then disengagement.

Most get news from social media and hesitantly look at local news.

Findings/suggestions:

- More commitment to understanding communities
 - More balanced coverage
 - Prioritize community voices
 - Empathize
- Solutions Journalism
 - Contextualize the problem
 - Report efforts being made to combat gun violence

Instagram account NoGunZone in Philadelphia allows civic dialogue and engagement.

Q&A

How do you share stories of people's vulnerable moments while not co-opting their experience?
Active intuitive listening. We need to do a much better job of listening.

Can we stop all the reporting on all white men shooters that focuses on how they were bullied?
I think the question is can we be more equitable. Can we do that in the same way as mass shootings or covering people of power. We need to even the playing field even more.

Coming Together: Local Journalists and Mothers of the Fallen

Mothers in Charge is a Philadelphia-based violence prevention, education and intervention organization made up mostly of women who have lost loved ones to violence. Three prominent local journalists will address questions gathered from these moms in a conversation intended to bring the communities closer together and improve coverage of the issue.

- *Moderator:*
Dorothy Johnson-Speight, PhD, Founder and National Executive Director, Mothers in Charge
- *Panelists:*
Mensah M. Dean, Justice & Injustice Reporter, The Philadelphia Inquirer
Cherri Gregg, Community Affairs Reporter & Host, Flashpoint, KYW Newsradio
Christopher Norris, Community Contributor and Engagement Editor, WHYY

- *Audio:*

<https://soundcloud.com/user-907769035/search-results-for-mothers-coming-together-local-journalists-and-mothers-of-the-fallen>

Dorothy Johnson-Speight: *Why are you here? Why is gun violence reporting important?*

Mensah M. Dean: Gun violence is probably the most serious crime there is. I see the impact it has beyond the 10 seconds on the TV news. Seeing that, it changes your life. It's important to learn as much as I can to do a better job and gain the trust of other people so they can lead me to other people. May be a story to file by 4 or 5, but for those affected it lasts forever.

Cherri Gregg: This summit is important because we want to get it right. We really want to get it right. My job title the most important word is community. Covering both sides. We don't want to judge someone before conviction and we don't want to vilify the victim. My sources are the community members, block captains, activists, and families. I don't go to the police for a first take. Community-first approach.

Christopher Norris: For me, it's about solving a problem. I want to make people think, not tell you what to think. If the news spends a short time talking about gun violence, and a lot of time on Gritty or cheesesteaks, it conditions people to think about what is the priority. Can the media play a role in mitigating apathy?

Dorothy Johnson-Speight: Talked about grandson who doesn't want to live in Philly, despite trying to keep him away from the news. Media coverage affects self image.

Michelle Kerr-Spry (of Mothers in Charge): Retold story of family deaths due to violence and ensuing media coverage. Her son and a police officer were shot around the same time. Officer's shooter found. Her son's shooter never found. Media reporter on her son's death covered in two sentences. Reporter wrote a story about Michelle, her husband and their home. Reporter didn't ask questions that might help find shooter.

Dorothy Johnson-Speight: Son's murder wasn't covered in news until she approached the media. Retold story of connecting with mother of another person murdered by the same person. Asks reporters to hear more about solutions. "No one is safe until we're all safe." More solutions and resources for people impacted by gun violence need to be reported.

Renee McDonald (of Mothers in Charge): Lost two nephews, surviving families overlooked in news coverage. Doesn't like the saying "in the wrong place at the wrong time" when talking about people caught in the crossfire. Advocacy for change in legislation. Not an angry black woman but a passionate black woman. Not here for her nephews, they are gone. Here for the kids who are still alive. We need respect and not to be reduced to a dot on a crime map.

Christopher Norris: Nothing wrong with being angry, it's what you do with it. People who have lost someone to violence or are a black man or black woman, you have a right to be angry.

While journalists are important, communities can also create their own content, voice and narrative. People can go to connect with him to help people produce their own content.

Cherri Gregg: PhillyCAM And PABJ help people to tell their own stories. Covers wrongfully convicted and balance is important. Journalists do play an important role in verifying facts. There is room for community and journalists to work together to do a job and tell a story.

Mensah M. Dean: Encourage community to reach out to traditional media. Not enemy of the state. People who do that get better coverage. If you want a story told, have to be willing to talk and trust someone.

Cherri Gregg: Diversity in newsrooms important because familiar faces make it less traumatic when someone shows up.

Michelle Kerr-Spry: Journalists should ask questions to help person. Questions to help find shooter are helpful. Let someone know what your intention is.

Q&A

What, if any balance, can be given between victims and perpetrators to contextualize the story?

Dorothy Johnson-Speight: Hurt people, hurt people. Report on where their trauma centers. Remembers when she learned about the shooter's past traumatic history growing up. "Good people make bad choices as well."

