

# Violence as a Public Health Crisis

Compiled by Jenny Herzog and Vivian L. Berard

In 1996, the World Health Assembly officially declared violence:  
*[“a leading worldwide public health problem.”](#)*

As of 2023, gun violence has surpassed the opioid crisis as  
*the [nation’s top public health concern.](#)*

## Violence is Contagious

“Violence is a contagious disease—that is, violence is spread from one person to another.”

Gary Slutkin, an epidemiologist and violence reduction expert, [pioneered the study of violence prevention using public health based strategies](#). He adapted his approach into a model called Cure Violence (previously known as Cease Fire), that has been implemented in hundreds of communities worldwide with incredibly high success rates.

“Before discovering what was causing epidemics of leprosy, plague, tuberculosis, cholera, and other infectious diseases, we frequently treated the people affected as “bad people”; we blamed them for the problem, and in particular lamented their moral character. People with leprosy, plague, typhus, cholera, tuberculosis, and other maladies were frequently considered morally “bad,” suffering stigma at a minimum, and in many cases worse treatment, including being put in dungeons, burnt at the stake, or thrown down wells.

“It now seems as if the problem of violence, like the great infectious diseases of the past, has been stuck—not because we do not care enough, nor because we do not have enough money devoted to it, but because *we have made the wrong diagnosis*. Wrong diagnoses, in particular moralistic diagnoses, usually lead to ineffective and even *counterproductive* treatments and control strategies. Problems of mankind frequently do get stuck, sometimes for decades or even for the history of man, commonly because we do not correctly understand the problem

*scientifically*, a step that is *required* to design and implement *rational and effective control measures*. It also seems that, historically, moralistic views and solutions usually fill that gap in understanding.

“Moralistic ideas actually have a very poor record of solving problems, in part because people differ in their interpretations of moralistic ideas, and in part because they lack an understanding of the actual biology of the problem. Sometimes this is because of the fundamental attribution bias where we humans replace incomplete understanding with blame of others. As a result, people who have learned violence, as for those affected or infected with the great infectious diseases, have been misdiagnosed and mistreated. However, we have more pieces of the puzzle. Violence can now be better understood scientifically, and as a result, there *must be a new strategy* to reduce and eliminate violence.”

“Violence, for starters, is a phenomenon driven by the brain, as the brain regulates and controls behaviors.”

“In its most obvious example, the most likely predictor of a subsequent case of a shooting in street or gang violence is a previous shooting ([Decker, 1996](#)). Likewise, the greatest predictor of subsequent cases of colds, flu, SARS, Legionnaires disease, and other infectious diseases is a prior case—and specifically exposure to a prior case—of that infection.”

“We know that exposure to community violence can lead to perpetrating community violence”

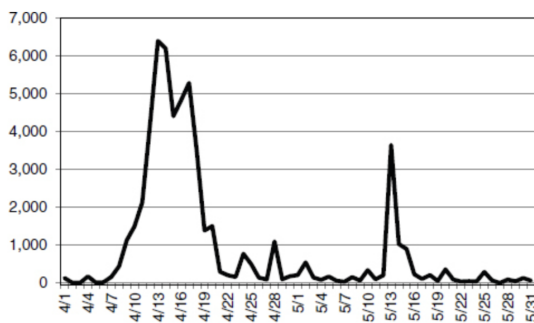


FIGURE II-5 Killings—Kibuya, Rwanda

SOURCE: Data from [Verwimp, 2004](#), Table 8.

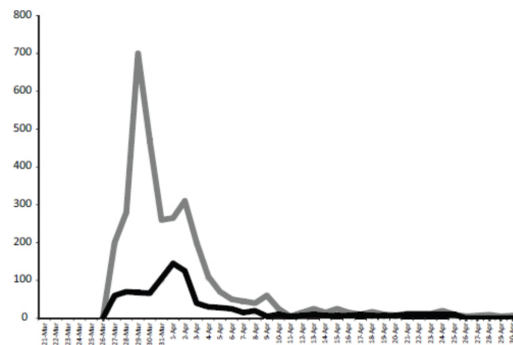


FIGURE II-4 Cholera—Gannet, Somalia

SOURCE: Data from [Farah, 1985](#), Figure 1.

*The frequency of killings spikes nearly identically to that of Cholera infections.*

“It has been said for a long time that violence begets violence, but it is *just as tuberculosis begets tuberculosis, or flu begets flu, that violence begets violence.*

“I would suggest that the characteristic signs and symptoms of violence are the behavioral actions that cause or attempt to cause physical injury to another person or to one's self, and that these constitute a disease. I would add that anyone who has suffered physical injury as a result of violence, and in some cases been traumatically threatened, may also be considered infected, or diseased. In other words I am suggesting that both what is called perpetrator and what is called victim in the current literature be considered as violence infected or having the violence disease.

“Exposure to violence increases the likelihood that the exposed person will commit violence, that is, to become a perpetrator .”

“The science, and the public understanding that follows this science, are bringing us into a new era. This new era is an era of discovery—but more importantly of transition. We can now leave the days of a vocabulary of “bad people” and “enemies” and apply a scientific understanding and a scientific approach to this problem. Violence has all of the historical, population, and individual characteristics of an infectious disease. It has routes of transmission, incubation periods, and different clinical syndromes and outcomes. There are definable biological processes underlying the pathogenesis. In addition, treatment as an infectious disease is effective. All of this requires more refinement and research. We are still performing research and refining our approach with tuberculosis, cholera, and malaria as well, but at least we have taken these problems out of the moral, medieval, and superstitious realms of evil and dungeons.”

### [Disparities by race](#)

- [Journal of Ethics Article](#)

Despite the urgent need to study and implement strategies to curb the massive loss of life that results from community violence, the federal government has been extremely limited in allocating funds for this critical research.

In 2020, [for the first time in 23 years](#), the CDC received congressional funding for gun violence prevention research.

## Certain Communities are Disproportionately Affected by Violence

The spread of violence [does not impact all communities equally](#). Striking racial gaps, rooted in a legacy of structural racism, have left generations of people of color with disproportionately [less wealth and education](#), [lower access to health care](#), [less stable housing](#) and differential [exposure](#) to environmental harms like [air pollution](#). Such factors [contribute](#) to concentrated poverty, racially segregated neighborhoods and other [community conditions tied to violent offending](#).

A [report](#) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development describes the effects of concentrated disadvantages on primarily Black, Brown, and immigrant neighborhoods, and the correlation to violent crime.

“Disadvantaged, segregated communities have experienced a large portion of the national decline in violent crime but remain disproportionately affected by high violent crime rates”

“Neighborhoods with more concentrated disadvantages tend to experience higher levels of violent crime. Numerous studies, for instance, show that neighborhoods with higher poverty rates tend to have higher rates of violent crime. Greater overall income inequality within a neighborhood is associated with higher rates of crime, especially violent crime.”

“Concentrated disadvantage, crime, and imprisonment appear to interact in a continually destabilizing feedback loop.”

“Multiple studies have found that foreclosures increase violent crime on nearby blocks. Vacancies and evictions can also lead to violent crime by destabilizing communities and creating venues for crime. A study of Pittsburgh found that violent crime increased by 19 percent within 250 feet of a newly vacant foreclosed home and that the crime rate increased the longer the property remained vacant.”

