YOUTH GUN VIOLENCE IN URBAN COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Youth gun violence in urban communities remains a critical public health and social justice issue in the United States and globally. This phenomenon is driven by a complex interplay of socioeconomic disparities, systemic inequality, limited access to quality education and employment, and exposure to community trauma (Walker et al,2025). Families in poverty are more likely to have high levels of conflict and undergo multiple adverse experiences (National Academies of Sciences, 2019). Urban youth, particularly those from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds, are disproportionately affected, both as victims and perpetrators (Abba et al, 2024). Researchers at Johns Hopkins University (2024) show that the high number of firearms, along with limited mental health services and strained relations with law enforcement, worsens the cycle of violence: peer pressure, gang ties, and social media fuel conflicts. The impacts are widespread, including higher mortality rates, psychological trauma, interrupted education, and long-term instability in communities (Abba et al, 2024). Effective interventions require a multi-faceted approach, including community-based violence prevention programs, youth mentorship, policy reform on gun control, and investment in education and economic opportunities. Collaborative efforts among local governments, schools, law enforcement, and grassroots organizations are crucial for creating safer environments and providing youth with viable alternatives to violence (Abba et al., 2024). The present study employed secondary data analysis, utilizing data from the Bibb County Sheriff's Office on youth gun violence from 2014 to 2025, as well as data from Bibb County School District Elementary schools to examine the Eddie Eagle GunSafe Program of children in PreK through 3rd grade. The results of the current study show that knowledge increased for some students; however, a lack of behavioral skills was later identified in other students using Bibb County Sheriff's Office youth homicide data.

Introduction

A key challenge faced by public safety programs and policies aimed at preventing youth gun violence is the limited access to comprehensive data and funding for effective research and evaluation (Roche et al., 2023). Three challenges hamper the field of research and its potential to staunch the firearm injury epidemic. Roche et al. (2023) identify three main contributors to the problem: inadequate funding, limited data access and availability, and a lack of evidence-based programming.

Federal funding for firearm injury prevention research has been severely limited, hindering the development and rigorous evaluation of evidence-based programs. This lack of funding has stalled progress in the field and limited the number of trained researchers and practitioners (Long-Green et al., 2023).

Access to relevant data is crucial for understanding the root causes of gun violence, evaluating the effectiveness of programs and policies, and informing future interventions. Adequate and comprehensive data on nonfatal firearm injuries or firearm transactions, for instance, are not readily available to researchers, thus limiting the ability to assess and improve prevention efforts (Long-Green et al., 2023)

Due to the scarcity of funding and data, there is a lack of rigorous scientific evaluation of programs and policies designed to address youth gun violence. This means that communities may implement interventions without strong evidence of their effectiveness, and some policies, even with good intentions, could potentially be ineffective or harmful. (Long-Green et al., 2023)

This doctoral evaluation project examines the role that community-based gun violence prevention policies play in impacting youth firearm violence rates in urban centers. This research focuses on black youth and their tendency toward firearm violence as victims and perpetrators.

Gun violence remains one of the most pressing public health and safety challenges facing our communities (Bhatt et al., 2024; Centers for Disease Control, 2024). Each year, tens of thousands of lives are lost to gun

violence, with countless more forever changed by non-fatal injuries and the lasting trauma inflicted on families and neighborhoods (Evan et al., 2018).

While this issue often sparks intense debate, there is growing evidence that well-designed prevention policies can help reduce gun deaths and injuries while respecting constitutional rights (Smart et al., 2024). This research examines evidence-based approaches to gun violence prevention, focusing on policies and programs that have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing firearm-related deaths and injuries, and community-based programs, like the Eddie Eagle Program. This paper will identify strategies that balance public safety with individual rights by analyzing data from multiple jurisdictions and research studies.

The methodology for this research involves secondary data analysis, utilizing the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) as the data source. The OJJDP data will illustrate the number of incidents of youth gun violence in the United States and show how youths are affected. The OJJDP data will describe how many youths are involved in gun violence every year.

Research Question and Objectives

To what extent do specific community-based gun violence prevention policies, implemented in urban areas, impact youth firearm violence rates and associated risk factors, and what are the long-term effects on youth well-being and community safety?

 This research will analyze state and juvenile gun control policies and their impact in the state of Georgia. The study will focus on early intervention, examining youth gun violence before individuals enter the adult criminal justice system. It will investigate how key decisions influence the successful and sustained implementation of violence-reduction practices, to inform the planning of more effective future prevention programs.

Literature Review

Juvenile gun violence has been a top priority in the United States. (Philnik et al, 2023). McLeod and Roberts (2023) suggest that reinvesting resources could enhance how society supports these youth in processing and coping with the trauma they have experienced. Their study examined the shortcomings of the current juvenile justice system by identifying that being trauma-informed requires that prior trauma be considered when analyzing the reasoning behind one's actions (McLeod et al., 2023). Positive school experiences serve as a protective factor against criminality and involvement in the criminal justice system (McLeod et al., 2023).

McLeod and Roberts (2023) based their study on the theory of diversionary processes, which focuses on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow states that human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of prepotency, and the appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more potent need (Maslow, 1943). Man is described as a perpetually wanting animal, and no need or drive can be treated as if it were isolated. Every drive is related to the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of other drives (Maslow, 1943). Maslow's Hierarchy theory identifies the needs that must be met to fulfill different needs (McLeod et al., 2023). The basic premise is that deficiencies must first be addressed for growth to occur. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is organized in the order of basic, psychological, and self-actualization needs (McLeod et al., 2023; Maslow, 1943).

McLeod and Roberts's (2023) methodology is a combination of strategies related to (1) diversion, (2) attrition, and (3) reinvestment of existing resources (McLeod et al., 2023). The diversion strategy includes trauma-informed practices that use punitive approaches such as restraints or solitary confinement, which can trigger responses to prior abuse (McLeod et al., 2023). Thus, being trauma-informed requires that prior trauma be considered when analyzing the reasoning behind one's actions (McLeod et al., 2023). For the attrition strategy, the premise is that as programs become obsolete, resources should be allocated to new evidence-based programs that involve youth actively participating in their rehabilitation (McLeod et al., 2023). Ultimately, reinvesting existing resources involves developing more sustainable strategies for juvenile justice, which in turn

produces more positive outcomes for youths (McLeod et al., 2023). The authors note that over time, the juvenile system in the United States has evolved to resemble the adult system more closely, focusing on punitive approaches for behavioral modification (McLeod et al., 2023). Lastly, the current system does not serve its purpose of reducing future criminal behavior. The authors advocate that the current system makes us less safe (McLeod et al., 2023).

