Voices of the Survivors: Louisville Metro
Violent Crime Impact Report

Josh Crawford

Introduction

Spike Lee’s 2015 crime drama *Chi-Raq* is a take on Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, set in modern day Chicago, its critical juncture is when gang-fueled violence takes the life of an innocent pre-teen girl. The film highlights the notorious explosion of homicides in the city of Chicago over the last several years. The most powerful performance is that of Irene, played by Jennifer Hudson, the child’s mother. While the pain experienced on the screen by Hudson’s Irene might be fictional, it is representative of so many real stories.

Here in Louisville, the murder of seven-year-old Dequante Hobbs Jr. on May 21, 2017 rocked our city. When a stray bullet flew through the window of his home, it struck the young boy while he was sitting at his kitchen table. He was eating a piece of cake and reading on his tablet. As he screamed out in pain, his mother, Micheshia Norment ran to the kitchen to find her son crawling on the floor into the hallway. There was blood everywhere. Micheshia tried to perform CPR, but her son threw up in her mouth. She spit it out and kept going. Several hours later he died at Norton Children’s Hospital.

Please pray for my city
Too much hate in my city
Too many heartaches in my city
But I got faith in my city
This Chi-Raq and I love that
You can't take it away from my city
Some can’t relate to my city
They die every day in my city, yeah

“Pray 4 My City” – Nick Cannon in the movie *Chi-Raq*
Dequante wasn’t the target that night, but nonetheless he became another one of the city’s more than 100 homicide victims in 2017. Micheshia now lives with the loss of her son every day. So does Dequante’s father, his little sister, his grandmother, and many more who knew a happy young boy with a love of reading. Surviving family members are sometimes referred to in the literature as “co-victims” because among other things, they are the ones left to deal with the medical examiner, the police, the courts, and the media; they carry the grief for their loved ones far beyond when the news cameras leave. While the grief associated with the loss of a loved one by homicide is similar to the grief experienced from any loss of a loved one, some researchers have suggested that for surviving family members of homicide victims, the grief may be more intense and longer lasting.

As for the survivors of non-fatal gunshot wounds, their physical recovery can be protracted, and their psychological recovery can take even longer. While it may take years for some wounds to heal, other victims may never return to the full quality of life they had before being shot. For others, like shooting survivor Sheronda Jasper, recovery includes overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds. Jasper, despite being told she would never walk again after being shot at a nightclub in January of 2013, walked down the aisle at her wedding in July of 2017.

Survivors, those left behind by loved ones who have been murdered and those who themselves have survived gunshot wounds, give us a unique perspective on Louisville’s violence. The purpose of this report is to examine the shared experiences of these individuals and make policy recommendations to improve the experience of survivors in the hopes of reducing long-term violence and cost to the city.
I. Methodology

This project began with a series of interviews with dozens of surviving family members of homicide victims and survivors of non-fatal gunshot wounds. All of these individuals either lost a loved one or were themselves shot between January 1, 2003 – the inception of Louisville Metro – and November of 2017. Additionally an examination of existing literature steers both the measurement of the impact of these shootings and the specific recommendations. The shared experiences of the survivors guide the recommendations in this report. Hereinafter the term “survivor” refers to either surviving family members of homicide victims or survivors of nonfatall gunshot wounds, where a distinction is necessary it will be noted.

II. The Impact

Since the creation of Louisville Metro Government in January of 2003, there have been
1,018 murders in the city of Louisville; 982 of those were investigated by the Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD). On average, every homicide in America leaves behind 7-10 close relatives, as well as significant others, co-workers, neighbors, and friends to mourn the deceased.

Additionally, according to the University of Louisville Hospital Trauma Center, there have been 3,048 admissions for gunshot wounds from 2003 through November 2017. According to LMPD, from 2012 through September 2017 Louisville Metro had 2,023 non-fatal shootings. The impact of these shootings breaks down into two major categories, the emotional impact on the survivors and the financial impact on survivors and society.

A. Emotional Impact

Most of the existing research on surviving family members of homicide victims falls into one of two categories; those focusing on grief or those focused on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In *Working With Adult Homicide Survivors, Part I:*

![Bar chart showing total admissions to UofL Hospital for penetrative gun wounds, 2003-2017.](chart.png)
Impact and Sequelae of Murder, M. Regina Asaro identifies four reactions to a loss following a murder, and five contextual factors that may affect the grieving process. These reactions will help how the emotional impact on survivors is described and assessed. The four reactions are:

1. distress over how their loved one died,
2. a desire to know all the facts surrounding the murder,
3. issues of guilt and self-blame, and
4. changes in the survivors assumptive world.