“We estimated that, in 2020, on average, there were approximately 14 more incidents of firearm violence in the least-privileged zip codes compared to the most privileged zip codes, and almost 150 more aggravated assaults and five more homicides.”

“Equal opportunities — including the opportunity to live, work, learn, play, and worship free from violence — are not afforded to all Americans and that the greatest burdens of violence are shouldered by our most marginalized and economically vulnerable neighborhoods.”

[Research in Brief](#)

- Although many individuals in both groups had no juvenile or adult criminal record, being abused or neglected as a child increased the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile by 59 percent, as an adult by 28 percent, and for a violent crime by 30 percent.
- Maltreated children were younger at the time of their first arrest, committed nearly twice as many offenses, and were arrested more frequently. Physically abused and neglected children were the most likely to be arrested later for a violent crime.

## The Criminogenic Effect of Serving Time

- [Between](#) 1975 and 1989, the probability of clearing a violent crime by arrest remained roughly constant, but sentencing policy became much harsher. Increases in both a convicted violent offender's chance of being imprisoned and the average prison time served if imprisoned at all combined to cause a near tripling of the expected prison time served per violent crime.
- [The criminal justice system's](#) increased use of prison reduced violent crime levels in two ways. First, it prevented 10 to 15 percent of potential violent crimes through incapacitation — the isolation that prevents prisoners from committing crimes in the community. Second, it prevented additional violent crimes through deterrence, by discouraging people in the community from committing them.
- [There is no reliable means](#) of estimating the size of the deterrence effect and the total number of violent crimes the harsher sentencing policy averted. Whatever the number, however, those potential crimes must have been “replaced” by others, because the actual number of serious violent crimes was about the same in 1989 as in 1975—2.9 million. This suggests that by itself the criminal justice response to violence could accomplish no more than running in place. An effective control strategy must also include preventing violent events before they happen.
- [Research has shown](#) that incarceration may actually increase crime. At the state level, there may be an “inflection point” where increases in state incarceration rates are associated with higher crime rates. This state-level phenomenon mirrors a similar occurrence in specific neighborhoods, where communities may reach an incarceration “tipping point” after which future increases in incarceration lead to higher crime rates. **The argument is that high rates of imprisonment break down the social and family bonds that guide individuals away from crime, remove adults who would otherwise nurture children, deprive communities of income, reduce future income potential, and engender a deep resentment toward the legal system; thus, as high incarceration**

**becomes concentrated in certain neighborhoods, any potential public safety benefits are outweighed by the disruption to families and social groups that would help keep crime rates low.**

- [At the individual level](#), there is also some evidence that incarceration itself is criminogenic, meaning that spending time in jail or prison actually increases a person's risk of engaging in crime in the future. This may be because people learn criminal habits or develop criminal networks while incarcerated, but it may also be because of the collateral consequences that derive from even short periods of incarceration, such as loss of employment, loss of stable housing, or disruption of family ties.

### Jail doesn't deter crime

### Mandatory Minimums

### Failure

### **Council on Criminal Justice: [Long Sentences by the Numbers](#)**

- “The shares of Black and White adults receiving long sentences have grown over time and the gap between those shares has widened, from half a percentage point in 2005 to four percentage points in 2020.”
- “In 2005, White adults convicted of drug crimes were more likely to receive a long sentence; in 2020, Black adults were more likely.”
- “The share of people convicted of drug crimes who received long sentences increased more than three percentage points from 2005 to 2020, a 34% increase.”
- “The share of people convicted of a violent crime who received a long sentence grew incrementally from approximately 29% in 2005 to 32% in 2019, an increase of nearly 10%, despite no increase in the number of people convicted of violent crimes.”
- “From 2005 to 2020, the share of people receiving long sentences increased for all offense types except robbery.”

- “Though murder defendants were the most likely to receive a long sentence, drug offenses accounted for the largest share of those admitted to prison to serve 10 or more years. Cumulatively across the 16-year study period, drug cases accounted for 20% of total long-sentence admissions, while rape/sexual assault cases accounted for 16%, robbery 13%, murder/negligent manslaughter 9%, and aggravated assault cases accounted for 13%.”

**Council on Criminal Justice: [The Public Safety Impact of Long Sentences](#)**

- “The public safety benefits of longer prison sentences diminish during the latter years because individuals tend to age out of criminal behavior.”
- “Research findings on the specific deterrent effect of long prison sentences are mixed; the weight of the evidence indicates that long sentences have either no effect on recidivism or slightly increase recidivism when compared to shorter sentences.”
- “One study found that incarcerating street-level drug dealers fueled their replacement by younger and more violent individuals.”
- “Additional analyses further indicate that incarcerating people for drug trafficking may result in increased crime rates in general and increased rates of violent crime, specifically, because of organizational destabilization and the need for new recruits to prove themselves.”
- “One evaluation focused on more than 1,000 people enrolled in a behavior modification program targeting individuals on probation with substance use disorders. Results indicated that the threat of swift, consistent, and shorter periods of imprisonment fostered greater compliance with the conditions of probation. Program participants had fewer probation revocations (9% compared to 31% of probationers in the comparison group of people not enrolled in the behavior-modification program) and spent fewer days in prison (112 days, on average, compared to 303 days for the comparison group).”
- “More than half (52%) of serious violent crime goes unreported to law enforcement agencies.”
- “Data indicate that post-conviction imprisonment has little impact on recidivism.”

- “The authors found that when compared to individuals with sentence lengths of 12 or fewer months, those serving 13 to 24 months and more than 24 months had modest increases in recidivism after controlling for risk factors associated with recidivism, including age, race, gender, and risk level.”

## Violence as a Cycle

- “Several studies show that between a third and a half of incarcerated women report childhood abuse, childhood or adult sexual abuse or rape, or involvement in abusive relationships, significantly higher than the prevalence in the general populations of women.” [Source](#)
- “Male inmates also report higher levels of prior abuse than nonincarcerated men do. Of male state prison inmates, 12% reported physical or sexual abuse prior to incarceration, and in a study of jail inmates in Florida, 17% of men reported prior emotional abuse, 6% reported physical abuse, and 2% reported sexual abuse. The comparable rates for the Florida female jail inmates were 24%, 16%, and 19%, respectively. Studies of adolescent offenders also show high rates of prior victimization.” [Source](#)

## Study of Victim: Offender

- “Studies show that youth who experience chronic exposure to violence are more than thirty times more likely to become chronic violent offenders.”
  - Those exposed to violence are more likely to perpetrate  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0093854810377164>
    - (a) youth with chronic exposure to violence were 3,150% (or 31.5 times) more likely to engage in chronic violent behavior and
    - (b) chronic vicarious victimization was a significant predictor of chronic violent behavior, after controlling for the effects of chronic violent victimization. The theoretical and policy implications of these findings as well as areas for future research are discussed.