The impact of gun violence on children and adolescents is evident in firearm injuries and deaths in the United States (Panchal, 2024). Firearms have killed more children and adolescents than any other cause, surpassing motor vehicle crashes. Panchal (2024) discusses how firearm-related deaths have increased among children and adolescents since the pandemic began, with seven children dying by firearm per day in 2022 (Panchal, 2024). There have been recent increases in firearm deaths that were driven by gun assaults, which accounted for two out of three firearm deaths among children and adolescents in 2022 (Panchal, 2024).

Additionally, from 2018 to 2022, the rate of firearm deaths doubled among African American youth and increased by 73% among Hispanic youth (Panchal, 2024). According to the author, firearm death rates for male children and adolescents are over four times higher than those of their female peers. From 2018 to 2022, the rate of deaths due to firearms increased by 50% among male children and adolescents but remained lower and stable among females (Panchal, 2024).

Firearm death rates among children and adolescents vary considerably by state; however, almost all states have seen a growth in these death rates during the pandemic years (Panchal, 2024). During the pandemic years, the states with the highest firearm death rates among children and adolescents were Louisiana, Mississippi, and the District of Columbia (8.8, 8.8, and 8.4 per 100,000, respectively, for combined years, 2020-2022) (Panchal, 2024). The states with the lowest firearm death rates were Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York (0.6, 0.9, and 1.1 per 100,000, respectively, for the combined years, 2020-2022) (Panchal, 2024). Graphs 1 and 2 highlight both high and low differences in states related to firearm death rates among children.

Graph 1. Highest Firearm death rates among children and adolescents (2020-2022)

Highest Firearm Death Rates Among Children and Adolescents (2020–2022)

Graph 2. Lowest firearm death rates among children and adolescents (2020-2022)
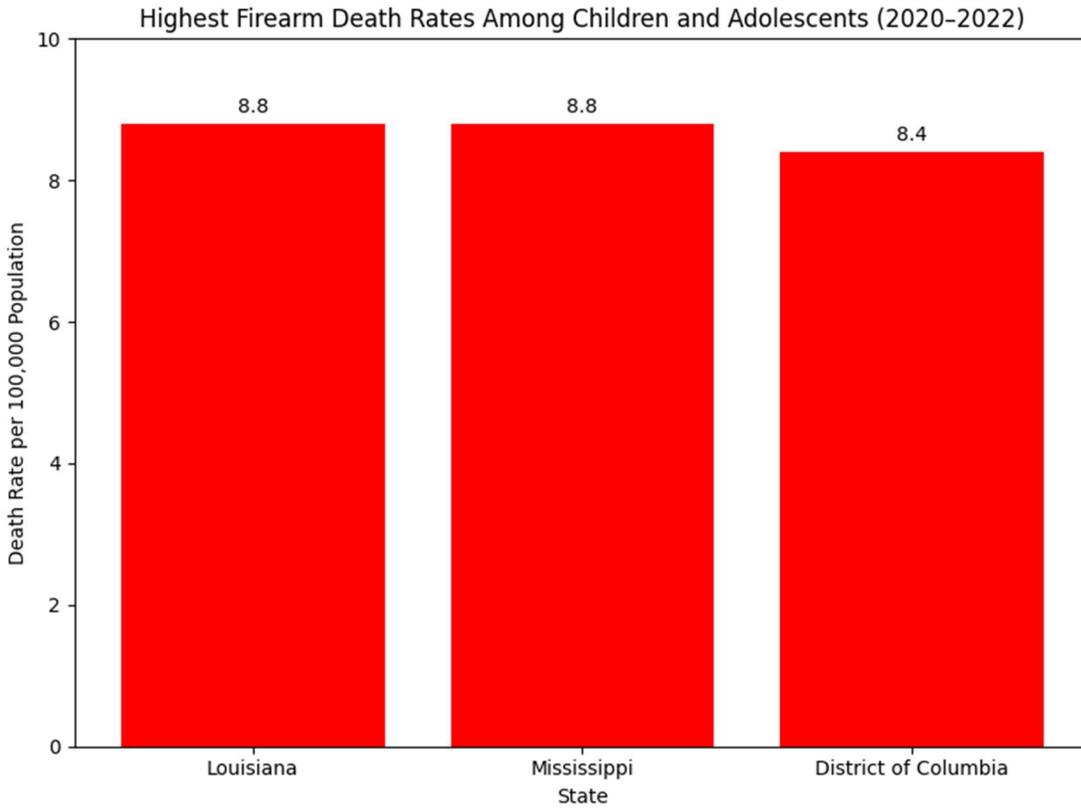
Lowest Firearm Death Rates Among Children and Adolescents (2020–2022)
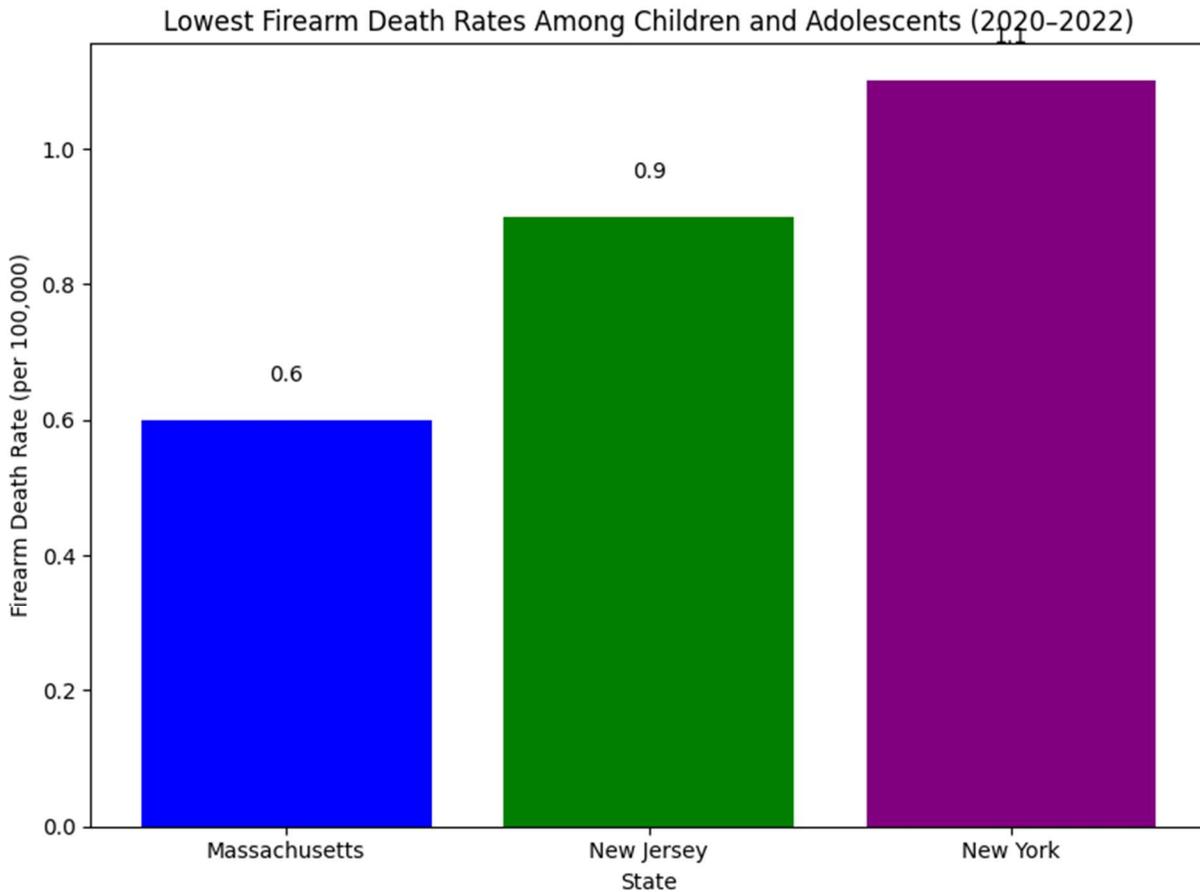
According to Panchal (2024), many children and adolescents are exposed to gun violence, even if they are not directly injured (Panchal, 2024). Data on exposure to gun violence among youth is generally limited. However, a recent analysis found that in 34% of unintentional and adolescent firearm deaths, at least one other child was present during the incident. Prior data from the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence found that 8% of children and adolescents were exposed to a shooting in their lifetime, with a higher share (13%) reported among adolescents (ages 14-17) (Panchal, 2024).