Do you have an example of what a journalist said to you that was good or positive?

Michelle Kerr-Spry: Had a good experience with a journalist who asked good, thoughtful questions. Was kind and gentle in approach. Not trying to just get the story.

Do you journalists take the time to conduct two hour plus life history interviews for perspective?

Mensah M. Dean: Every story you give the weight it deserves. You take your cues from the person you are interviewing. Not practical for breaking news.

Cherri Gregg: I've never done a two-hour interview. That's a lot of tape. I've spent an hour with someone.

We provide resources for people with suicidal thoughts. What can we do to identify resources for other people?

Michelle Kerr-Spry: Referenced doctors and empathy training Mothers in Charge did with doctors as they are often the last people their children and see.

Errin Haines: Maybe we should put support group information, like Mothers in Charge, at the end of stories.

Cherri Gregg: Echoes idea.

What practical steps can you take to avoid co-opting someone's story?

Renee McDonald: Editor of Westside Weekly reached out and wrote the story. It's all about listening and not interjecting the stereotypes and stigma. We are individuals and different and

the stories should reflect that.

Errin Haines: *What advice would you give journalists and what should be standard reporting practices?*

Christopher Norris: It's about language. Doesn't use "cover" a neighborhood, uses "engage." Attends a mother's support group in South Philly just to be there. Just to engage. Be in the neighborhood whether you're covering a story or not.

Mensah M. Dean: We would have more good news if more good things happened. We also have to hold ourselves and police more accountable. In one of the five mass shootings covered in the last year, only one perpetrator caught, the one where police were shot. Put pressure on police to do their jobs. What are they doing with crime and unsolved murders. Spoke about unsolved murder rate in Philly.

Cherri Gregg: Takeaway is to follow-up. If community is covered in a negative way, go back and find something good as well.

Renee McDonald: New Mothers in Charge LIPSTICK initiative. This isn't going to change unless you get and stay involved.

Michelle Kerr-Spry: What is the intention for writing a story? Add resource box and tip line.

Dorothy Johnson-Speight: Please share powerful, wonderful things that are making a difference. There is hope in the city of Philadelphia.

Widening the Lens: Perspectives from the Medical, Public Health & Research Communities

As part of this panel, we will hear from health care providers treating gun injured patients as well as public health practitioners and researchers working to unpack the root causes of gun violence and identify evidence-based solutions to this important public health problem in Philadelphia. On the front lines of gun violence every day, we present our unique perspectives and work in the areas of gun violence epidemiology and prevention.

- *Moderator:*

Jessica H. Beard, MD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Surgery, Temple University

- *Panelists:*

Sara F. Jacoby, MPH, MSN, PhD, Former Trauma Nurse; Assistant Professor of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania

Elinore J. Kaufman, MD, Fellow, Surgical Critical Care and Trauma Surgery, University of Pennsylvania

Caterina Roman, PhD, Associate Professor of Criminal Justice, Temple University

Raynard Washington, PhD, MPH, Chief Epidemiologist, City of Philadelphia, Department

of Public Health

- *Audio:*

<https://soundcloud.com/user-907769035/widening-the-lens-perspectives-from-the-medical-public-health-and-research-communities>

Raynard Washington:

(PRESENTATION DECK)

Firearm homicides in the last 20 years: 227,711

In Philly: 5,461

Increase in gun violence in the last five years.

Decline in violent crimes.

Over 300 homicides per year due to firearms

For every fatal homicide: 4 shootings.

About 3 or 4 shootings per day.

Snapshot of one year that tracked individuals involved in gun violence finding they often have a complex social, behavioral, economic, and community circumstances. Large percentage with DHS, social services or substance abuse services.

Highest risk of gun violence: 75% of shooting victims and known perpetrators are young black men.

Public health approach: families, neighborhoods, and service providers.

Almost half of firearm homicide victims used drugs or alcohol before their death.

Relationship between drug overdoses and drug related homicides.

Firearm related injuries are costly.

Prefers gun “accountability” not gun “control.”

Jessica H. Beard:

Shares her experience as a trauma surgeon.

As a researcher the narrative of the shooter doesn't matter. Looked at mass shootings from the perspective of the trauma surgeon team.

In the past 11 years: clustered firearm-injured patients (FIPs) arrived within 15 minutes

Hospital hot-spots for FIPs.

Also looked at victims of neighborhood mass shootings.

Also looked at how these events were covered in the media.

Limited reach in telling about high-intensity mass shooting events.

A tale of two Philadelphia mass shootings.

For 10/13: I was the only surgeon on call, had to call in her back-up.

Sara F. Jacoby:

(PRESENTATION DECK)

Gun violence is an issue as much about structural determinants, as much as other factors.