- “The hallmark of a trauma informed approach is its assertive outreach and engagement with victims, meeting clients where they live at home or in the community. It provides wide-ranging, comprehensive support to survivors of violent crime, including mental health counseling and case management, relocation help, and support navigating the justice environment. Treatment outcome data show that 44% of clients served by TRCs had decreased symptoms of PTSD and depression, and roughly 90% were better able to handle daily activities and cope more effectively with substance use.”
- [Repeat Victimization](#)
- [Those exposed to violence are more likely to perpetrate](#)
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**Council on Criminal Justice: [Meeting Bulletin #6](#)**

- “Violent crime devastates communities already suffering under high rates of concentrated poverty.”
- “One recent study indicated that the relative inequality between the safest and most dangerous neighborhoods in Chicago rose by 10 percent between 1990 and 2010, and suggested that these disparities are increasing nationwide.”
- “More than one third of victims of a violent crime have been repeatedly victimized. Victims of violent crime are four times as likely to be victimized again. Of the 1.5 million people treated for a violent injury each year, 45 percent will be reinjured within five years.”
- “Studies note that children who are victims of multiple types of violence – bullying, domestic violence, gun violence, etc – are more likely to be revictimized and become perpetrators of violence themselves.”
- “In communities highly impacted by gun violence, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is more common than among veterans of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Vietnam.”

- “For those living in communities with high levels of violence, the stress response associated with past trauma is frequently activated as a means of survival. As adults, survivors are more likely to engage in substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, and aggression to manage unresolved and ongoing traumatization. They are also at increased risk of obesity, depression, and suicide. Finally, research shows that structural violence and historic disinvestment in healthcare, education, and housing contribute to further traumatization.”
- “Studies show that youth who experience chronic exposure to violence are more than thirty times more likely to become chronic violent offenders.”
  - [Youth](#) with chronic exposure to violence were 3,150% (or 31.5 times) more likely to engage in chronic violent behavior and
  - [Chronic vicarious victimization](#) was a significant predictor of chronic violent behavior, after controlling for the effects of chronic violent victimization. The theoretical and policy implications of these findings as well as areas for future research are discussed.
- “The hallmark of a trauma informed approach is its assertive outreach and engagement with victims, meeting clients where they live at home or in the community. It provides wide-ranging, comprehensive support to survivors of violent crime, including mental health counseling and case management, relocation help, and support navigating the justice environment. Treatment outcome data show that 44% of clients served by TRCs had decreased symptoms of PTSD and depression, and roughly 90% were better able to handle daily activities and cope more effectively with substance use.”

### [The Overlap Between Victim and Offender](#)

- [Illinois Gov Report](#)

### Public Health Interventions

- [Investing in Communities](#)
- [Addressing violence as a health crisis:](#)
- [When law enforcement alone can't stop the problem](#)

- [What happened when a brooklyn neighborhood policed itself for five days](#)
- [Incarceration leads to community harm](#)
- [Homegrown peacemakers in LA](#)

“To our knowledge, this is the first study to consider the joint interaction of race and class on the prioritization of carceral systems over health and social support systems.” - [Source](#)

The five cities that most strongly favored carceral spending over health and social support were: Charlotte, North Carolina (CRI -0.92), Kansas City, Missouri (CRI -0.89), Indianapolis, Indiana (CRI -0.85), Chicago, Illinois (CRI -0.81), and Mesa, Arizona (-0.79). The five cities that most strongly favored health and social support over carceral spending were: San Francisco, California (CRI 0.58), New York, New York (CRI 0.29), Washington, D.C. (CRI 0.28), Seattle, Washington (CRI 0.22), and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (0.16) - [Source](#)

## Grant Information

[Shannon 2023 Funds Allocation](#)

[SSYI 2023 Legislative Report](#)

[GVP 2021 Legislative Report](#)

- Both SSYI and Shannon go through the PPD. They [reported](#) \$500,000 received for SSYI in at least the past two years. They [reported](#) \$369,534 received for Shannon in the last two years.
- GVP goes directly to 18 Degrees, but I can't find any accurate or updated information on the status of the program since 2021, when 18 Degrees was first awarded the grant. They were given a total of \$955,000 that was originally supposed to be spent over two years, but according to this report, the program was extended to include another fiscal year. The first year (2021), they were provided a budget of \$176,000. Not sure if that rate has remained the same or not; it seems unlikely, at that rate it would take them 5 years or more to burn through the \$955,000.

## Berkshire County House of Corrections

- According to a [report](#) on Massachusetts Incarceration spending from 2018, Berkshire County spends far and away the most money per inmate. According to their calculations, Berkshire County spent literally \$87,579 PER INMATE. All the other counties didn't get close to breaking \$75,000. Granted, that was back in 2016, but I think it's safe to assume not too much has changed since then. The [estimates for expenditure](#) per inmate increased to just under \$100,000 in 2019.
- But maybe the reason they're spending all this money is because they provide fantastic services! Nope. [Berkshire](#) is smack in the middle of the pack when it comes to health services spending, with only \$6,735 out of that \$90,000 being spent per inmate. That's significantly lower than five other counties that have much smaller budgets. [Education](#) and Program Services make up an average of just 3.2% of MA Sheriff's Department's budgets.
- Despite the [Berkshire Incarceration rates](#) declining by 42% from 2011 to 2016, the budget for the House of Corrections increased by 22%.
- Berkshire Sheriff's Dept. [budget](#) for 2022 was \$20,683,126.

[Pittsfield budget and stats](#)

[Police budget](#)

[State funding for jail](#)

## Salaries

- [Op-ed on BCHOC salaries](#)
- [Reported Sheriff's Dept Salaries](#)

## [Incarceration Stats for BCHOC](#)

### [MA Incarceration Rates](#)

## Cost of Homicide

### [Pittsfield Budget](#)

- “...the cost of a single murder to be, respectively, \$10 million, \$13.5 million, and \$19.2 million. These estimates include direct costs such as lost labor and property damage, as well as medical and justice system costs. They also capture indirect costs such as diminished quality of life and the avoidance behaviors previously described. In total, the annual price tag for homicide alone, not including any other violent crime, ranges from \$173 billion to \$332 billion—between \$531 and \$1,020 per American. These costs are passed on to us, the public, in a number of ways. Most obviously, we pay them via taxes...approx. \$284 billion in American taxpayer dollars are spent on federal, state, and local criminal justice systems. We also pay via elevated insurance rates: for example, many of those treated for gunshots, stab wounds, and other traumatic injuries are uninsured, resulting in higher medical and disability premiums for others...violence has a massively negative impact on economic activity as well as residential and commercial property values.” (p. 23) Thomas Abt Bleeding Out
- Collective costs of murder: \$173-332 billion in criminal justice and medical costs, lost wages and earnings, damaged and devalued property, and diminished quality of life. That’s between \$531 and \$1,020 per American, paid out in higher taxes, higher insurance premiums, and lower property values. (p. 2)
- [Statistical Calculations](#)
- Costs:
  - Criminal justice
  - Medical

- Lost wages
- Damaged and devalued property
- Avoidance

## Cure Violence (CeaseFire) Evaluation

- A recent study by Johns Hopkins' Center for Gun Violence Solutions found that for every **\$1 invested in Safe Streets Sites in Baltimore, the return on investment is anywhere from \$7 to \$19.**

Plus prison education costs

## Juvenile Justice

[Columbia, Emerging Adult Justice](#)

[Columbia law lab: https://justicelab.columbia.edu/EAJ](https://justicelab.columbia.edu/EAJ)

Juvenile law center: <https://jlc.org/>

<https://clbb.mgh.harvard.edu/juvenilejustice/>

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/why-youth-incarceration-fails-an-updated-review-of-the-evidence/>

[http://www.juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/resource\\_134.pdf](http://www.juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/resource_134.pdf)

[http://www.juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/resource\\_138\\_0.pdf](http://www.juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/resource_138_0.pdf)

