

What are the causes of youth violence?

In my city high violence among kids is N-O-R-M-A-L. "Hitting licks", "bussing plays" and "cracking cards are part of the conversations I hear daily. Looking up to the "Kia Boys," pulling up, and catching b's is cool while biting cheese or snitching is against all the rules. I'm from Chicago where a kid like me has to move very carefully. I believe family background, social media, and drugs are the greatest contributing factors to the crime among kids in Chicago.

Family background is the greatest contributor to youth violence. I hate to say it, but some adults are not fit for kids. The lack of role models is a huge problem. Too often families encourage violence, for example at my school parents are always telling teachers that their kids are to "fight." Parents strongly believe in teaching kids to "hit back" instead of "tell the teacher." These attitudes from home help promote bullying, which typically turn into violent acts. Bullying is not just hitting or being malicious, it's also the breaking down of character, mental abuse, and physical abuse. People I see getting bullied are the ones who don't fit the norm, people who are overweight, insecure, and people facing traumatic experiences. These are the people who are picked on, and the ones who usually commit the most violent acts. Livescience.com suggests that "bullied kids are more likely to commit crimes" landing them in prison as adults. Remember the Texas shooting, hurt people, hurt people. Sandy Hook and others are violent acts that took place because of bullying that led to deadly crimes. Some parents are just very bad influences on their children. Children see their parents' negative behavior and act based upon that. Some children want to impress their parents so they will do anything to receive their love and praise even if it isn't right.

Social media has the biggest influences on kids. Social media is very fun. You can post cute videos of yourself, advertise your brand, do fun dances, and so much more. But it also has very negative effects that many children unfortunately get influenced by. Many kids listen, follow and try to model artists that proudly state that they kill other people, especially in my city. I've seen so many kids my age and younger showing off guns on live. Social media is also the biggest platform to promote fights that also leads to some form of bullying. Peer pressure, fitting in and trying to look cool is all that is seen on my Instagram stream - along with violence, drugs, and alcohol. Drugs, that's a whole nother beast. Now that we are on the topic of weed let's really begin to speak. Weed is a drug that comes from the marijuana plant. B-U-T this plant has so many different names it's hard to keep up. Some call it stankin', I call it the devil's lettuce. It seems like almost every kid I know is playing with this drug and more. I come from a place where edibles, percocets, xanax, and popping pills is a thing, a very real thing. Now the effects these drugs have on kids are literally insane. These kids do drugs, get high, and literally think they are superman. I believe the usage of these drugs is one of the main reasons there is so much violence today. The effects the drugs have on their minds is sad and lead to the horrible and sad mistakes that are continually made.

Speaking directly to the adults, please stop and think, are you part of the problem or the solution when it comes to violence and youth? It is important to understand that not all children are the root of the problem, but a product of their environments.

#### References

<https://www.livescience.com/38612-childhood-bullying-criminal-delinquency.html>

Violence makes me think twice about enjoying myself at large events and about making sure my family knows that I love them. When I am at a large event such as a school game or concert, I am always looking for the exits and making sure I am aware of my surrounding, instead of just enjoying the festivities. It is really a strange state of mind to be in because instead of just enjoying the moment, you are instead wondering if this will be your last moment to ever see your beloved family members. I used to always hear people talk about not taking your loved one for granted and I never understood what that meant. But when I hear on the news about school shootings, concert shootings, grocery store shootings and even shootings that have occurred in churches, I understand what is meant by that statement.

As a resident of the Englewood neighborhood in Chicago, it is often assumed that all young people want to do is get high and commit violence. Historically is mostly inhabited by African Americans. Many African Americans moved to the Englewood area from the South. They were looking for a better life and better paying jobs. Englewood is where many celebrities have lived, for example, Jennifer Hudson, Bernie Mac and even rappers like Lil Dirk. Therefore, we know that there are many good things and good people that have come from Englewood. Unfortunately, many critics believe that the violence that we experience in Englewood is because the 'people' don't want to do any better for themselves. I know that this is not true. We do want to live in a calm, clean community. It is presumed that we don't have dreams for the future. It is implied that this is just a part of our chaotic life, but this is far from the truth. Many of us live in

loving families and have high expectations for our futures. We want to learn to be productive people and experience all that life has to offer us. We are not excited about the chaos and terror of harming others. We are a loving community that desires our light to shine in this current sea of darkness.

Just thinking about that makes me angry, weary and sad. One way I deal with it all is writing poetry to express myself. When I found out that one of my former classmates had recently been shot, I immediately wrote this poem in my journal.

“It’s crazy you need violence just to feel good about yourself!

What happened to all the loved ones that you could have talked to if you needed help!

It’s crazy that your family ain’t there when you really need help!

I am screaming at the top of my lungs, “I need help!!!!”

I just don’t understand why it has to be this way, Lord please help us.”

I wrote this with tears streaming down my face for myself, loved ones and for young people everywhere. There is so much anger that gets expressed through violence. Sometimes the anger is directed to people that the perpetrators of the violence don’t even know.

Even if you try to live a quiet life and stay to yourself, you still can’t escape the violence because we are reminded everyday just how easily someone can take any person’s life over something as trivial as not liking how you look or respond to them. It is especially difficult being a young woman because many times you are just trying to navigate being a female, and not even sure of how to do that. Then here comes the added responsibility of worrying about someone being so upset with you if you refuse their advances, that they actually decide to pull a

gun on you. I wonder sometimes why guns were even invented! And it doesn't seem like the government can do anything to deter people from wanting own guns. Even though it has been proven time and time again that gun ownership does not keep you safe it actually can result in an accidental shooting. Why do people feel that a moment of individual anger or frustration should lead to a lifetime of misery? The person who was the victim has their life shortened, their family is devastated and I believe even the perpetrator's life is now ruined because of a momentary misjudgment. Again, it can lead to misplaced anger and despair.

So what can we do to prevent violence? Prevention is never reactionary. We have to start showing students ways that they can express themselves in positive ways, as early as preschool. They have to be reminded that they have great minds and great futures. They don't have to be jealous or angry with anyone. We have to start showing mutual respect in the school community through the staff-teachers-students-parent relationships. We have to remind all parties that we all have one goal in mind and that is making sure that everyone is safe and respected. We have to get the social workers and mental health workers in the schools and neighborhoods. I don't believe that police officers should be removed from schools, but, I do believe that police officers need more training in crisis intervention and how to deescalate situations.

But none of this will work until we take time to talk to each other. We need to know what people really want and need. We need ex-offenders who have turned their lives around to be a part of helping these conversations take place.

Finally, we need our city government to be present and listen to the needs of the citizens of this great city. Englewood needs to get out there and vote so we can demand that our tax money get spent correctly. We need to understand that violence does indeed affect ALL of us not just Englewood.