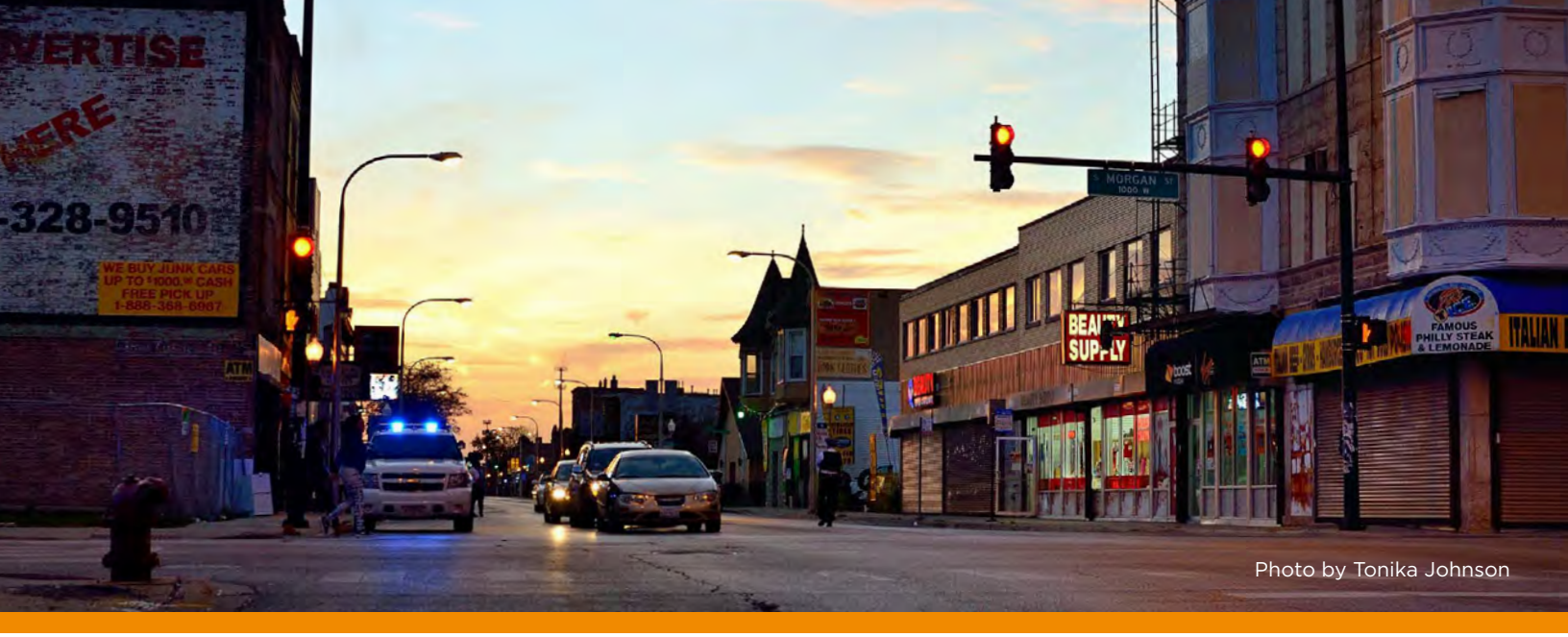


Photo by Tonika Johnson

POLICING, VIOLENCE, AND (IN)JUSTICE

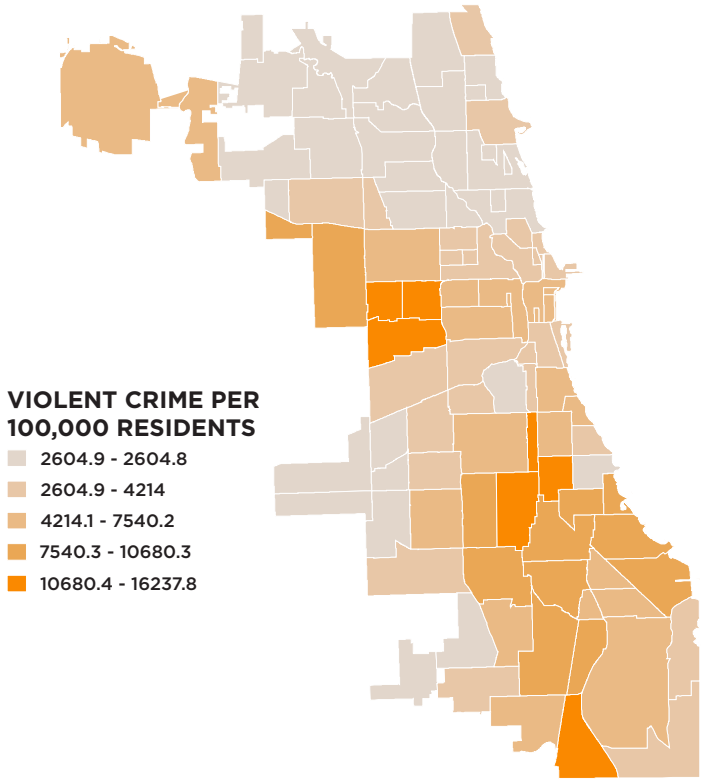
David J. Knight

Perhaps more than any other large city in the nation, Chicago is defined by vastly uneven levels of exposure to aggressive policing and violence. These two issues disproportionately affect the lives of African Americans in the city. For example, although African Americans constitute roughly 30% of the population of Chicago, over 70% of the individuals stopped by Chicago police in 2016 were African American.[132] This is a far greater proportion of African Americans being stopped by the police than in New York City, which recently made national news for its discriminatory stop-and-frisk practices.[133] In their investigation of the Chicago Police Department (CPD), the U.S. Department of Justice suggests that the CPD's practice of disproportionately stopping black people is related to its tactical approach to proactive policing, which prizes "aggression, hustle, and effort" yet leads to the unfair pursuit and criminalization of black and brown young people.[134] According to the Justice Department, these disparate interactions and systemic deficiencies lead to the harms of unreasonable and excessive force.[135] Thus, where Chicagoans live and their racial and/or ethnic identity significantly determines if and how they will interact with the police.

Violence, which tends to arise in contexts of poverty and structural disadvantage,[136] also varies considerably by neighborhood in Chicago. As **Figure 1** shows, many of the predominately white neighborhoods on the North Side experience rates of violent crime below Chicago's average of 4,491 per 100,000 residents.[137] The vast majority of black and Latinx areas on the West and South Sides, however, are exposed to higher rates of violent crime—sometimes much higher. At 10,134 per 100,000 residents, Englewood experiences