## Pittsfield Crime Rates

- FBI Database on violent crime in US, 2019 - [source](#)
- Just an interesting study commissioned by the city in 2009 about housing developments/improvements needed in the Morningside and Westside neighborhoods - [source](#)

- FBI Database on violent crime in Pittsfield, 2021 - [source](#)

Table 6 Crime in the United States by Metropolitan Statistical Area, 2019											
Metropolitan Statistical Area	Counties/principal cities	Population	Violent crime	Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter	Rape <sup>1</sup>	Robbery	Aggravated assault	Property crime	Burglary	Larceny-theft	Motor vehicle theft
Pittsfield, MA M.S.A. <sup>3</sup>		124,775									
	Includes Berkshire County										
	City of Pittsfield	42,268	300	2	36	31	231	796	263	490	43
	Total area actually reporting	90.2%	446	2	73	43	328	1,617	431	1,119	67
	Estimated total	100.0%	475	2	76	46	351	1,730	450	1,205	75
	Rate per 100,000 inhabitants		380.7	1.6	60.9	36.9	281.3	1,386.5	360.6	965.7	60.1

- Pittsfield Police Data on Reported Crime in Pittsfield, updated daily - [source](#)
- Pittsfield Police Monthly Crime Data Reports, Nov 2022 - [source](#)

### Redlining in Pittsfield

- o [\(Redlining: A Case Study, p. 51\)](#)
- o [Berkshire Eagle](#)
- o [Williams Report](#)

### Pittsfield Public Schools

#### [PPS school safety action plan](#)

- From the PPS Secure School Environment policy:
  - “Extended suspension: Serious disciplinary action, while necessary, addresses effects not causes. Attention must also be directed towards determining the underlying reasons involved in school and community life. Further, steps will be taken in cooperation with other municipal departments and community agencies to ensure that where lengthy school suspensions are dictated, violators will be assigned to specific activities outside the regular school setting and will not be free to roam the streets.
  - The withdrawal of educational opportunity is of course undertaken with reluctance and only after the student has been accorded full due process. However, the right of the great majority of students and their parents to a school atmosphere free from fear is an overriding priority and will be protected.”

### 18 Degrees

- 18 Degrees State Filings: [Public Charities Filing Search](#)
- [FY 2021 State Audit](#)

- [FY2021 PC - Form PC/Annual](#)
- [FY2021 PC - IRS 990](#)

### **GVP Talking Points:**

“Research shows that residing in high-crime neighborhoods increases the likelihood that youth will witness violence, and that living with community violence can cause trauma.”

“The communities most affected by gun violence also have long histories of deep social and economic inequity. Discriminatory lending practices, poor access to social services and medical care, and lack of business investment mean that people in these communities have been denied fundamental economic, educational, and employment opportunities for generations.”

“The financial impact of homicides and assault among youth ages 15-24 in Massachusetts is staggering. This includes both the costs of medical care and lost wages over time. In 2015, death by homicide in this age group in the Commonwealth cost \$99,650,000. Nonfatal injuries requiring hospitalization cost \$45,922,000, and nonfatal ER visits cost \$46,595,000. Compared to these expenditures, the cost of preventing gun violence is miniscule.”

“Individual health is largely determined by community-wide socioeconomic factors such as the quality of schools and housing, and access to food, employment, and medical care. The factors that predict individuals' chances of developing asthma, diabetes, or heart disease also predict their chances of becoming victims of gun violence. The zip code an individual grows up in and the resources available in that person's community impact the likelihood their life will be affected by gun violence.”

“Trauma can be an individual or collective experience that results from poverty, racism, violence, neglect, and loss. Trauma occurs when people experience events that are emotionally painful or even unbearable, and that overwhelm their capacity to cope. Young people who have witnessed or experienced gun violence are susceptible to trauma, which can affect their ability to think clearly, make decisions, relate to others, learn new things, get enough sleep, and stay physically healthy.”

## Trauma

### [Slutkin Article](#)

- Additional research shows that trauma (an outcome of exposure to violence) causes dysregulation in the limbic system and prefrontal cortex leading to hypervigilance, and hostile attribution to perceived insults, resulting in more rapid and less regulated responses to real or perceived insults.



## PTSD screenings in hospitals

- Harvard Study on Community Based Response
  - “Young adults are developmentally distinct from older adults. Recent scientific work suggests that the human brain continues to develop well into the 20s, particularly in the prefrontal cortex region, which regulates impulse control and reasoning. Several studies suggest that people do not develop adult-quality decision-making until their early 20s, and others have shown that psychosocial capacities continue to mature even further into adulthood.”
  - “Young adults are more likely to engage in riskseeking behavior, have difficulty moderating their responses in emotionally charged situations, or have not fully developed a future-oriented method of decision-making.”
  - “Justice-involved individuals are more likely to have experienced a traumatic incident, including sustaining a traumatic brain injury (TBI) — more than twice as likely as the general population.”
  - “Justice-involved youth and young adults have a higher likelihood of parental incarceration, poverty, foster care, substance abuse, mental health needs and learning disabilities, all of which have been linked to impeding psychosocial maturity.”
  - “If young adults have a history of involvement with the juvenile justice system, there is a higher likelihood that they may be developmentally delayed or have untreated mental health needs.”
  - “In 2012, over 200,000 young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 either entered or left the prison system. Nearly 130,000 youths between the ages of 18 and 24 were admitted to state or federal prison, 21 percent of all admissions that year. Another 97,500 between the ages of 18 and 24 — 15 percent of all prison releasees — were released from state or federal prison back to their communities. For those who were released, the recidivism rates are significantly higher than for the population of prison releasees as a whole. **Roughly 78 percent of those released will be rearrested within 3 years.**”
  - “Justice-involved youth are likely to enter the justice system significantly behind their peers in many of the markers of adult life. They are more likely to have had a parent incarcerated or to have lived in a foster home, and more likely to report regular drug use than young adults in the general population. About 20 percent of young inmates report having some kind of disability. There is also a drastic difference in educational attainment between incarcerated populations and the general public. In the general public, more than 70 percent of males ages 18-24 have attained at least a high school diploma or GED; among incarcerated men of

the same age, the rate is less than 20 percent. Two-thirds (68 percent) of African-American male high school dropouts have been imprisoned by the time they reached age 35.”

- “Studies suggest that incarceration worsens these disadvantages, creating additional barriers to educational attainment, stable employment, housing, health care and relationships. The multiple disadvantages that these young people face suggest that correctional programming, both in secure facilities and in the community, must include more robust options than skills training alone. Young adults must also build the prosocial skills to succeed in adult roles — exercising impulse control, emotional self-regulation, and better interpreting others’ intentions — in addition to the technical skills of their work.”

#### [EAJP Rikers Island Overview](#)

- “The criminal legal system, and particularly carceral settings such as Rikers Island, perpetuates and concentrates exposures to violence.”

#### [Victims are More Likely to Perpetrate](#)

- “Among the seventy-two respondents who experienced acts of violence before, turned out that 61.1% became perpetrators of violence in the future. This is by the theory of intergenerational violence, which continues to be repeated as a learning process in one’s household. In this study, the risk of someone who has experienced acts of violence to become a perpetrator of violence is twice as high.”