For the Louisville survivors, reactions 1, 2, and 4 were particularly prevalent.

The experience of homicide survivors and survivors of non-fatal gunshot wounds is also unique in the ways internal and external forces can impact the survivors. Asaro’s five contextual factors are:

5. cognitive dissonance,
6. rage and desire for revenge,
7. media intrusion,
8. dealing with the criminal justice system, and
9. social stigma and reactions of others to the murder.

The Louisville survivors expressed factors 6 lasting frustration with factor 8.

i. Distress over how their loved one died

Asaro notes that “[i]t is not possible to say that one person’s grief is more painful than that of another, or that loss, by its nature, is not in some way usually traumatic.”

Previous research from Asaro did however find that none of her subjects believed that other losses in their lives compared to the loss of a loved one to a murder. This was
largely attributed to the violent nature in which their loved one died and a concern that their loved one suffered.\textsuperscript{17}

Perhaps no one better exemplifies this reaction than Marie Wren, whose sons Larry Ordway and Maurice Gordon were murdered in May of 2016. The painful and explicit detail to which Ms. Wren can describe these murders, both boys were repeatedly stabbed and then set on fire – demonstrates the unique nature of the loss of a loved one to a homicide as opposed to other losses.

\textbf{ii. A desire to know all the facts surrounding the murder (or shooting)}

The proverbial “why” remains a powerful question lingering in the mind of many survivors.\textsuperscript{18} For both the family members of homicide victims and the survivors of non-fatal gunshot wounds, this feeling is aggravated when an arrest is never made in their case. Unfortunately, for the Louisville survivors, many of whom never saw a conviction or arrest, this feeling has not subsided.

\textbf{iii. Changes in the survivor’s assumptive world}

Perhaps nothing changes one’s world like losing a loved one or being the victim of a non-fatal shooting. As Asaro notes, “[I]lloss of a loved one through murder violates our assumptions about the way things are and the order in the world that permits us to feel safe and in control – that is, able to predict, understand, and explain the things that happen in our lives.”\textsuperscript{19} The same is true for survivors of non-fatal gunshot wounds.\textsuperscript{20} Research also suggests that this is why many survivors not only lose a sense of personal security but also no longer feel that their loved ones are safe.\textsuperscript{21}

For the Louisville survivors, these changes in their assumptive world manifested
in different ways. For some this took the form of a loss of faith in fundamental fairness, for others it manifested as continuing fear surrounding doing certain things they associate with the homicide or shooting. For non-fatal gunshot wound survivors in particular, subsequent violent events in their neighborhood, particularly shootings, shook them immensely. These feelings were stronger in survivors whose traumatic event occurred more recently, and in survivors whose cases remain unsolved.

Nicole Taylor, who was shot in a carjacking early in the morning on July 18, 2017, has had her world turned upside down. She now worries constantly about her young son who was with her at the time of her attack, and she has fundamentally changed the way she interacts with her surroundings. Her young son, who was with her when she was shot, has lingering fears and no longer wants to be outside. She wants desperately to move from where she lives, but as of December, 2017, she has been unable to.

For Sheronda Jasper, who was shot and nearly paralyzed in a nightclub shooting in 2013, her assumptive world did not change until years later when she was at another nightclub and another shooting took place. Ms. Jasper was unhurt physically, but the experience forced her to change her priorities and she now describes herself as a “homebody.”

For Micheshia Norment, who has contemplated suicide, and who finds herself watching old movies that she used to watch with her son, she struggles with trusting a world that took her son away. She worries that an act as seemingly random as an unrelated shooting that could take her son away from such a distance, will happen again. Micheshia has not been back to work since Dequante’s murder – in part because of her own grief and in part because she simply cannot trust the world that took her son
away to be fair anymore.

For these survivors and the others we interviewed, this fraternity that emerges from violence comes not only with grief for the one lost or questions about who and why but also a fundamental transformation of the way in which they see and interact with the world around them.

iv. Rage and desire for revenge

The desire for revenge or to retaliate against the individual who committed the murder or shooting is both an expected outcome and one that contributes to the cycle of violence. A simple Google search of “retaliation shooting” returns 600,000 results. The role that retaliation plays in gangland violence is well documented, but one does not need to be a member of a criminal street gang to experience the desire for revenge and retaliation. This desire stems primarily from one or both of two emotions.