twice the rate of violent crime compared to the city's average **(see Table 1)**. This disparity matters tremendously because it affects community wellbeing, children's capacity to learn, social ties, mental health outcomes, and more.[138] It also correlates with other health-related outcomes such as life expectancy **(see Table 1)**. In effect, this uneven geography of violence deeply shapes social and political life among Chicagoans. These inequities in policing and exposure to violence are also reflected in our interviews with young adults across different Chicago neighborhoods.

FIGURE 1: VIOLENT CRIME PER 100,000 RESIDENTS ACROSS COMMUNITY AREAS R



"Show Us We Can Trust Them": Policing in the City

Unresponsiveness and Failure to Serve

For as much as charges of corruption and excessive force plague the Chicago Police Department, the most consistent evaluation made by young adults in our study was that the police are unresponsive and neglectful, and thus fail to fulfill their duties to serve and protect. In every racial/ethnic group, young adults told personal stories of police officers arriving late to scenes of assault, theft, and domestic violence, or otherwise responding inappropriately or insufficiently to emergencies. Despite the pervasiveness of this complaint, important racial and ethnic disparities also existed among young adults' reports of the police's failure to provide adequate and timely service. In our study, African Americans reported significantly higher levels of police unresponsiveness than other racial/ethnic groups. Roughly 1 in 3 young African Americans we interviewed reported that the police responded slowly or inadequately in their neighborhoods and in their own personal experiences **(see Figure 3)**. Among young Latinxs, about 1 in 6 reported that police failed to address emergencies in a timely or appropriate manner, compared to around 1 in 10 young Asian Americans and young whites. While these numbers are neither representative of all neighborhoods nor of all young adults in the city, they reveal an important racial disparity in how young adults perceive the police.