Gun control debates are deeply divided politically in the U.S., but beyond gun control, other approaches seek to reduce the impact of firearms on health (Panchal, 2024). Safe storage and child access prevention provisions have been linked to a reduction in adolescent firearm homicides and non-fatal gun injuries. Panchal (2024) states that gun violence can lead to increased mental health and substance use concerns. The recent

increase in child and adolescent firearm injuries and deaths comes at a time when worries about youth mental health have grown, but access to and utilization of mental health care may have worsened (Panchal, 2024).

In the United States, gun violence is a leading cause of death for youth and young adults. (David–Ferdon and Simon, 2014; OJJDP, 2014). According to the CDC, in 2020, firearms were the leading cause of death for children and teens (ages 1-19), surpassing motor vehicle accidents (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2021) Youth gun violence is when a gun or firearm is present in the process of youth (ages 10–24) intentionally using force or power to threaten or harm others or themselves (OJJDP, 2014). The firearm-related death rate among children and adolescents increased by 29.5% from 2019 to 2020 (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2021). Youths are victims of gun violence when they are injured or killed because of someone (a youth or an adult) intentionally using a gun to threaten or harm them (whether the youth victim was the intended target or not). (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2021). Globally, the prevalence varies significantly. High-income countries generally have lower rates of youth gun violence compared to low- and middle-income countries, but the US is an outlier among high-income nations. (David–Ferdon and Simon, 2014; OJJDP, 2014; Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2021). Graph 3 highlights the firearm deaths among children and adolescents between 2018 and 2023.

Graph 3: The firearm deaths among children and adolescents between 2018 and 2023.

Firearm Deaths Among Children and Adolescents (2018–2023)
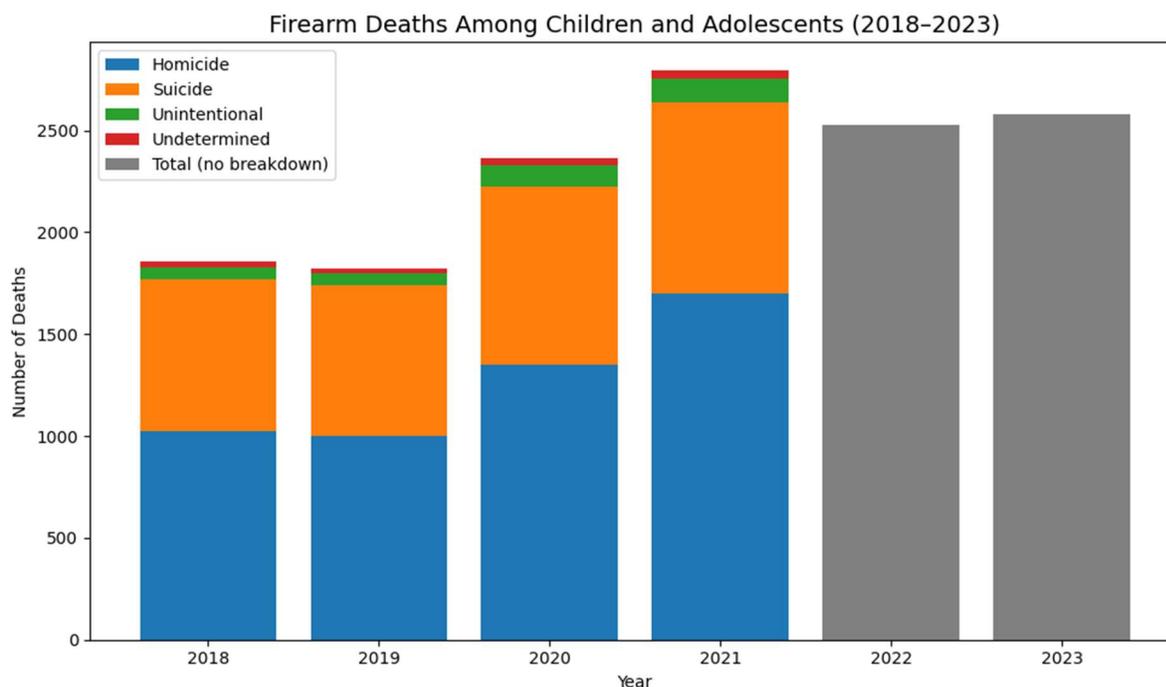
Gun violence includes homicides (victimization and perpetration), nonfatal injuries, suicides, community violence, and school violence/school shootings (OJJDP, 2014:14). Unintentional gun violence (including accidental injuries or deaths from guns) will not be explored. The scope of the problem of youth gun violence in the United States is reflected by the incidence and prevalence of gun-related homicides, suicides, and nonfatal injuries of youths (OJJDP, 2014:14). Urban areas typically experience higher rates of youth gun violence compared to rural areas. However, rural areas often have higher rates of gun ownership. Males are more likely to be both perpetrators and victims of gun violence compared to females, with some studies showing males are up to 6 times more likely to be involved in gun-related incidents (OJJDP, 2014:14).