The first contributing emotion to the desire for revenge is the anger that comes with the loss of a loved one or being the victim of a shooting. In some cases the anger is overwhelming and can take the form of vivid revenge fantasies, and survivors can become preoccupied with anger and thoughts of revenge. As University of California, San Francisco Professor Mardi Horowitz, M.D. has noted, “[h]ate toward perpetrators burns at the core of revenge fantasies.” Given the particularly violent nature of homicide and shootings, and the resulting changes to the survivor’s assumptive world, some individuals whose moral or religious beliefs would otherwise preclude them from seeking revenge, are more open to and preoccupied with the idea. Anger and hatred, however, are not the sole reason survivors feel a desire for revenge and retaliation.

The desire for justice, and the reckoning of injustice, not only for the homicide or
shooting, but for the end result of a criminal investigation, can be a powerful driver in
the desire for revenge. Revenge as a means of achieving justice is a realization of
equity theory, whose central thesis is that revenge may enable survivors to reduce their
distress by restoring equity with the perpetrator. As researches Karina Schumann and
Michael Ross note in their work on revenge and justice, “[r]evenge does not undo the
harm, but it can restore the balance of suffering between the victim and the
transgressor.” This is exacerbated when the outcome of a criminal investigation is
another perceived injustice to the survivor. As Horowitz notes, survivors often have a
“fear that no rescuer can be trusted,” and when this is confirmed by the lack of an
arrest or conviction, the desire to take justice into their own hands is heightened.

For the Louisville survivors, many expressed either a personal desire for revenge,
a need to prevent other family members from seeking revenge (especially male siblings
of slain children), or that friends or other relatives had asked if the survivor wanted
them to exact revenge for them. All of this complicates the healing process and can
contribute to additional violence.

v. Dealing with the criminal justice system

Survivors are guaranteed to interact with the criminal justice system, and “[a]t a
point when most survivors feel they are not cognitively or emotionally able to handle
one more thing, the must begin to deal with the ongoing pleas, motions, hearings, trials,
sentencing procedures, and appeals that make up the criminal justice system.” What
this observation assumes is that an arrest and trial occur, and it ignores the initial and
follow-up interactions with police.

This is the area of impact where the experiences of the Louisville survivors were
most alike and the survivors were most outspoken about in their discussion. A number of shared, though not universal, experiences arose. Many survivors felt as though communication between them and the homicide detectives in their case was inadequate. Many of these same survivors acknowledged some version of “I understand they’re busy and have other cases,” but felt like “their case didn’t matter.” This feeling was particularly prevalent among survivors with cold cases. Most survivors had a positive view of law enforcement and they reserved more of their ire for the courts.

For those who were not survivors with a cold case, their opinion of the criminal justice system was largely negative, and largely focused on the courts. Multiple survivors expressed dismay over defendants being placed on home incarceration pending trial. They felt betrayed by a system that failed them twice – first when it was supposed to protect them and didn’t, second when it let their assailant back out onto the street.

They further expressed displeasure with a lack of notice of court proceedings, a lack of input in the process, and the final sentencing, especially when the sentence came via plea bargain.

**B. Financial Impact**

The costs associated with any crime, but especially a violent crime like murder are shouldered by a combination of the victims, their families, the taxpayer, and society at large. The question of who pays for what, and how much, is often a matter of policy decisions and cost shifting. A number of studies have attempted to calculate the total cost that a homicide exacts on its victims and society at large. Perhaps the most widely cited of these studies is *The Cost of Crime to Society: New Crime-Specific Estimates for*
Researchers found the total cost of a homicide to victim and society was $8,982,907 in 2008 dollars. This number takes into account both tangible and intangible costs including direct victim costs, criminal justice costs, opportunity costs associated with the offender’s decision to engage in criminal behavior, and intangible costs to the victim including pain and suffering, decreased quality of life, and psychological distress. For homicides this figure also includes the loss of productivity and earning potential from a lost life.

Similarly, a 2010 RAND Corporation study found the average cost of a murder to be $8,649,216 in 2010 dollars. The purpose of the RAND study was to demonstrate the incredible cost-savings that can come from preventing a future murder and the effectiveness of certain policies in doing so.

Some researchers however, have found a much larger cost associated with murder. Matt DeLisi, a professor of criminal justice and sociology at Iowa State University along with a team of graduate students found that the average cost of a homicide exceeded $17.25 million per instance. The DeLisi study used a sample of 654 convicted and incarcerated murderers and also found that the most prolific and violent of these individuals cost victims and society upwards of $150 million each.

The research on the cost of a non-fatal shooting is more sparse and less reliable. A 1997 study found that the average cost of a medically treated gunshot wound was $154,000 per survivor. This included medical, public service, and work-loss costs. In 2017 dollars this translates to just under $235,000. Ted Miller, one of the authors of the 1997 study later estimated in a 2015 piece that each gunshot wound requiring hospitalization costs about $583,000. It is unclear why this estimate is more than
double the inflation adjusted estimate from the 1997 study.