TABLE 1: VIOLENT CRIME AND HEALTH OUTCOMES BY NEIGHBORHOOD [S]

	Violent crime (per 100,000 pop., 2016)	Firearm-related homicides (per 100,000 pop., 2011 - 2015)	Injury deaths (per 100,000 pop., 2011 - 2015)	Infant mortality (per 1000 live births, 2011 - 2015)	Life expectancy (2016)
Albany Park	2260.3	3.9	34.6	6.1	79
Bridgeport	2282.9	4.2	41.2	4.9	79
Chinatown	3629.3	2.6	19.9	6.1	80
Englewood	10133.8	41.8	104.8	15.5	71
West Englewood	10133.8	46.9	99.4	15	68
West Town	3057.1	4.2	41.2	4.6	80
Lake View	2135.3	0.2	24.9	3.6	81
Lincoln Park	1531.6	0.4	25.3	3.4	81
Near North Side	3747.3	2.8	35.3	5.1	83
Pilsen	3212.3	6.1	50.9	6.9	78
City of Chicago	4491.1	13.7	55.5	7.9	77

However, this is not to say that young adults wanted a greater police presence in their neighborhoods.[139] To the contrary, large numbers of young adults reported that, when they do feel compelled to call the police for help, the police fall short in their fundamental duties. Numerous young adults described calling the police, only to find that their emergency—a missing person, a robbery, a car accident—does not reach the level of concern that merits the police department's immediate attention. Ana, a 28-year-old Latina from Pilsen, recalled, "*Just last weekend around 2:00 in the morning they were shooting right across the street. It sounded like they were right next to us, it was so loud. I'm like, this is really scary. I have my children at home; what if a bullet comes, and it kills one of them? … But either the 911 keeps ringing or they never return the call, or they don't pick up. … They came hours later. It happened at 2:00 in the morning, they came close to 12:00 p.m.*" Stories like this were repeated in Pilsen, Chinatown-Bridgeport, and Englewood **(see Figure 2)**.

Many young adults also stated that they believe the police need more training in handling race and cultural differences as well as family and community conflict. Several young women underscored that police officers' slow response rate and lack of training are particularly harmful to those facing domestic abuse. Jada, a black woman, aged 22, in Englewood, described such an experience: "*I had an issue with my son—I was in an abusive relationship. I called the cops five times to remove [my son's father] from my house, and instead of taking him out, they flipped to make it seem like I was the bad person. I literally just got hit, and the police did not say nothing about that.*" Stories of police neglect, insensitivity, and inappropriate response, particularly to domestic violence,

were echoed by a number of other young women in Englewood and across other Chicago neighborhoods.

Who Do You Call When You Need Help?

While a great deal of the young adults we interviewed said that the police respond insufficiently or inappropriately when called, these reports should not be interpreted as a demand for increasing the size or strength of the city police department. Instead, numerous young adults we interviewed, especially youth of color, were skeptical of the police but felt they had no other options when in trouble.

A considerable number of young adults, across race and ethnicity, stated that calling the police was undesirable, as they associated police involvement with its own set of risks. For example, Camila, a 24-year-old Latina in Pilsen, put it plainly: "*It has to be some crazy sh—t [to make me call the police]. Like, there's someone swinging a machete around here and someone has a cut arm. Even then I'm pretty sure somebody [other than the police] can stop them. I don't know. I just think cops are so dramatic. I don't want anybody [to end up] with a record when there's actually hope of them being rehabilitated*." These views were reflected in the large proportions of young adults across race, ethnicity, and place who stated that they would only call the police in situations where they had no other option **(see Figure 5)**. A notably large number of African Americans and