#### [OJJDP Report on Victimization and Offending](#)

- “Within year 1, juveniles who offended were 5.3 times more likely than nonoffenders to be victimized (37 percent versus 7 percent), and those who were victimized were 2.4 times more likely than nonvictims to offend (78 percent versus 32 percent). Within year 2, juveniles who offended were 6 times more likely than nonoffenders to be victimized (42 percent versus 7 percent), and those who were victimized were 4 times more likely than nonvictims to offend (66 percent versus 16 percent). In general, these patterns were true regardless of age, gender, race, level of physical development, or drug use.”

#### [DOJ Report Children Exposed to Violence](#)

- “Children who do not live with both biological parents are at increased risk of exposure to violence, especially for experiencing physical and sexual assault perpetrated by a family member and witnessing domestic and community violence.”
- “Risk for exposure to violence and risk of experiencing multiple victimization episodes was higher when family alcohol problems or drug use were present.”
- “Children who associate with more deviant or delinquent peers in one year are at higher risk for exposure to community violence in the next year.”

- “Children who experienced one type of victimization in the past year had double or even triple the risk of other types of victimization. These risks held true for lifetime exposure as well.”
- “High rates of victimization are seen in juvenile justice samples. Seventy percent of youth in residential placement had some type of past traumatic experience, with 30 percent having experienced frequent and/or injurious physical and/or sexual abuse. Some types of victimizations are more strongly associated with violent offending than others. Sexual victimization is not predictive of violent offending, whereas victims of child physical abuse are approximately 1.7 times more likely than others to be involved in perpetrating violent offenses. Being the victim of a physical assault increases the likelihood of violent juvenile offending by 3.3 times.”
- “Children exposed to violence are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol; suffer from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic disorders; fail or have difficulty in school; and become delinquent and engage in criminal behavior. Sixty percent of American children were exposed to violence, crime, or abuse in their homes, schools, and communities. Almost 40 percent of American children were direct victims of two or more violent acts, and one in ten were victims of violence five or more times. Children are more likely to be exposed to violence and crime than adults. Almost one in ten American children saw one family member assault another family member, and more than 25 percent had been exposed to family violence during their life. A child’s exposure to one type of violence increases the likelihood that the child will be exposed to other types of violence and exposed multiple times.”

#### [SAGE Study on Experiencing or Witnessing Violence and Aggression](#)

- “Researchers asked nearly 800 children, from 8 to 12 years old, about whether they had witnessed or experienced violence at school, in their neighborhood, or at home. The survey also measured responses to whether aggression was appropriate, such as in the statement: "Sometimes you have to hit others because they deserve it." The final section of the questionnaire measured how aggressive the child was, based both on their own report and what their classmates said about them.”
- “The schoolchildren who had witnessed violence were more aggressive. Witnessing violence also had a delayed effect -- observing violence at the first phase of the study predicted more aggression six months later, over and above how aggressive the children were in the beginning.”
- “The same effect occurred for being a victim of violence. Victimization at the first phase of the study was associated with more aggression six months later, even given the high levels of aggression at the study's start.”

- The increased aggression was caused in part by a change in how the children thought that violence was normal. Seeing violence -- at home, school, or as its victim -- made it seem common, normal, and acceptable. Thinking that aggression is "normal" led to more of it.
- "Exposure to violence can also increase aggression regardless of whether at home, at school, and regardless of whether the person is a witness or a victim," the authors wrote. "People exposed to a heavy diet of violence come to believe that aggression is a normal way to solve conflict and get what you want in life. These beliefs lower their inhibitions against aggression against others."

### How Social Situations Influence Aggression

- "Björkqvist et al. found that girls who use nonphysical aggression reported being less lonely and were more likely to have higher status than did nonaggressive girls. In another study, aggressive boys were more likely to be accepted by their peers than were nonaggressive boys."
- "In a meta-analysis, Gershoff found that although children who were spanked by their parents were more likely to immediately comply with the parents' demands, they were also more aggressive, showed less ability to control aggression, and had poorer mental health in the long term. The problem seems to be that children who are punished for bad behavior may be more likely to change their behavior only for external reasons, rather than internalizing the norms of being good for its own sake."
- "Another outcome of viewing large amounts of violent material is desensitization, the tendency to become used to, and thus less influenced by, a stimulus. When we first see violence, we are likely to be shocked, aroused, and even repulsed by it. However, as we see more and more violence over time, we become habituated to it, such that subsequent exposures produce fewer and fewer negative emotional responses. In the end, we may begin to see violence as a normal part of everyday life and become accepting of it.
- In sum, continually viewing violence substantially changes how we think about and how our brains respond to the events that occur to us. Frequent exposure to violence primes aggression and makes aggressive behavior more likely. And viewing aggression frequently makes that aggression seem more normal and less negative. If we create for ourselves a world that contains a lot of violence, we become more distrustful and more likely to behave aggressively in response to conflict.

### NIH, trauma on the brain

- Trauma impacts three parts of the brain:
  - Limbic system: 150 million years old
  - Prefrontal cortex: 2-3 million years old
    - Amygdala: emotional/instinctual center

- Amygdala gather surrounding information to assess for threat; if it registers a threat, it creates a fear-response.
  - When reminded of a traumatic event, amygdala reacts as if you are re-experiencing the trauma
  - PTSD creates a hyperactive amygdala, constantly assessing for threats and creating paranoia
  - Helps prepare body for fight or flight
- Hippocampus: memory (limbic system)
  - Trauma reduces activity in the hippocampus, which distinguishes between past and present (hard to distinguish whether traumatic event happened in the past or is currently happening; your brain reenacts it)
  - Suppresses certain memories and reenacts others
  - Any surroundings that remind individual of traumatic event will induce fear and panic–fight/flight in response to perceived threat
- Prefrontal cortex: regulating emotions and impulses
  - Amygdala assesses for fear, and prefrontal cortex uses rationality to assess whether it is necessary to be afraid
    - Trauma suppresses the ability to lead with reason, and puts the amygdala in overdrive; hard to regulate fear.
  - When experiencing trauma, prefrontal cortex becomes suppressed, so you're more reactive and less able to regulate
- Overall, trauma creates a state of hypervigilance, suppresses memory and impulse control, and traps you in a state of emotional reactivity.
- Increased cortisol and norepinephrine, creating toxic stress levels over time and remaining in overdrive
- PTSD fundamentally changes brain structure and alters its functionality

#### [PTSD diagnosis criteria](#)

- Hyperarousal symptoms of PTSD: hypervigilance, irritability, paranoia...insomnia, depression, anxiety, flashbacks.
- [“Cortisol spikes make the body more susceptible to chronic conditions”](#)

#### [Desensitization to violence](#)

Exposure to violence is especially ubiquitous in poor urban areas, where as many as 80-90% of children and adolescents witness violence in their schools and communities

Across all income levels, however, African American youth are disproportionately more affected by exposure to violence compared to Caucasian adolescents

emotional desensitization for youth exposure to community violence, speculating that at high levels of exposure some youth may show a pattern of *pathologic adaptation* characterized by high levels of aggression combined with low levels of internalizing distress.

repeated exposure to violence should increase violent behavior both directly through increasing aggressive behavior and indirectly through diminished negative emotional, cognitive and physiological reactions to violence that would otherwise inhibit aggression (i.e., through desensitization).

If violence is experienced at home, in the community, and at school, negative reactions to further violence are more likely to be dampened and desensitization is more likely to occur.