We make no independent attempt to calculate the cost of a homicide or shooting, and because these are national statistics, refrain from applying them directly to the first fifteen years of violence in Louisville Metro. However, what is abundantly clear is that if these numbers, or some scaled down numbers – to account for Louisville’s below average median income – were applied to that time period, it would produce a total cost in the billions.

IV. Policy Recommendations

The policy recommendations in this piece are designed to address the specific needs of survivors in the aftermath of violent crime in Louisville. Louisville Metro and local non-profit organizations already provide many of the resources one would hope are available to help survivors, including a homicide support group, grief counseling, and assistance with burial costs for indigent families. Yet a knowledge gap exists between the services and survivors. The policy recommendations are an attempt to address both gaps in services and that knowledge gap.

Rochelle Turner, whose son Ricky Jones was killed in April of 2016 said it better than I could, “[i]f you’re going to tell me my son has ‘expired’ at least arm me with the knowledge and resources to heal my family.”

A. Establish and Fund a Civilian Victim Advocate Program within LMPD

One of he outcomes of the modern crime victims’ rights movement within the United States was to join victim services with prosecutors’ offices. While this has been a largely successful effort in helping victims navigate the trial process, it necessarily
leaves out any survivor whose case does not end up in a prosecutor’s office. This is particularly problematic given the increased number of cold cases in recent years due to the spike in homicides. By establishing a victim services program within the Louisville Metro Police Department, civilian caseworkers could help guide survivors through the investigative process, keep survivors aware of updates in their case, and ensure that survivors are informed of relevant counseling and support services. While paid staff are essential to a productive victims services unit, the use of trained volunteers, many of whom would likely be survivors themselves, could alleviate some costs and help build community-police relations.

This seems to be a direction that LMPD already wants to head in, having recently hired a victim advocate. Funding for a full program, at least one that covers homicide cases and non-fatal shootings should be a priority for the Mayor and Metro Council. This would ensure that all survivors are informed and would likely improve survivor-police relations. Several North Carolina Police Departments, including Durham and Ashville, have programs worth examining and possibly replicating.

**B. Pass a Constitutional Amendment Guaranteeing Survivors the Right to Notice of All Court Proceedings and to Deliver a Victim Impact Statement**

As previously noted, for a survivor whose case does make it into the courts, additional frustrations arise. We have previously called for the elimination of pretrial release on home incarceration for homicide defendants, leaving two additional areas for reform in the courts.

In Kentucky, survivors already have statutory rights to notice of all court proceedings and to make a victim impact statement (VIS) following a conviction or
plea agreement. Yet the Louisville survivors feel neither of these rights have been properly afforded to them. A Constitutional Amendment would ensure that survivors are not denied critical rights related to the criminal justice system. While the use and appropriateness of VIS has been the subject of academic debate, the absence of a VIS leaves a “silenced victim with general loss of freedom.” Professor Erin Sheley posits that the expressive nature of VIS not only serve the survivor and the criminal justice system, but society in general, as we gain a better understanding of the narrative of the offense. Perhaps no case better exemplifies this than the “Stanford Rape Case” in which a viral VIS sparked outrage and calls for change in the law.

Guaranteeing these rights for survivors in Louisville is an important step in recovery for those whose cases make it into the courts.

C. Establish a Community Fund Designed to Offset Certain Costs Endured by Survivors

The costs bore by survivors are immense and varying. While certain expenses are covered by medical or other insurance, the depth of issues that survivors must cope with can seem never-ending. A community fund could have the flexibility to help survivors with whatever their specific needs are. For some survivors this would be the cleanup of blood, which is typically covered by homeowners or renters insurance, but for many low-income survivors, it is something they must take care of on their own. For other survivors it is help with probate costs, funeral and burial costs, or additional rehabilitation past what insurance will cover. A private community fund for survivors could meet these needs on an individual basis and with minimal administrative overhead.
V. Conclusion

The first fifteen years of Louisville have been a time of remarkable growth and opportunity in our city. But we have also seen great pain and loss over that period, and at an extraordinary cost. For policymakers it is important to remember the individuals directly impacted by homicides and shootings. They are our neighbors, they are mothers, brothers, fathers, sisters, sons, and daughters. The one thing they have in common is the one thing they wish they did not. They are survivors.