FIGURE 2: REPORTS OF POLICE UNRESPONSIVENESS AND CORRUPTION

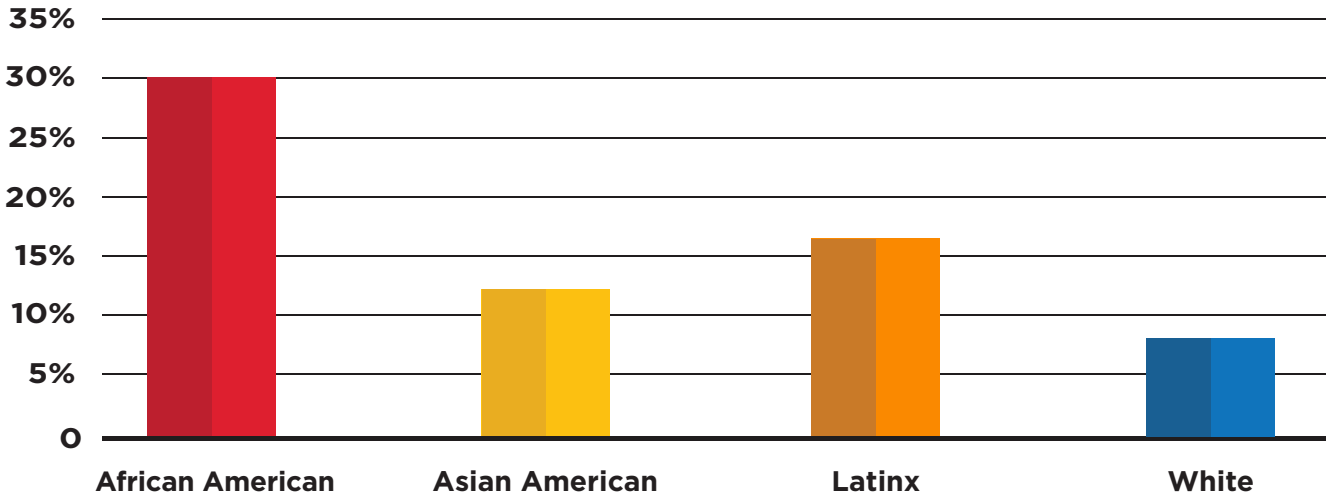
"My mom got jumped and her purse got robbed. We reported it to the police, but they didn't even try to find it or try to find who did it. They didn't even question the neighborhood, which kind of felt really offen[sive] because we're citizens, too."
—Amy, age 18, Asian American woman, Chinatown-Bridgeport

"They [Police] take their time. They take their time if something happens, like a murder; they'll take their time coming, or like I said, they the ones doing the killing. I've witnessed it; police bringing [black people] to someone else's block and letting them fight. I witnessed it."
—Jasmine, age 24, African American woman, Englewood

"I've seen a female get beat. A guy was beating her for probably 30 minutes. No policemen came. … [Also] that little boy got killed. There's no way you can tell me, 9 shots go off, y'all [police are] patrolling this area [and] nobody was there to help save this little boy's life, so hell no they [the police] don't respond. Police officers wait till the shots are over with."
—Kevin, age 22, African American male, Englewood

Asian Americans said "Depends/If I had no other option" when asked if they would call the police in a troubling situation. Importantly, around 1 in 5 African American young adults and 1 in 9 young Latinxs with whom we spoke—largely in Englewood

FIGURE 3: REPORTED POLICE UNRESPONSIVENESS AND NEGLECT BY RACE AND ETHNICITY



and Pilsen, respectively—said they would *not* call the police if they were in trouble. This is an important observation because it suggests that subsets of black and Latinx young adults in these neighborhoods neither trust the police nor see it as an institution that could make them safer even in the face of peril. But these young adults' concerns about calling the police, and choice not to do so, should serve as a catalyst for thinking about alternative ways of achieving safety and justice beyond policing and law enforcement.

Police officers are often the first responders when people need help, are in trouble, or face violence from others. However, several young adults who we interviewed struggled with this fact, stating explicitly that they did not know who else to call when they were in danger. As demonstrated in **Figure 4**, young adults across neighborhoods, gender, and race/ethnicity said that they thought the police were their final or only option in the face of danger or distress. Young adults repeated: "Who else is going to come help me?" "Who else would I call?" "What else am I gonna do?" On one hand, these questions reflect young people's sense that they have limited resources when it comes to protecting themselves. But these questions, coupled with young adults' profound critiques of the police, suggest that a lot of them are open to an alternative option to calling the police when they need help—an alternative set of institutions and support systems that could serve as first responders when trouble arises. Recognition of this point is crucial, because it pushes policymakers, activists, advocates, and community members to question the purpose of policing and to reimagine what resources, stakeholders, and approaches are needed to achieve justice, safety, and wellbeing in our communities.