Problem-oriented policing employs a systematic approach that involves identifying, analyzing, responding to, and evaluating problems, providing a framework to uncover the complex mechanisms underlying youth homicide (Braga et al., 2001). Connections between community violence and threats to healthy physical growth will ascend in importance as social workers pay closer attention to gun violence and community safety (Delgado, 2019). Firearm-related interpersonal violence is a health and public safety problem, and rates are

highest in urban populations (Wintemute GJ, Tancredi D, Pear VA, et al, 2024). An estimated 21% of American adults had experienced gun violence in the previous 5 years, either themselves or through a family member or close friend in mid-2022 (Wintemute GJ, Tancredi D, Pear VA, et al, 2024).

California's Armed and Prohibited Persons System (APPS) identifies legal purchasers of firearms who have become prohibited people and seek to recover all firearms and ammunition to which they have access (Wintemute GJ, Tancredi D, Pear VA, et al, 2024). Transitions to prohibited-person status include convictions for violent crimes, involuntary hospitalizations for acute mental illness associated with dangerousness to self or others, and domestic violence restraining orders (Wintemute GJ, Tancredi D, Pear VA, et al, 2024). Legal firearm purchasers in the United States retain their firearms after becoming prohibited persons, leaving gun access available to youth (Wintemute GJ, Tancredi D, Pear VA, et al, 2024).

As a result, public health professionals, advocates, and other stakeholders need to be aware of how their support for youth education can help to reproduce industry-favorable narratives about the effectiveness of education as a means of keeping children safe from harm, including firearm injuries (van Schalkwyk et al., 2025). Although youth facing everyday gun violence experience negative impacts on their health and well-being, they are also creating positive change for themselves and their communities. In underserved Black and Latinx communities experiencing high rates of gun violence, community members have led impactful efforts to reduce community violence (Delgado, 2019).

State-sanctioned violence involves police brutality and stop-and-frisk actions that many youths in marginalized communities experience as part of their childhood socialization and daily life (Delgado, 2019). State-sanctioned violence can be traced to the founding of our nation, and its evolution has ranged from low visibility to high-profile acts (Delgado, 2019). There are privacy policies that further exacerbate community-police relations and illustrate that those who fail to live in communities where they cannot make economic contributions to society will be left on the fringes of society and disconnected (Delgado, 2019). Minority youth who are unable to graduate from high school will also be relegated to the margins of society with increased likelihood of having a compromised future that includes incarceration and or premature death (Delgado, 2019).

In addition, youth in high-risk communities will not have the benefit of protective factors, and exposure to violence will be repetitive and ongoing. State-sanctioned violence within urban areas consists primarily of people of color and those who are marginalized and encompasses other forms of violence, such as environmental justice and how youths' lives are cut short through state indifference to their plight (Delgado, 2019).

The data available on the incidents of gun violence in the United States shows how greatly youths are affected. Available data can describe how many youths are involved in gun violence every year (either perpetrating, witnessing, or being a victim of gun violence). However, the numbers cannot explain why youth gun violence is so prevalent. One issue is the lack of research focused exclusively on the causes and consequences of youth gun violence. For instance, although research has examined the risk and protective factors related to youth violence in general, gun violence is usually not explicitly focused on, but rather grouped with other forms of violence, such as school or community violence. Some information is known about the risk factors related to youth gun violence perpetration (for example, exposure to violence and access to and availability of firearms are strong predictors of the occurrence of violence). Nevertheless, a great deal about the complexity of youth gun violence is still not known. Specific and well-defined research examining the prevalence and predictors of youth gun violence would help inform future policies and programs designed to reduce gun violence perpetration involving youth.

Some laws and policies that have been enacted at the federal and state levels are intended to reduce youths' access to guns. However, while these laws restrict gun access to those under certain age thresholds (18 in some cases, 21 in others), with few exceptions, the laws do not directly target youth behavior. As more information is gathered and analyzed, more informed policies can be developed to address the issue of youth gun violence effectively.

Moreover, many specific programs, using different approaches such as public health approaches and hot-spot policing, have been developed to target various forms of community-based violence, including youth gun violence. Several of these programs have been shown to reduce measures of violence; however, few

programs have been evaluated to determine the particular impact of specifically youth-centered gun violence (Fagan, 2002). One program that evaluated youth outcomes was Operation Ceasefire in Boston, which was found to decrease youth homicides and gun assaults. Nevertheless, further research is still needed in this area (Fagan, 2002).

Several authors, including Fagan (2002), have provided a historical perspective on youth gun violence, dating back to the 1980s and 1990s, and examined how law enforcement agencies across the United States have adopted strategies to combat youth gun violence (Mendel, 2025; Panchal et al., 2025; Fagan, 2002). An epidemic of youth gun violence in the United States from 1985 to 1998 triggered a crisis of social and political consequences that mobilized legal institutions to develop policies and programs targeting youth (Mendel, 2025; Panchal et al., 2025; Fagan, 2002).

Fagan's methodology examined eight case studies that illustrate different aspects of the intervention and its impact. Fagan defined intervention as a structured, intentional program, strategy, or set of practices aimed at modifying behavior or outcomes in a specific population, in this case, youth involved in or at risk of violence (2002). Fagan (2002) identified that youth homicides were concentrated among a small number of gang-involved youth. These individuals were responsible for a disproportionate amount of violence (2002). To combat violence, some cities focused on building cooperation between police and community members to address youth violence. This approach aimed to enhance police legitimacy and foster a positive image within the community (Mendel, 2025; Panchal et al., 2025; Fagan, 2002).

