

The Effects of Gun Violence

Editor's Note: This essay by Dante Rodriguez, 16, won first prize in a \$500 essay contest sponsored by the Connecticut Collaborative for Education Against Gun Violence. C.C.E.A.G.V. can be reached at P.O. Box 523, Southport, CT 06890 or by phone at (203) 268-3050

By Dante Rodriguez

Gun violence is one of the leading causes of death in America for kids ages 10 to 19. Two thirds of all murders that occur are directly connected to gun violence.

Statistics show that 60% of all teen suicides have been committed with the use of a gun. Guns have been an easy way out for many people suffering with mental problems and also physical ones.

I am a resident of Hartford, Connecticut, and have seen many acts of gun violence and the effects of gun violence that occur as a result of arguments and or fights.

I have been on the receiving end of gun violence because I was once taken by surprise in a back alley and found myself staring down the barrel of a Glock 45. I was robbed of all my jewelry, money and other small items that I had on me that night just because I was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

On July 4th last year, in the North end, a young girl named Takira Gaston, an innocent bystander, was struck by a stray bullet which entered her cheek and ripped through her other cheek. This was the result of an argument over drug turf. Some people feel the only way to get what they want and succeed in life is to take it by force.

I have known people who have been the victims of gun violence, including my uncle who was shot because he was mistaken for someone else. He was left with a bullet lodged in his brain that remains there to this day. He underwent a large amount of emotional stress during this period in his life. He struggled with many internal conflicts which I can't describe. He was left with the question many people ask themselves, "Why me?"

Though he did not suffer any permanent physical damage, he was left with a mental scar that will never heal.

Gun violence not only affects the person who is injured but also the parents who may have to identify their child's body, the children who may have to go on without a par-

ent for the rest of their lives, or the children who may have no chance to experience the joys of life. Gun violence will always torment people.

Young children who are affected by gun violence may grow up thinking that this is a normal way of life. Youth in the urban areas of Hartford have been subjected to gun violence in a big way. Not only are they affected by their peers but are also influenced by the glorification of guns in the media. This has been the cause of 12 deaths among Hartford teens this year.

Guns are a cowardly way of ending problems that may be internal or external. People do not think about the consequences that come along with the use of guns until they must face the death of a family member or a loved one. Many crimes have been committed out of pure ignorance or hatred for something that these people could not understand.

When are we going to put our feet down and really start cracking down on gun-related crimes?

There have been many deaths that go on and do not get investigated. Do you really want to live in fear of being a victim of gun violence? If not, what can we do?

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Andrea Casey of West Haven won first prize in the art division sponsored by C.C.E.A.G.V.