One City, Two Realities

In addition to general concerns about the unresponsiveness of police, young adults also reported differences in police treatment by race and ethnicity. Respondents from South and West Side neighborhoods repeatedly described the police as a corrupt institution that particularly targets and exerts power over those perceived to be black, Latinx, Muslim, or of Arab descent. On the North Side, however, respondents painted a picture of the police as an imperfect but helpful resource in the community. For example, most white young adults we interviewed described a gap between their own, typically "good," "privileged," and respectful interactions with police and what they learn in the news about police harassment and brutality, largely against African Americans and Latinx individuals.

Of all the young adults we interviewed, African Americans in Englewood reported the most frequent levels of police harassment and the harshest experiences of police treatment. A common story emerges from the experiences of these young African Americans: Young black men and women are regularly profiled, stopped, and frisked by police. A considerable number of these young men and women recounted experiences of mistaken identity in which police detain, pin down, and handcuff them before determining that they are "clean." Gabriel, a 23-year-old young black man from Englewood, summarized the

FIGURE 4: YOUNG ADULT REPORTS ABOUT WHY THEY WOULD CALL THE POLICE IF IN TROUBLE

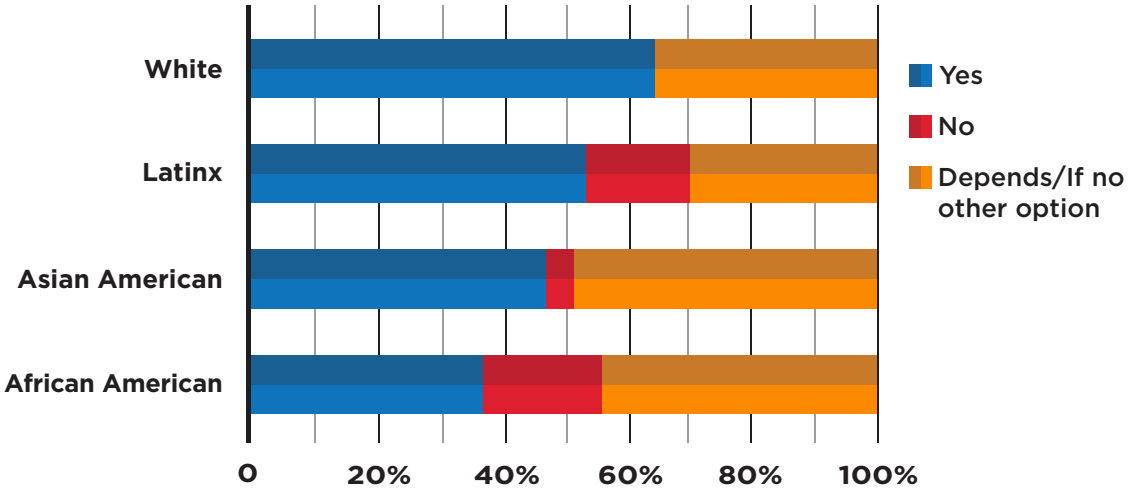
Interviewer: If you were currently in trouble and needed help, would you call the police?
Nicole: Yeah. I know there's a lot of negative [opinions] toward them, but if I don't call them, whom am I going to call? Who is going to come help me?
—Nicole, age 22, Latina, Albany Park

Interviewer: If you were ever in trouble or needed help, do you feel comfortable calling the police?
Peter: Yeah, because I think that's the only option. No one else in my family knows a better option besides calling the police when I'm in trouble. They don't know what to do, so I think the police is the best option I can get.
—Peter, age 20, Asian American man, Chinatown-Bridgeport

Interviewer: If you were in trouble or needed help, would you call the police?
Henry: Yeah, who else would I call? It depends on the situation, but for the most part, I'd call the police. There's nobody else to call.
—Henry, age 18, African American man, Englewood

Interviewer: Would you call the police if you felt that you were in trouble?
Yolanda: Yes, I would. That's because what else am I gonna do? I can't do nothing myself. If it was that big of a deal, I would have to call the police, hoping that they would do something.
—Yolanda, age 18, African American woman, Englewood