The use of gun trafficking analysis was adopted by some cities and revealed that many guns used in youth crimes were recently diverted from retail sources. Massachusetts partnered with out-of-state law enforcement agencies to target youth suspected of minor criminal activities. While this strategy contributed to a decline in youth gun violence, it sometimes led to perceptions of police being unfair and promoting racial bias in minority communities (Mendel, 2025; Panchal et al., 2025; Fagan, 2002).

An inter-agency collaboration was a working group formed with line-level representatives and representatives from several cities. The goal was to explore "soft" strategies, offering alternatives to arrest and

emphasizing problem-solving approaches. These methods aimed to change youth behavior without relying on punitive measures (Fagan, 2002). Some cities implemented a mix of the above strategies, balancing enforcement with community collaboration to shift social norms and reduce youth gun violence (Fagan, 2002). Reciprocal control was the first approach to reducing youth gun violence (Fagan, 2002). Cities that adopted reciprocal control to policing gun violence included Boston, Chicago, and San Diego. The goal is to reinforce the activities of police and community groups (Mendel, 2025; Panchal et al., 2025; Fagan, 2002). Another approach to reducing youth gun violence was punitive legal control (2002). The punitive approach focused on deterring gun violence through vigorous law enforcement and did not include citizens in the process (Fagan, 2002). Fagan's last four methods consisted of focused deterrence, a strategy that involved direct communication with gang members (Fagan, 2002). Community Engagement, where community leaders, clergy, and social service providers are delivering moral messages and offering support services to gang members (Fagan, 2002).

Strategic communication involved gang members being called into meetings, told that violence would not be tolerated (Fagan, 2002). Rapid response to violence, when a violent incident occurred, the working group would immediately respond with arrests, probation checks, and other enforcement actions (Fagan, 2002). Policing alone cannot contain lethal youth violence (Fagan, 2002). Police must incorporate procedural justice and moral legitimacy to make their efforts salient among youth and adults in communities burdened with gun violence (Fagan, 2002). Fagan's analysis suggests that no single approach conclusively reduced youth gun crime over the long term. However, a balanced strategy that combines enforcement with community engagement may help address the underlying social factors contributing to youth gun violence (Mendel, 2025; Panchal et al., 2025; Fagan, 2002).

According to Patton, McGregor, and Slutkin (2018), firearm violence is a public health problem in the United States, and the firearm death rate is higher than in other high-income, industrialized nations (Patton et al, 2018). Firearm violence is acute in large cities, and violence tends to cluster in marginalized communities of color. The city of Chicago experienced a 58% increase in homicides in 2016; 80% of those homicide victims were African American, and within that group, most were males between the ages of 15 and 34 with at least one

previous arrest (Patton et al., 2018). The public health impact resulting from gun violence has historically been operationalized by quantifying physical injuries and deaths resulting from gunshots (Bancalari et al., 2022). Further, Bancalari et al. (2022) identify that indirect exposure to community gun violence poses broad threats to youth development and wellbeing (2022).

There is a difference between direct exposure to gun violence and indirect exposure to gun violence. Direct gun violence exposure is defined as being threatened, injured, or killed with a firearm (Bancalari et al., 2022). Indirect exposure to community gun violence refers to witnessing gunfire or hearing gunshots in streets, parks, and schools, or having a friend who has been shot and being aware of gun violence in one's community (Bancalari et al., 2022). Being exposed to community gun violence is linked to distress, anxiety, depression, anger, withdrawal, post-traumatic stress, substance use, desensitization to violence, and academic difficulties (2022). Thus, indirect exposure to gun violence is highest among African American urban, male, and low-income adolescents (Bancalari et al., 2022). The methodology used by the authors consisted of urban youth ages 2 to 18 years old in the U.S., with attention given to populations placed at risk, including low-income African Americans and Latinx youth. Indirect gun violence was operationalized based on using existing literature and included seeing or hearing gunfire and knowing someone who has been shot or carries a gun (Bancalari et al., 2022).

Inclusion criteria included peer-reviewed articles and defined firearm assaults occurring in public spaces, among low-income children and adolescents aged 2 to 18 years old living in urban areas (Bancalari et al., 2022). The nature of community gun violence is such that a child does not need to be directly exposed to suffer its consequences. Instead, gun violence ripples across a child's ecosystem, through a diminished sense of safety, parental distress, and neighborhood disorder (Bancalari et al., 2022). In addition, urban preschoolers who handle parents' firearms in the home were correlated with more aggressive behavior, suggesting gun exposure may contribute to externalizing behaviors from a young age (2022). As well, urban youth are often exposed to many different forms of violence, with about 3 in 5 children experiencing either physical assault, sexual victimization, maltreatment, property victimization, or witnessing violence (Bancalari et al., 2022).

Thus, youth who are repeatedly exposed over long periods are prone to developing normative beliefs about community violence and subsequently, maladaptive cognitive frameworks and coping behaviors (Bancalari et al., 2022).

Awareness of gun violence in one's neighborhood is harmful, as youth are forced to cope with its looming threat constantly (Bancalari et al., 2022). Community gun violence disrupts cognitive, emotional, and social development and contributes to ongoing community violence. It is important to note that rural youth are also exposed to gun violence (Bancalari et al., 2022).

The Eddie Eagle Gun Safety program and its Eddie Eagle character were developed in 1988 by the National Rifle Association of America, in collaboration with reading and curriculum specialists, teachers, law enforcement, and psychologists, for children who are considered too young to handle firearms (NRA, 2025). A 2025 research study revealed that the United States experienced a sharp increase in firearm mortality among youth in recent years, with firearms becoming the leading cause of death for children and adolescents by 2020 (Panchal et al, 2025).

The Eddie Eagle agenda is to convey to youth gun accident prevention and to stay safe should they encounter an unattended gun. Youths are taught that guns are neither good nor bad based on a non-biased stance on the controversy (NRA, 2025). According to the NRA, the film-based program aims to educate children on how to respond if they find a firearm, and 26,000 schoolteachers and law enforcement officers have taught the Program to over 32 million children (NRA, 2025).