The above policy recommendations won’t eliminate violence or ensure that no survivor has to grieve again, but they will directly address the expressed frustrations of the survivors, go a long way in mending broken fences, and improve the experience of those who have dealt with pain unimaginable to most of us.

About the Author

Josh received a bachelor’s degree in Crime, Law, and Justice from Penn State University and a Juris Doctorate from Suffolk University Law School in Boston, Massachusetts. Josh has served as a Rule 3.03 student prosecutor for the Plymouth County District Attorney’s Office, as a law clerk for Boston Municipal Court Justice Michael Coyne, and as a secondary lecturer at Penn State University. Before joining Pegasus Institute, he worked in the Sacramento County District Attorney’s Office (CA).

About Pegasus Institute

Pegasus Institute is a first of its kind, millennial-led, state-based think-tank. Our mission is to provide public policy research and solutions that help improve the lives of all Kentuckians. Pegasus Institute operates as an independent, non-partisan, privately funded research organization focused on state and local policies.
Footnotes


2 105 as of 11/29/17; https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1VMY5yltDJOhnXoCYSCD2WDqRNwc&hl=en_US&ll=38.18732535030176%2C-85.8058923543973&z=1


6 Id.


9 Supra at note iv.

10 Data provided by Dr. Keith Miller of the University of Louisville Homicide Trauma Center. These numbers only include those who were admitted to the hospital. Those merely treated for a gunshot wound in the emergency room but not admitted are not included in this data set.


13 Asaro, M. R. (2001). Working With Adult Homicide Survivors, Part I: Impact and Sequelae of Murder. Perspectives in Psychiatric Care, 37(3), 95-101; Additionally, the assumptive world concept refers to the assumptions or beliefs that ground, secure, stabilize, and orient people. They are our core beliefs about fairness, justice, safety, and so on.

14 Id.

15 Id.

Id; Redmond, supra at note iv.


Supra at note iv.


Id.


Supra at note xii.


Supra at note xxvi.

Supra at note xxiv.

Supra note xii.


Id.

Id.


Id.


Id.


Id.


KRS 421.500

KRS 421.520


Id.

Id.
Josh and Pegasus Institute would like to thank the following individuals and families for their willingness to share their experiences with us.

Tracy Faulkner  
The family of Derrick Cargill  
The family of Cameron Pugh  
The family of Donald Hester  
Nicole Cowhard  
Michael Thomas Sr.  
The family of Wilson Burton  
Shawnmonquila Bragg  
Priscilla Sykes  
Tanya Madrey  
The family of Larry Williams  
Kim Hammond  
Marianne Dean  
Rochelle Turner  
Donita White  
Mona Phlippins  
Jamie Denton  
Terri Tharpe  
Micheshia Norment  
Priscilla Norment  
Derrik Miller  
Tay Reed  
Tina Tyus  
Juanita Williams  
Pastor Jerome Garrison  
Misty Tweedy  
Terry Zawicker  
The family of Antonio Williams  
The family of Timothy Williams  
Veronica Hughes  
The family of Damion Morton  
The family of Andre Oneal, Jr.  
The family of Charles Hill  
The family of Ja’quay Rogers  
Tracy Browning  
Donna Goldsmith  
The family of Brian Lewis  
Latasha Shantel  
Joyce Johnson  
The family of Darnell Banks  
Kim Jarboe  
Star Robinson  
Constance Esters  
Shekela Brasher  
Thomas & Maria Hamby  
Toni Duvall  
Nicole Taylor  
Sheronda Jasper  
Latasha Shantel  
The family of George Brown  
Joyce Johnson  
Nicole Lemons  
Sharri Morris  
Miranda Livers  
Donald Mattingly Sr.  
Steve Mattingly  
Lisa New  
Shareka Chappell  
The family of Diane & Steve Woods
Special Thanks

A very special thanks, first and foremost, to Christopher 2X, Voices of the Survivors Peace Advocate, without whom this report would not have been possible.

Thank you to Maj. Troy Pitcock (ret.), Lt. Richard Pearson (ret.), Homicide Det. William Brown (ret.), Ofc. Richard Gibbs (ret.), Ofc. Steven Kelsey (ret.), Trauma Surgeon Dr. Keith Miller and the University of Louisville Trauma Institute, Katherine Duckett Nichols and Kentuckians’ Voices for Crime Victims, filmmaker Lavel White, Interfaith Paths to Peace, and the Respect Project for their assistance with this project and their continued work with survivors.

Thank you to the five policy experts and academics who provided peer-reviews of this report ahead of its release. You make our work stronger and we are indebted to you.

Finally, Josh would like to thank Research Assistants Dasha Kolyaskina and Jared Crawford for their help with this report.