FIGURE 5: "WOULD YOU CALL THE POLICE IF YOU WERE IN TROUBLE?" RESPONSES BY RACE AND ETHNICITY



sentiments shared by many: "*You can just be black in Chicago and police most likely will be threatened by you*." These intense levels of racial profiling and harassment are also likely to make young black people more vulnerable to arrest. Survey evidence from the Sinai Community Health Survey, which finds that black people in Englewood experience high rates of arrest, supports what our interview respondents told us. Their data indicate that over half of black men and one-fourth of black women in West Englewood have ever been arrested.[140]

The reports in our study, especially among young black men, reveal that police officers often initiate contact with them through interrogation: asking these young black men if they committed an alleged crime or have drugs on them. During these encounters, police often physically apprehend and search these young men. Eighteen-year-old Elijah, a black man in Englewood, recounted a common story of racially discriminatory policing in his neighborhood: *I got harassed by the police when I was coming out of the gas station and I was putting something in my pocket. … I was putting some candy in my pocket and they pulled over, jumped out, and put me on the wall. They was checking me, trying to ask me, 'Where the drugs at?' and I had some candy in my pocket. They pulled it out, and they was mad and told me to get the f— out of there.*

Such personal accounts suggest that the human and constitutional rights of many people in Chicago are regularly violated. The contempt and disrespect underlying these racially targeted encounters with young African Americans also highlight the undemocratic nature of racial profiling and use of force. Police officers' treatment and targeting of young black people is a significant and recurring type of governmental interaction that flies in the face of the principles of due process and

the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The U.S. Justice Department makes this same point, finding that these practices are not only unsound but also unnecessary, unreasonable, and unconstitutional.[141]

For a lot of the black young adults we interviewed, formative experiences with the police begin before age 18. Malik, a 28-year-old black man, has had experiences with police harassment dating back to his teenage years. When he was 14 years old and walking from school in an unfamiliar neighborhood, police stopped him as they were looking for a murder suspect. According to Malik, the police said he fit the description and they detained him for several hours. *"But they didn't give me a description. … They held me in the car for about three hours just provoking me to try to get me to confess to something. And then they let me go and told me if they see me again in the neighborhood, they'll arrest me for sure."* As suggested by our interviews and by the Justice Department's report, a young person's race and appearance appear to be common reasons behind police stops and searches. Gabriel, a 23-year-old black man, noted, *"I can walk out in the street, I ain't doing anything, but the police will pull me over. I have been pulled over many times. … Last week I got pulled over just because they said I fit the description."* While the law is vague about what "reasonable suspicion" means, our interviews with young adults of different races and ethnicities clearly show that the presumption of guilt falls disproportionately on young black people.[142] Statistics on use of force further reveal this disparity. The Chicago Police Department uses force nearly ten times more often against African Americans than against whites.[143] These kinds of experiences reflect why the city has had to settle cases of police brutality totaling over $9 million in Englewood and $11 million in West Englewood **(see Table 2)**.