The present results suggest that youth who had been exposed to violence in any setting should be screened for the presence of both externalizing and internalizing problems, which generally tend to co-occur. However, a subgroup of youth may be identified who have been exposed to high levels of violence or to violence across multiple contexts, and who also present with high levels of externalizing problems but little emotional distress. These youth are at the greatest risk for serious violence in the future. Violence prevention efforts may be more likely to prevent desensitization and associated negative outcomes if they aim to reduce violence across multiple settings (e.g., communities, as well as schools and homes). For youth who have experienced violence, interventions should focus on both externalizing and internalizing problems, as well as cognitive and emotional aspects of desensitization, such as normative beliefs and acceptance of violence and emotional numbing and callousness.

Living in a violent neighborhood gives you as much PTSD as going to war

<https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/02/ptsd-among-wounded-americans-in-violent-neighborhoods/>

“Americans wounded in their own neighborhoods are not getting treatment for PTSD. They’re not even getting diagnosed”

Research on military veterans has found that the symptom of “chronic hyperarousal”—the distorted sense of always being under extreme threat—can lead to increased aggression and violent behavior  
Hospitals should evaluate, support, and treat for PTSD whenever a traumatic injury comes through.

There are usually not routine PTSD screenings in hospitals...don't budget for it.

RAND corp.

“We had people tell us that we'd see a lot of people who were gang-bangers, and they wouldn't develop PTSD, because they were already hardened to that kind of life,” said Grant Marshall, a behavioral scientist who studied patients at a Los Angeles trauma center. “We didn't find that to be the case at all. People in gangs were just as likely as anyone else to develop PTSD.”

In fact, trauma appears to have a cumulative effect. Young men with violent injuries may be more likely to develop symptoms if they have been attacked before.

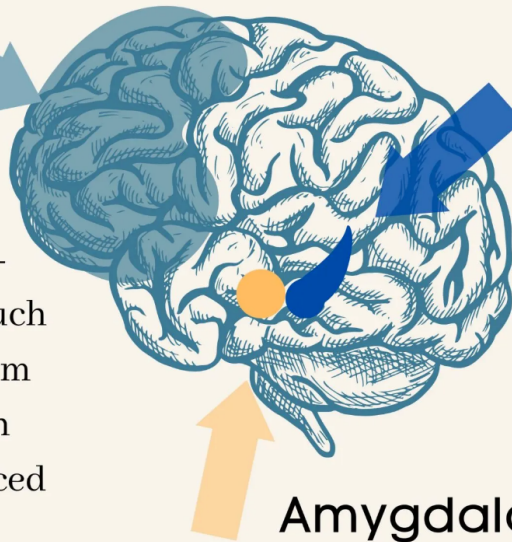
The Los Angeles study found that 27 percent of the men interviewed three months after they were injured had symptoms consistent with PTSD.

“Most people still think that all the people who get shot were doing something they didn't need to be doing,” said Porter, the trauma surgeon from Jackson. “I'm not saying it's the racist thing, but everybody thinks it's a young black men's disease: They get shot, they're out selling drugs. We're not going to spend more time on them.”

# HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS THE BRAIN

## Prefrontal Cortex

Rational thinking - regulates emotions such as fear responses from the amygdala - with PTSD this has a reduced volume



## Hippocampus

Responsible for memory and differentiating between past and present – works to remember and make sense of the trauma.

With consistent exposure to trauma, it shrinks.

## Amygdala

Wired for survival, when active it is hard to think rationally. The more hyperactive the amygdala is, the more signs of PTSD are present.

## [Source](#)

### Fight or Flight

- Sympathetic nervous system is activated due to release of hormones
- Adrenal glands release adrenaline
- Heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate gets faster
- Can be triggered by real or imaginary threats

### Survival Mode



- In order to have the best chance of survival, parts of the brain like the limbic system are prioritized (as opposed to prefrontal cortex), body is ready for fight or flight and releasing increased levels of hormones and adrenaline (toxic stress)
  - Executive functioning goes down//frontal lobes
    - Attention, judgment, problem solving, emotional regulation and impulse control (critical thinking, analytical decision making, communication between emotional response and cognitive decision making becomes disconnected)
    - Lack of proper communication between emotional response and executive functioning keeps the brain from encoding event appropriately; when, where, how becomes vague, so triggers set off this memory out of context.
    - Frontal lobe/executive functioning: critical thinking, analysis, problem solving, emotion regulation
    - Survival mode activities fight/flight/limbic system/stress response: executive functioning takes too long to employ and we need to stay alive before then.

## Mass Incarceration

[Nationally, \\$280 Billion is spent to fund the criminal justice system each year.](#)

[Of the more than 700,000 people that U.S. prisons release each year, 40% of those released inmates end up back in prison within three years.](#)

Prisoners say they need education and job training to reintegrate into society. They're right: 68% of inmates in state prisons lack a high school diploma.

The cost of correctional education programs per participant is \$1,400–\$1,744. Nearly a third of participants still recidivate. But the average savings per participant from reduced reincarceration rates is \$8,700–\$9,700 over three years. Even assuming the highest average cost (\$1,744) and the lowest average savings (\$8,700), the three-year return on investment for taxpayers is nearly 400%, or \$5 saved for every \$1 spent.

According to a RAND analysis, incarcerated people who take part in education programs are 43 percent less likely than others to be incarcerated again, and for every dollar spent on prison education, the government saves \$4 to \$5 in reimprisonment costs.

Mass incarceration rips apart families and communities, disproportionately hurts people of color, and costs taxpayers \$260 billion a year.

The homicide rate for Black Americans (29.3 per 100,000) was about seven and a half times higher than the white homicide rate (3.9 per 100,000) in 2020.

Harms of pre-trial detention

Failure of Justice System: Harvard Law

Mass Incarceration Impact on Communities of Color

Mass incarceration rips apart families and communities, disproportionately hurts people of color, and costs taxpayers \$260 billion a year.

- Despite an increase in length and severity of sentencing, the number of serious violent crime remained the same; this suggests that by itself the criminal justice response to violence could accomplish no more than running in place.
- Incarceration may actually increase crime. ...high rates of imprisonment break down the social and family bonds that guide individuals away from crime, remove adults who would otherwise nurture children, deprive communities of income, reduce future income potential, and engender a deep resentment toward the legal system; thus, as high incarceration becomes concentrated in certain neighborhoods, any

**potential public safety benefits are outweighed by the disruption to families and social groups that would help keep crime rates low.**

- [incarceration itself is criminogenic](#), meaning that spending time in jail or prison **actually increases a person's risk of engaging in crime in the future.** This may be because people learn criminal habits or develop criminal networks while incarcerated, but it may also be because of the collateral consequences that derive from even short periods of incarceration, **such as loss of employment, loss of stable housing, or disruption of family ties.**

[The United States has less than 5 percent of the world's population, yet nearly 25 percent of its prisoners.](#)

Nationally, around 650,000 individuals return to their communities from prison each year.

[\(MAMHA\)](#)

One in three Black boys born today can expect to be sentenced to prison, compared to 1 in 6 Latino boys and 1 in 17 white boys nationally. [\(Source\)](#)

The United States has the highest juvenile corrections rate; a rate five times higher than the next highest country.