Education is an important avenue for teaching youth about gun safety; however, it needs to be reinforced by responsible parents who demonstrate concern for all safety issues surrounding their children (Panchal et al., 2025). The Eddie Eagle Gun-Safety program curriculum message includes four steps. Step 1: Stop! Step 2: Do not Touch! Step 3: Leave the Area! Step 4: Tell an Adult (nra.org).

The NRA uses several interrelated strategies to frame children's behavioral responses to firearms as the problem and the Eddie Eagle Gun Safe program as a logical, practical, and legitimate solution to keeping children safe from firearm injuries (NRA, 2025). There are critics of the Eddie Eagle Gun Safe Program. A 2004

Pediatrics study, for example, found the Eddie Eagle program to be less effective at changing behavior than a program based on behavioral skills training.

In Georgia, the average child death rate due to gun violence injuries between 2009 and 2013 was 12.5 (Youth Behavior Survey, 2013). In 2013, Bibb County Sheriff's Outreach Section began negotiations to adopt the Eddie Eagle Gun Safety Program. The program targeted students in Pre-K through 3rd grade in elementary schools to focus on gun accident intervention (bibbsheriff.us). The target population for the Eddie Eagle program was selected based on higher student enrollment numbers in Pre-K through 3rd grade compared to other grade levels (bibbcountyschools.us). Bibb County Sheriff's Outreach Section partnered with seven Bibb County Elementary schools to conduct the Eddie Eagle Gun Safety Program. The seven elementary schools are: Bernd Elementary, Martin Luther King Elementary, Veterans Elementary, Skyview Elementary, L.H. Williams Elementary, Ingram-Pye Elementary, and John R. Lewis Elementary.

The Bibb County Sheriff's Outreach Section has consistently worked within the Bibb County School system since 2014, implementing the Eddie Eagle program using the Eddie Eagle curriculum or wearing the Eddie Eagle mascot costume, as shown in the table below.

Ten-Year Eddie Eagle Enrollment and Intervention Rates in 7 Bibb County Public Schools
From 2014 to 2024 for grades P-K through 3

Schools	Years 2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Bernd	415 e 292 I	400 e 293 I	411 e 280 I	445 e 305 I	453 e 305 I	441 e 307 I	417 e 224 I	399 e 268 I	399 e 268 I	408 e 265 I	356e 250I
MLK	328 e 242 I	685 e 503 I	738 e 548 I	720 e 495 I	725 e 502I	656 e 465 I	581 e 402 I	607 e 423 I	607 e 423 I	639 e 389 I	675e 481I
*Barden **Veterans	390e 250 I	287 e 196 I	■	■	■	■	733 e 485 I	719 e 460 I	697 e 449 I	708 e 481 I	715e 490 I
Skyview	522 e 355 I	515 e 352 I	500 e 362 I	496 e 344 I	461 e 246I	448e 314 I	399 e 240 I	419 e 232 I	419 e 232 I	435 e 314 I	423e 298I
L.H. Williams	296 e 202 I	279 e 203 I	289 e 211 I	337 e 237 I	341 e 184 I	353 e 245 I	330 e 232 I	330 e 234 I	330 e 234 I	334 e 226 I	294e 201I
Ingram Pye	634 e 452 I	628 e 442 I	476 e 335 I	456 e 314 I	435 e 308 I	438 e 313 I	402 e 296 I	415 e 293 I	415 e 293 I	455 e 313 I	456e 312I
John R. Lewis***	409e 277 I	348 e 264 I	370 e 269 I	349 e 262 I	344 e 231 I	■	643 e 436 I	709 e 495 I	709 e 495 I	724 e 488 I	712e 481I

Scale: e=enrollment; I=intervention

*Barden opened in 2014- 2015, closed in 2016

**Veterans replaced Barden in 2020

Source: Georgia Department of Education for enrollment rates

https://app3.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte_pack_enrollgrade.entry_form

Bibb County Sheriff's Office for intervention rates from 2014 to 2024

maconbibb.us

***John Lewis Elementary School closed in 2019 when a new school was built.

Seven Bibb County Elementary schools use the Eddie Eagle Gun Safety program. Schools are visited monthly to implement the program. These are the numbers of the interventions that are used and inputted in 2025, as demonstrated in the chart below:

Elementary School	Total Enrollment	Pre-K	K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	Intervention
Bernd	408	29	69	58	47	62	265
MLK	639	30	83	73	87	83	356
Veterans	708	39	116	116	116	104	491
Skyview	435	23	64	59	76	62	309
L.H. Williams	306	23	42	54	55	52	226
Ingram Pye	455	42	75	79	75	75	346
John R. Lewis	724	53	101	105	107	149	515
TOTAL	3675	239	550	544	563	587	2508

Source: Bibb County Sheriff's Office and Bibbcountyschools.us

The 2025 chart is intended to illustrate the implementation of the Eddie Eagle Community-based Intervention Program in Bibb County schools. For example, 21% of Pre-K and Kindergarten students are directly exposed to the Eddie Eagle mascot. Next, 46% of first-, second, and 3rd-grade classes viewed the Eddie Eagle Program video. At the conclusion of the video, students participate in a question-and-answer session focused on guns and gun safety.

In summary, the Eddie Eagle community-based intervention program is an initiative carried out by the Bibb County Sheriff's Outreach Section in partnership with the Bibb County School System. The target group is

PreK-3rd-grade students. The Eddie Eagle program aims to decrease youth gun violence. Specifically, the mission of the Bibb County Sheriff's Outreach Section is to keep children safe through gun-related awareness and intervention measures. Youth gun violence is a leading cause of death among children aged 1-19 (Goldstick et al., 2022). The Eddie Eagle program, administered by the Bibb County Sheriff's office, aligns with Fagan's definition of intervention as a structured, intentional program, strategy, or set of practices aimed at modifying behavior or outcomes in a specific population, in this case, youth involved in or at risk of violence (2002).

The proposal used the Eddie Eagle community-based intervention program as the methodology and PreK-3rd-grade students as the variable. The methodology involved analyzing the Eddie Eagle program, its related materials, and practices as applied to schools in Bibb County. Data were collected from the Bibb County Sheriff's Outreach Section and the seven Bibb County schools where the Eddie Eagle program is implemented, as well as the intervention provided.