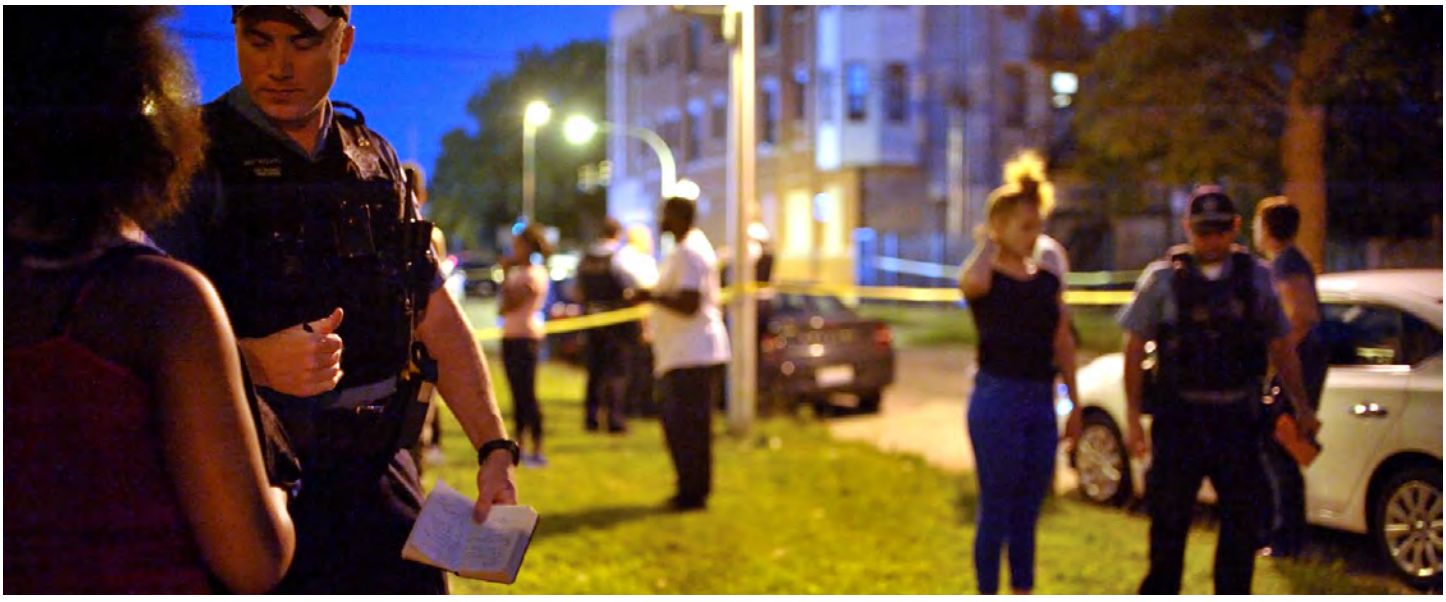


Photo by Tonika Johnson

But racial profiling is not limited to young black men. Young black women also reported being targeted and experiencing harassment. Several young adults in Englewood, for example, pointed out that police target young black women as well as men in their neighborhood based at least partly on appearance or other specific characteristics, such as having 'locs.' Destiny's experience with the police supported this observation. A 25-year-old black woman, she shared that the police targeted her because of her locs, tattoos, and general appearance. "S*ometimes after they establish that I'm a female they still proceed with searching me, you know, just to see if they can try to find some drugs or something … and then once they see my ID and it say disabled at the bottom, then they want to say, 'I'm sorry, ma'am. Enjoy the rest of your day*.'"

While Asian Americans in Chinatown-Bridgeport and Latinxs in Pilsen reported fewer encounters with police, racial and ethnic discrimination still played a role in their experiences with law enforcement. And unlike what is suggested by popular media, Asian American women and Latinas reported more incidents of racially discriminatory police contact than the Asian American men and Latinos we interviewed. For example, 23-year old Constanza, a Latina from Pilsen, discussed the role that race and skin color play in who is targeted by police. *"A lot of my friends are Latino and Latinas. There are instances when we've been stopped and certain people in my group of friends are questioned because they're darker or because they're more Hispanic-looking than the rest of us."* Constanza reported that the police separated the darker-skinned members of her friendship group. She believed that the police did this *"because they feel they [her darker friends] are going to act out violently, which is not the case."* These young Latinxs' experiences resonate with the experiences of young African Americans in the city,

TABLE 2: RECENT SETTLEMENTS/JUDGMENTS INVOLVING CHICAGO POLICE MISCONDUCT, 2011-2016 [T]

	Settlements	Total $	False report/arrest	Excessive force
Albany Park	3	$3,820,198	2	2
Chinatown	0	$0	-	-
Bridgeport	5	$142,750	2	3
Englewood	35	$9,198,816	18	22
West Englewood	22	$11,225,883	11	16
West Town	5	$236,500	2	4
Lincoln Park	2	$67,000	2	2
Near North Side	8	$681,136	5	6
Pilsen	0	$0	-	-

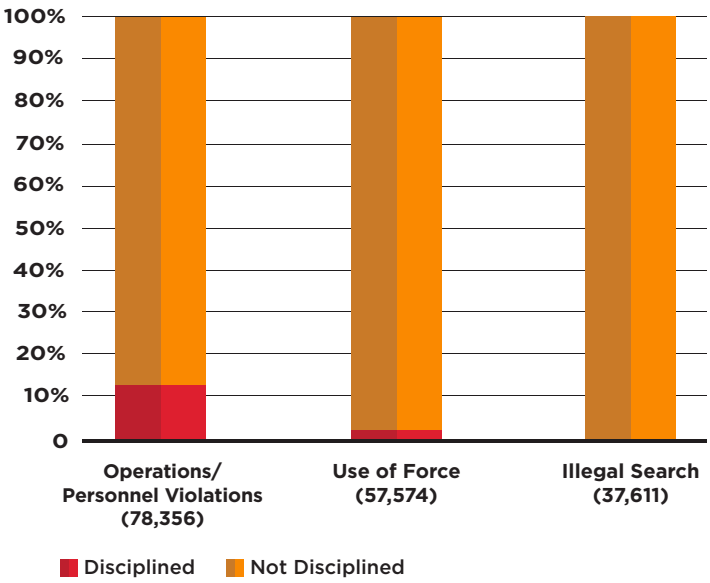
who stated that the police harass them based on a presumption of guilt.