*In the first 8 months after being released from incarceration...*

- 47% of participants reported experiencing at least one traumatic event.
- 68% experienced two traumatic events,
- and 32% experienced three or more. [\(Source\)](#)

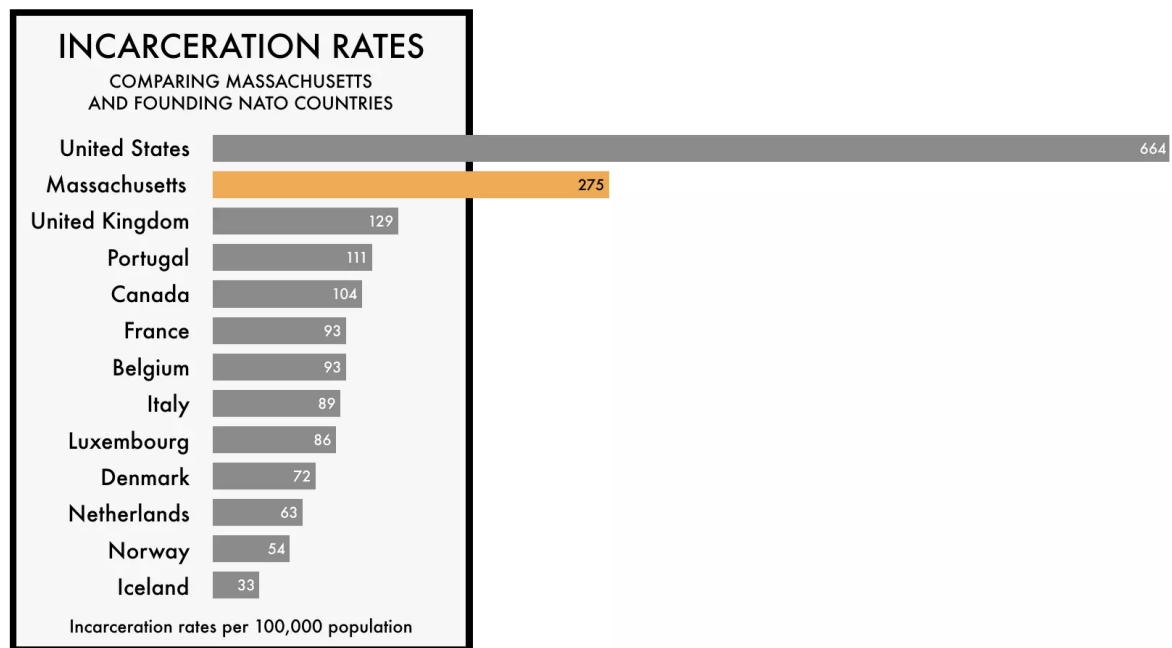
Also in the first 8 months after being released from incarceration...

- 18% had a loved one die by homicide
- 23% were violently assaulted
- 60% received news of an injury or death of a loved one
- 31% witnessed serious injury or death
- 31% experienced a serious health incident. [\(Source\)](#)

Among recent releases from a MA state prison..

- 50% reported being beaten by their parents
- 40% had witnessed someone being killed
- 30% had endured family violence
- 16% had been sexually abused. (Bleeding Out, p. 102)

Today, Massachusetts's incarceration rates stand out internationally



Source: <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/2021.html>

*In the U.S., incarceration extends beyond prisons and local jails to include other systems of confinement. The U.S. and state incarceration rates in this graph include people held by these other parts of the justice system, so they may be slightly higher than the commonly reported incarceration rates that only include prisons and jails. Details on the data are available in [States of Incarceration: The Global Context](#). We also have a version of this graph focusing on the [incarceration of women](#).*

[Source](#)

[“The criminal legal system, and particularly carceral settings...perpetuates and concentrates exposures to violence.”](#)

## Council on Criminal Justice: [The Public Safety Impact of Long Sentences](#)

- **“One study found that incarcerating street-level drug dealers fueled their replacement by younger and more violent individuals.”**

[In 2019, black and latinx males ages 18-19 were 12.4 times and 3.2 times more likely to be imprisoned than their white peers, respectively.](#)

## Juvenile Justice

[Columbia. Emerging Adult Justice](#)

[Columbia law lab: https://justicelab.columbia.edu/EAJ](https://justicelab.columbia.edu/EAJ)

- [Harvard Study on Community Based Response](#)
  - “...the human brain continues to develop well into the 20s, particularly in the prefrontal cortex region, which regulates impulse control and reasoning.”
  - “ Justice-involved individuals are...more than twice as likely as the general population...to have experienced a traumatic incident”
  - “Justice-involved youth and young adults have a higher likelihood of parental incarceration, poverty, foster care, substance abuse, mental health needs and learning disabilities, all of which have been linked to impeding psychosocial maturity.”
  - **Roughly 78 percent of young adults between the ages of 18–24 will be rearrested within 3 years.**
  - In the general public, more than 70 percent of males ages 18-24 have attained at least a high school diploma or GED; among incarcerated men of the same age, the rate is less than 20 percent.
  - Two-thirds (68 percent) of African-American male high school dropouts have been imprisoned by the time they reached age 35.
  - Studies suggest that incarceration worsens these disadvantages, creating additional barriers to educational attainment, stable employment, housing, health care and relationships.