The data from 2014 to 2025 consistently captured the Bibb County Sheriff's Outreach Section, demonstrating its persistence in delivering the Eddie Eagle program within the specified time frame. The Bibb County schools repeatedly request that the Bibb County Sheriff's Outreach Section return to the classrooms each year. Despite the Eddie Eagle program, local programs face scrutiny over their actual behavior impacts. For example, the Bibb County Government Office maintains data on students completing the Eddie Eagle program. The data tracks students as victims or suspects of youth gun violence. From 2014 to 2022, only one student was a victim of gun violence, and 30 students were identified as suspects in gun-related youth violence (bibbcountygovernmentoffice.us).

Methodology

The methodology used for this paper will be based on the databases of the Bibb County Public School, the Bibb County Sheriff's Office, and the National Rifle Association (NRA) regarding youth gun violence. The methodology is based on an analysis of secondary data. The primary focus will address youth gun violence in local urban communities. The specific variable is the number of elementary students enrolled in Pre-K through 3rd grade. I have reviewed the community-based program known as the Eddie Eagle Program.

I used the Eddie Eagle Program curriculum, which teaches students gun safety through fun and simple steps. Animated videos, classroom activities, and take-home materials were used to help children remember the STOP! Message. Do not touch. Run Away. Tell a Grown-Up." In all the schools I serve, the Eddie Eagle GunSafe Program is taught in a straightforward and engaging manner. There is a classroom discussion with their homeroom teacher, or sometimes other officers from my unit assist me with the students, which begins with a brief talk for all grades about safety and what to do if they encounter a gun.

I wear the Eddie Eagle costume for PreK students. Activity Sheets and games are also used for students who enjoy coloring pages, puzzles, and interactive activities, as they help reinforce the message. Part of my intervention includes an activity where I bring a plastic gun to my classes to demonstrate the four safety steps: STOP! Do not touch. Run Away. Tell a Grown-Up.

The 3rd-grade students watch an animated Video, an 8-minute cartoon featuring Eddie Eagle and friends, which shows the four safety steps: STOP! Do not touch. Run Away. Tell a Grown-Up. Take-home materials are distributed to each student, a certificate, and a letter for parents, allowing families to continue the conversation at home. The Eddie Eagle program requires the support of parents. The entire lesson is delivered during one class period and is designed to feel like a safety game, instead of a lecture, and is short and fun. I have a very young audience; their attention span is very short. I use an agenda to remain on track. Below is how the agenda is used in the seven schools for the Eddie Eagle curriculum in Bibb County Schools, including the estimated duration for Each Step. Classroom Discussion: 5 minutes, Classroom Discussion: 5 minutes, Activity Sheets & Games: 10 minutes, and Take-Home Materials & Wrap-Up: 5 minutes, Total: Approximately 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

This report covers ten years of youth homicides committed in Macon, GA, from 2014 to 2025. Over the past ten years, 124 homicides have been committed. By 2020, the first group of students enrolled in the Eddie Eagle Gun Safety Program had progressed to the 6th grade. Former students of the Eddie Eagle Gun Safety Program had committed 33 homicides from 2019 to 2025 over five years. The success rate of the Eddie Eagle Program, administered by the Bibb County Sheriff's Outreach Section, is 73%, as evidenced by the Bibb County Homicide Data Report.

Bibb County Sheriff's Office Youth Homicides 2014 – 2025

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	TOTAL
Youth Homicides	2	9	4	4	10	9	9	13	16	18	20	10	**124**
Former Eddie Eagle Students involved in youth homicides	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	3	8	8	5	4	**33**

Source: Bibb County Sheriff's Office

In 2014, the Eddie Eagle Gun Safety program was introduced to the Bibb County Sheriff's Outreach Section (SOS). Data was gathered from the Bibb County Sheriff's Office. The above table illustrates the changes in homicides from 2014 to 2025. From 2014 to 2019, the chart demonstrates that students enrolled in the Bibb County Sheriff's Outreach Section (SOS) Eddie Eagle Gun Safety program did not experience or become victims of youth gun violence. Further, the chart highlights my direct contact with students in the Eddie Eagle Gun Safety Program, and my review of the Bibb County Youth homicide data captures how former students were impacted by youth gun violence. The methodology demonstrated that implementing the Eddie

Eagle Gun Safety program by the Bibb County Sheriff's Office in Bibb County Schools aligns with the premise provided by McLeod et al. (2023), which is that the current system does not serve its purpose of reducing future criminal behavior (McLeod et al., 2023).

Conclusion

Exposure to violence can occur at home, school, peer groups, and community (Guo et al., 2024). The violence encompasses a range of incidents, from more prevalent, less severe acts, such as fighting, to less prevalent, more serious acts such as shootings (Guo et al., 2024). High exposure to gun violence among urban youth in low-income urban communities are frequently exposed to both direct and indirect gun violence (Guo et al., 2024). This includes witnessing shootings, knowing victims, or experiencing gun-related trauma themselves. Such exposure is linked to increased risks of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues. (Bancalaril et al., 2022). Structural inequities as root causes of socioeconomic disparities, racial segregation, underfunded schools, and limited access to mental health services are expected to emerge as key structural drivers of youth gun violence. (Herrin et al., 2018).

Normalization of violence and retaliation in communities with persistent violence, youth may develop attitudes that normalize gun use and retribution. These attitudes are reinforced by peer influence, media portrayals, and lack of trust in law enforcement (Milam et al., 2018). The effectiveness of community-based intervention programs like *Cure Violence* and *Safe Streets* is likely to show promise in reducing shootings and changing community norms when implemented with fidelity and community buy-in. (Milam et al., 2018). The need for multidimensional approaches, such as the complexity of youth gun violence, suggests that single-strategy interventions are insufficient. Effective solutions will likely require integrated approaches that involve education, mental health, economic opportunities, and community engagement (Ervin et al., 2018). Accessing existing programs will help children cope with witnessing firearm violence. School-based programs that include social-emotional learning have been shown to reduce the adverse effects of children's exposure to gun violence (Urban, 2024).

Gun violence death rates among children and adolescents increased 46% from 2019 to 2021 (Panchal et al., 2025). From 2021 to 2023, the firearm death rate has held steady at 3.5 per 100,000 children and adolescents (Panchal et al., 2025). The increase in gun deaths during the pandemic is most pronounced among Black and Latino youth, among whom gun assaults also account for many firearm deaths (Panchal et al., 2025). Youth violence in the United States is a contributing factor in firearms-related injuries becoming the number one cause of death among all children and adolescents in 2020. Gun violence costs this country billions of dollars annually and leads to a myriad of harmful individual, interpersonal, and community outcomes. (Campie et al., 2020).