Ethnological study of black men gunshot victim's experience of navigating the hospital system.

Hotspot maps of firearm injury or death.

People tend to be hurt near where they live. White victims not hurt near where they live, black victims tend to be hurt where they live. Map of deaths by race and place shows racial segregation.

Stark racial disparities in who is or isn't injured in Philadelphia.

Referenced Home Owners Loan Corporation map from 1937 (red-lining).

Gun violence is a disease of places as it is of people.

Structural gun violence prevention may also shape how people recover from gun violence.

A tale of two Philadelphia "mass shootings" shows differences between shooting involving six law enforcement victims and shooting involving six victims:

- Trauma surgeon:
 - Three patients with minor injuries, all discharged
 - Six patients, 2 immediate surgeries, back-up called
- Hospital:
 - On lockdown
 - Business as usual
- Law enforcement
 - Hundreds of police sent to scene and hospital, shooter arrested
 - No arrests made, business as usual
- Neighborhood:

- Damage to homes, unmeasured trauma, residents can't go home
- Business as usual, unmeasured trauma
- Media:
 - On-ground presence, hospital interviews, victims named, live helicopter coverage
 - Fewer stories, victims not named

Caterina Roman:

(PRESENTATION DECK)

What her answers to questions are: evidence.

Evidence promotes the common good.

Policy makers' evidence (based in belief) v. Researchers' evidence (based on evidence)

Are intervention programs for comfort or evidence-based? Ask those involved.

Evidence hierarchy: focus on levels 3 and 4. Need comparison group.

2013 survey of Philly violence reduction programs under Nutter: out of 104 case management programs, 92 (89%) weren't evidence-based.

Federal Health and Human Services three questions to ask: Long-term goal? What degree of confidence that changes were because of program? Negative outcomes of program?

Evaluated South Philly's (focused deterrence) and North Philly's (cure violence) EBM's for gun violence reduction.

Cure Violence v. Focused deterrence

- Cure violence: no meta-analysis
- Focused deterrence: two meta-analyses and systematic reviews
- Both programs had similar reduction in shootings

Mentioned logic model.

Mentioned book Bleeding Out (about focused deterrence).

What are short-term activities that can bring about change?

What are the internal mechanisms to bring about the change and is there any possible harm?

Ensuring the intervention is causation and not correlation.

How do we get away from the idea that anything we do about gun violence is good?

Elinore J. Kaufman:
(PRESENTATION DECK)

Hopes that her patients are stabbing victims.

“You have no idea how hard it is to kill someone with a little something that is sharp.”

Background checks for gun purchases help.
Up to 40% reduction.

Stand your ground laws increase violence and homicides by 22%.

Concealed carry laws don't seem to prevent violence and may actually increase them.

No state is an island, referencing movement of guns from state to state.

The more laws you have in an origin state, the less guns that leave.

The lesser laws in a destination state, the greater the number of incoming guns.

Licensing laws will affect guns moving around from state to state.

Relationship between state proximity and gun laws and suicide and homicide.

States with strong or medium gun laws, didn't matter what neighbor was doing.

Effects of greening on violence, dropped by 6-9%

Q&A

How can journalists find evidence that isn't harmful to underserved communities or minorities?

Caterina Roman: Partnered with community-based orgs to find community members to inform research questions. “We work from answers the community gives us.” Temple is a case study on going into the community for research. New programs would call and ask her how they can be an evidence-based program. Told them to draw their model and explain each step/process.

How can small community-based programs if they don't have high level data?

Caterina Roman: You have data because you're doing the work. Have researcher or data collection to quantify activities. If you are collecting data, you're on your way to being prepared for grants.

Do the comparisons between gangs always work?

Caterina Roman: Both models take that into account in different ways. Different metrics used for definitions for different interventions.

In terms of structural determinants, what are the EBM (evidence based models) to apply in Philly?

Sara F. Jacoby: Not enough data or research to confidently implement. Putting resources toward any part of the structure will. Likely help, but it is likely an association and difficult to prove causation. Examples: Vacant house remediation, funding for schools, victim services.

Jessica H. Beard: Talk about it but it won't be an easy fix. It's most important to prove (talk about) the structural including racism.

Errin Haines: *What advice would you give journalists and what should be standard reporting practices?*

Raynard Washington: Keep in mind is that what info is in front of people see and know is what becomes a priority. Report with an intention. What can happen as a result of the headline?

Sara F. Jacoby: Complicate the narrative. Things happen to people in the context of circumstances. Homicide is important but so are the consequences.

Caterina Roman: We need to be asking why are we doing what we are doing. Will the change come?

Jessica H. Beard: One- and two-line reporting on gun violence is harmful. We (researchers) can be your sources.