



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPORTING ON EVERYDAY GUN VIOLENCE



Media organizations can play a critical role in shedding light on the gun violence problem and serving as community resources to identify and support the changes required.

The hypothesis of the Philadelphia Center for Gun Violence Reporting (PCGVR) is that changing the way news media portrays gun violence could lead to a reduction in shootings.

HARMFUL MEDIA COVERAGE CAN:

- Further traumatize survivors, families, and communities.
- Increase prejudice and stigmatization against people and communities.
- Provide an incorrect narrative on the issue of gun violence.

HELPFUL MEDIA COVERAGE CAN:

- Comfort and provide shareable resources for survivors, families, and communities – including families of the perpetrators.
- Contribute to public support for firearm injury prevention policy and programming, and show that police are not the only answer communities need.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Episodic reporting: The daily catalog, without context and without comment from those involved, of shootings around the city. Episodic reporting on violence tends to lead audiences to blame individuals for problems.

Firearm violence: Any conflict, injury, or fatality involving a gun, including suicides, homicides, shooting injuries, unintentional shootings, police shootings, and domestic violence.

Professional expert: A person whose expertise on a particular topic comes from academic learning and not firsthand, experiential learning. Someone with “lived expertise,” by contrast, has knowledge of a topic based on their firsthand experience.

Survivor: Any individual with a close connection to an incident of gun violence—such as family members, friends, and community members—not just those who experienced the incident firsthand.

Thematic reporting: Situating the incident within a larger social and structural context. Thematic reporting is more likely to prompt audiences to identify institutions and policies as responsible for entrenched social problems.

Half of all shooting victims were not reported in the news.

“This conflicts with a common justification for episodic crime reporting, namely that, in the interest of public safety, it must occur in real-time with limited information.”

‘Like I’m a nobody:’ firearm-injured peoples’ perspectives on news media reporting about firearm violence.

INSTEAD OF THIS

- Defaulting to information provided by police officials or anyone else, especially those who wield power or hold a vested self-interest in portraying a particular narrative. Remember that official information isn’t always accurate.

- Using stories that do not directly relate to the issue you’re talking about. Don’t focus on criminal records without a good reason, and don’t judge victims.

- Oversimplifying, speculating on the reason, or sensationalizing details in the headline or story.

- Posting videos that depict graphic violence.

- Reporting specific information about a firearm-injured person’s clinical condition, number and location of bullet wounds, and whereabouts, unless verified with and approved for inclusion by the victims themselves.

- Stigmatizing the community where the incident occurred or the people targeted by the perpetrator.

- Early reporting on individual shooting events with no follow-up .

DO THIS

- Explore a full spectrum of experts who can shed light on the issue of gun violence, from public health and epidemiology to criminology, communications, and more, *not only professional experts.*

- When victims are young, include the voices and perspectives of young people.

- Be sensitive that certain descriptions in news reports can imply criminality and complicity in the cause of a shooting.

- Report using facts and language that are sensitive to a grieving family. Remember that families, including those of the perpetrator, are deeply affected and traumatized by the incident. Be sensitive when conducting interviews.

- Balance the need to inform your audience with the goal of minimizing traumatic content. Posting video of a shooting can be traumatic and can potentially provide positive re-enforcement for perpetrators.

- Be sensitive that reporting which hospital the injured person went to and their condition could cause a threat to their personal safety.

- Respect the community. Find and share the wonderful things taking place in a neighborhood, outside of the negative. Tell stories of resilience. Create hope.

- Ensure follow-up after early reporting that incorporate the victim and community perspective, including sources and narrators apart from law enforcement. Identify and discuss relevant potential solutions.

“Media reports on interpersonal firearm violence largely present it as a crime issue focused on individual shooting events. This episodic framing can undermine support for public health solutions to firearm violence. Potential harms of this narrative on firearm-injured people are unknown... Journalists and public health practitioners should work together with communities to identify strategies to reframe firearm violence as a public health problem through reporting that is trauma-informed and incorporates the perspectives of firearm-injured people.”

‘Like I’m a nobody:’ firearm-injured peoples’ perspectives on news media reporting about firearm violence.

AVOID

INSTEAD / EXPLANATION

“Gritty” or “urban”

These can be perceived as racist code words.

“In the wrong place at the wrong time”

This can stigmatize the community where the incident occurred.

“Officer-involved shooting”

Avoid the passive voice and decisively link subject with verb: “A police officer shot and killed a Black man on Thursday.”

“Epidemic” or “skyrocketing”

“Increase” or “rise”

“Accidental” shooting

“Unintentional” shooting
“Accidental” implies that nothing could be done to prevent it.

“Gun control”

“Gun violence prevention”
“Gun control” is politically polarizing.

“Red flag laws”

“Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs)”
“Red flag” can stigmatize individuals with mental illness.

KEY MESSAGES

1. GUN VIOLENCE IS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS
2. GUN VIOLENCE IS PREVENTABLE

REFERENCES

The Philadelphia Center for Gun Violence Reporting, <https://www.pcgvr.org/>

The Initiative for Better Gun Violence Reporting, <https://ibgvr.org/>

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