Youths can be involved with violence as victims, as witnesses/bystanders, or as persons engaging in the violence (David–Ferdon et al., 2014; OJJDP, 2014). There is evidence linking firearm access and youth violence, resulting in informed gun control legislation (OJJDP, 2024). Child Access Prevention (CAP) refers to laws and measures designed to keep children from accessing firearms (McClenathan et al., 2018). These laws hold adults criminally liable if a child gains access to an unsecured firearm, aiming to reduce unintentional injuries, suicides, and violence among youth (McClenathan et al., 2018). Effective CAP practices include storing unloaded and locked firearms, often using trigger locks or gun safes, and can be reinforced by state laws mandating such secure storage (McClenathan et al., 2018). CAP laws are an example of laws specifically focused on preventing youths from accessing guns (McClenathan et al., 2018). Investment in community-based programs shows that policies should prioritize funding for proven violence interruption models, such as *Cure Violence*, *Safe Streets*, and *Ceasefire*, which have demonstrated reductions in shootings and homicides in cities like Baltimore, Chicago, and Oakland (Ervin et al., 2018).

Trauma-informed education and mental health services in schools in high-violence areas should receive resources to implement trauma-informed practices, counseling services, and restorative justice programs to support affected youth (Matei et al., 2022). However, as of January 1, 2024, only eight states and the District of Columbia (DC) require safety training before purchasing or carrying a firearm, and the curricula, instructor training, and passing requirements for the training courses differ by state (DeMello et al., 2025).

Cross-sector collaboration with policymakers should encourage partnerships between law enforcement, public health agencies, schools, and community organizations to create comprehensive violence prevention strategies (Matei et al., 2022). Working with educators through the Violence Reduction Partnership, the initial community outreach component involved visiting local middle and high schools to explain the costs of gun violence and promote legitimate, upcoming summer activities and resources (Braga, 2019).

Data-driven decision-making in local governments should prioritize investing in data collection and evaluation systems to monitor the effectiveness of interventions and adapt strategies based on real-time evidence (Matei et al., 2022). Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicate that youths who had been in a physical fight were more likely than youths who had not been in a physical fight to carry a gun (Simon et al., 2022). Having data available demonstrates that interventions are either effective in reducing violence or require improvement (Matei et al., 2022). Many intervention programs relied on police data related to shootings and homicides to map their local violence and for understanding the local dynamics of violence and measuring their interventions' outcomes and impact that will benefit youth (Ervin et al., 2018).

For example, the Eddie Eagle Gun Safety program and its Eddie Eagle character were developed in 1988 by the National Rifle Association of America, in collaboration with reading and curriculum specialists, teachers, law enforcement, and psychologists, for children who are considered too young to handle firearms (NRA, 2025). A 2025 research study revealed that the United States experienced a sharp increase in firearm mortality among youth in recent years, with firearms becoming the leading cause of death for children and adolescents by 2020 (Panchal et al, 2025). The Eddie Eagle agenda is to convey to youth gun accident prevention and to stay safe should they encounter an unattended gun. Youths are taught that guns are neither good nor bad based on a non-biased stance on the controversy (NRA, 2025).

In summarizing my efforts in the proposal, my goal was to identify a critical issue, which is gun violence and its impact on young people, particularly young African American youth in urban areas. Gun violence remains one of the most pressing public health and safety challenges facing our communities. Each year, tens of thousands of lives are lost to gun violence, with countless more forever changed by non-fatal

injuries and the lasting trauma inflicted on families and neighborhoods. By examining the 1980s, it is evident that youth gun violence did not happen overnight. It is the epidemic of youth gun violence in the United States.

According to one author (Fagen, 2002), the crisis, which dates to 1985, triggered a series of social and political consequences that mobilized legal institutions to develop effective policies and programs targeting youth violence (Fagen, 2002). In the 21st century, many youth programs were cut due to governmental changes and new administrations. Community policing in some states does not exist; most states and counties' law enforcement have dropped the ideal of communication with the community.

CompStat is a performance management system used in law enforcement to reduce crime and improve police department performance by focusing on data-driven problem-solving and accountability (OJJDP, 2013). I am familiar with CompStat from my experience in law enforcement. Using CompStat seems to be the new way to approach youth gun violence. Part of the reason we cannot connect with our youth under CompStat is our failure to be initiative-taking. As law enforcement officers, we often sit in our cars and watch the show instead of connecting with the youth in our community, who we know are experiencing problems.

As I was researching the current proposal, I aimed to gather as much information as possible about young adults in urban communities. Several authors mentioned the city of Chicago. One study quoted, "In 2017, Chicago experienced more homicides than New York City and Los Angeles combined, and many of these deaths came at the hands of gun violence. Chicago had 3,475 shooting victims in 2017" (Robertson, 2018). However, I realized I was better equipped to research youth and gun violence because I work directly with students in elementary schools. Thus, the Eddie Eagle program, which focuses on gun safety education for children and firearm intervention design, was a wise policy decision for the Bibb County Sheriff's Outreach Section. I am determined that future research should explore this further, starting with a title that addresses specific issues. For example, changing the title to "Youth Gun Violence in Chicago, IL, and Macon, GA: Urban Community." I believe this approach will enable me to examine specific urban areas. Finally, as I developed my final proposal and proceeded, I considered my research question.

The future research question should be, *what juvenile gun control policies have Chicago, Illinois, and Macon, Georgia, implemented to improve the juvenile justice system, and how have these policies contributed to improving public safety?* These two cities are relevant to me because I have worked with law enforcement in Chicago, where I assisted in implementing ShotSpotter, a gunshot detection technology, across the USA. It uses acoustic listening devices to identify the locations of discharged firearms (Doucette et al., 2021).

Second, I am the Youth Prevention Officer in Bibb County. Thus, I have direct access to urban youth in Macon, Georgia. Further, Macon has a high per capita rate of youth gun violence for a small city whose rate of youth violence competes with larger cities. As we continue to use the Eddie Eagle program, more critical scrutiny is needed to inform other intervention sectors. Specific and well-defined research examining the prevalence and predictors of youth gun violence would help inform future policies and programs designed to reduce gun violence perpetration involving youth.

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