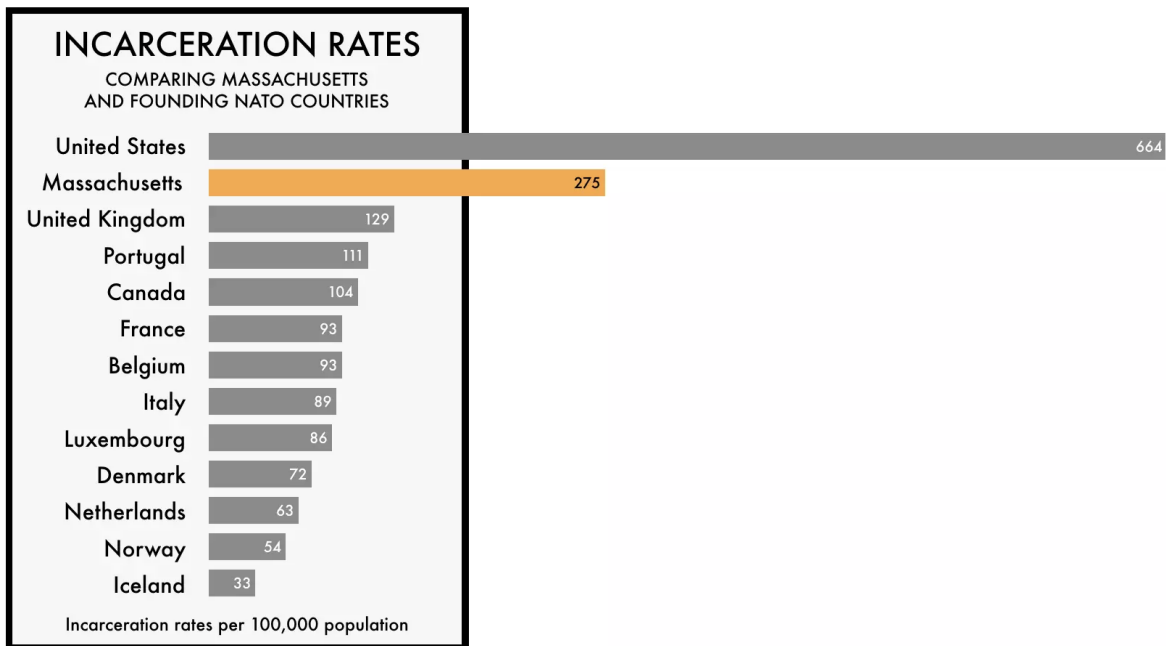
## Jail doesn't deter crime

## Mandatory Minimums

## Failure

## Images

Today, Massachusetts's incarceration rates stand out internationally

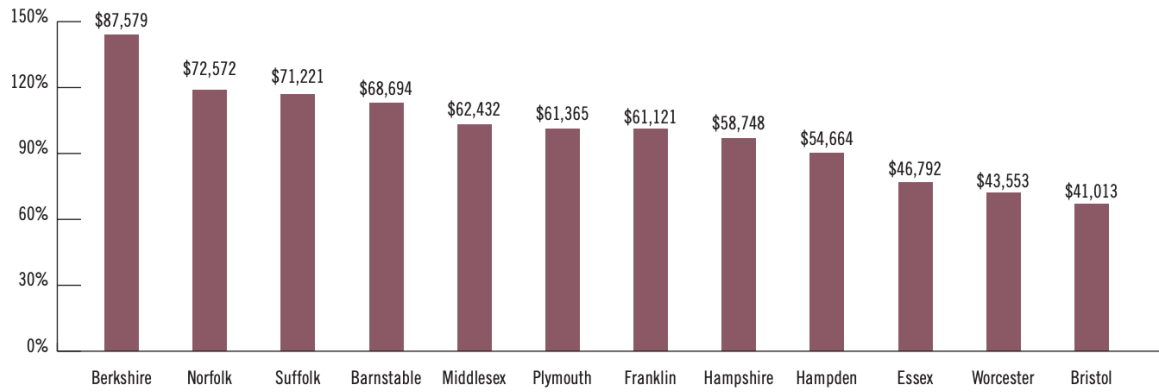


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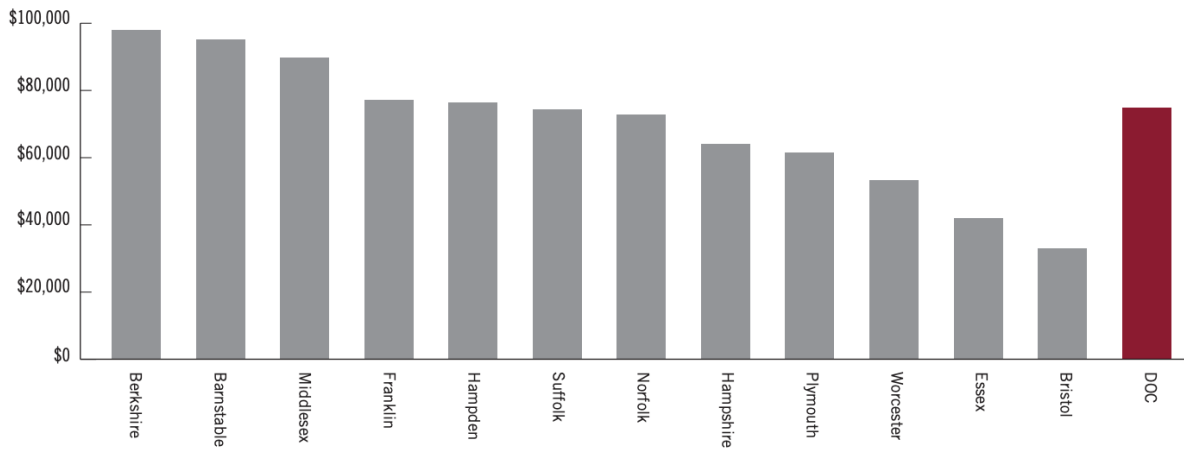
**Figure 5: Total expenditure per inmate, FY 2016**



Sources: MassINC's analysis of Massachusetts Office of the Comptroller data request and Department of Correction Weekly Count Sheets

[Source](#)

**Figure 4: Estimated expenditure per inmate, FY 2019**



Source: MassINC's analysis of Department of Correction Weekly Count Sheets, April 2018, and average House and SWM FY 2019 budget proposals (adjusted upward based on final expenditures, FY 2011 to FY 2018)

[Source](#)

	Prefer mandatory minimums	Prison leaves inmates more/less likely to commit more crimes	There are too many people in prison/not enough people in prison
All registered voters	8%	53% / 27%	42% / 10%
Self or family have been victims of a crime	9%	53% / 22%	46% / 10%
Residents of high crime areas (2014 poll)	9%	56% / 32%	45% / 16%

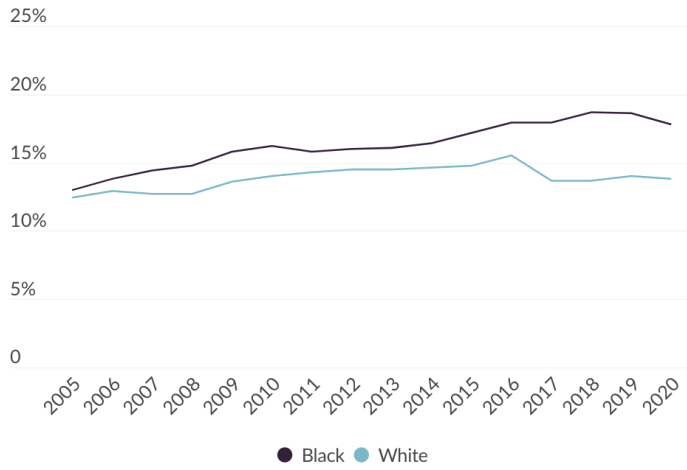
**Figure 1:**

**Voters want criminal justice system to prioritize prevention, rehabilitation.** *Q: Which do you think should be a top priority for dealing with crime?*

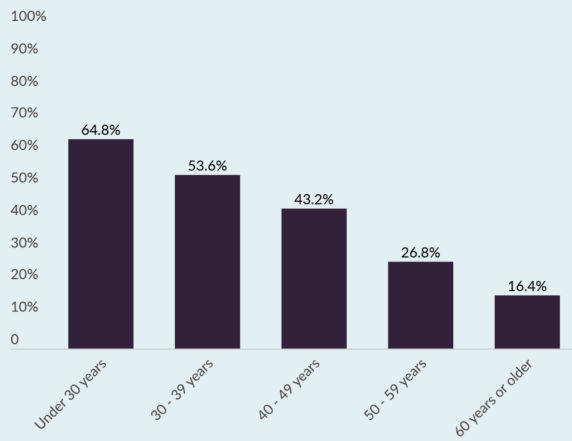
	2014	2017
<b>Prevention</b> , such as education and youth programs	43%	41%
<b>Rehabilitation</b> , such as education and job training for prisoners	22%	25%
<b>Punishment</b> , such as longer sentences and more prisons	14%	8%
<b>Enforcement</b> , such as putting more police officers on the streets	19%	22%
Don't Know/Refused	2%	4%



**Share of Newly Admitted People Sentenced to 10+ Years by Race**



**FIGURE 1: SHARE OF PEOPLE REARRESTED WITHIN EIGHT YEARS OF RELEASE, BY AGE GROUP**



Source: United States Sentencing Commission. (2017). The effects of aging on recidivism among federal offenders.

Compiled by Vivian L. Berard and Jenny Herzog.