Some young Asian American women and Latinas also discussed police encounters involving their mothers—encounters in which language barriers and immigrant status were points of conflict. In those instances, these young women attempted to translate for their mothers. Madison, a 19-year-old Asian American woman, recalled one such instance involving a miscommunication between police officers and her mother when she was in middle school. Upon learning that Madison's mother was not a fluent English speaker, the police criticized her mother and questioned why she had a driver's license, all the while refusing Madison's attempts to translate. Madison admitted, *"**I don't think I'll ever forget that experience, and I think that's a snapshot of being a minority … and that's the reason why I don't know if I can trust [the police] when I need their help.**"* A number of Latinxs and Asian Americans noted that their interactions with the police made them feel like second-class citizens, which deepened their sense of distrust in law enforcement.

"I don't think I'll ever forget that experience, and I think that's a snapshot of being a minority … and that's the reason why I don't know if I can trust [the police] when I need their help."

On the other hand, most of the white young adults we interviewed said that they are shielded from negative interactions with the police. Although several said that they are skeptical of law enforcement and that the police are slow to respond to reports and 911 calls, nearly all reported that their own personal encounters with the police were "good," helpful, and respectful. White young adults reported these types of experiences across gender. However, a great number of white young adults with whom we spoke also believed that policing has a racial bias and that a gap existed between their own respectful encounters with police and their understanding that police brutality is a problem in the city. For example, Trevor, a 28-year-old white man, acknowledged this point by describing a time in high school when he was driving drunk and was let go by police: "*If I was any other race and I didn't go to [an elite magnet public school], I would have 100% been arrested. … That is the impact of white privilege in the city of Chicago*." Representative of the position of various young white respondents, Calvin, a 21-year-old white man, reflected in greater detail on how he understood his privilege as a white individual: *There are plenty of fair police officers, but I think there are problems with the institution as a whole that reflect poorly … I know that police*

FIGURE 6: TOP THREE TYPES OF COMPLAINTS OF POLICE MISCONDUCT, 1988-2018 [U]



officers can be nice people. But it's still a career choice that represents a lot of institutional problems, you know, so it's hard to detach those feelings, especially if you're someone that's—I mean, I have my share of disadvantages, I'm disabled and I'm gay, but usually people can't tell that just from looking at my face, whereas if you're a person of color I think immediately there might be a first perception that's like, hey, this person might be carrying drugs or be a threat.

Moving Forward on Police Accountability

Young adults experience the police as an institution that treats people unequally based on race, ethnicity, and place. Both personal experiences and knowledge gleaned from friends, loved ones and the media support this outlook, which reduces the legitimacy of law enforcement in the city. But unlike most news stories that rightly focus on instances of police brutality, young adults' most repeated concern was their experience of the police department as unreliable and unresponsive when they were in an emergency. According to some of these young Chicagoans, the slow response time and disregard among the police makes the problems of police corruption and brutality even worse.

Young people's reports of police unresponsiveness and disregard are further supported by administrative data. Police data amassed by the Invisible Institute's Citizen Police Data Project (CPDP) reveals that operations and personnel violations—which include inadequate service, failure to provide service, or neglect of duty—were the most common complaints of police misconduct in the city **(see Figure 6)**. One-third of all complaints in the CPDP data were about operations and personnel violations, followed by complaints about police use of force. Yet only 2.5% of the nearly 127,000 civilian complaints made over the past four decades have been sustained, and one-fourth of sustained civilian complaints resulted in no penalty for the offending officers **(see Figure 7)**.

The lack of police accountability may contribute to the sharp disparities in reports of police misconduct among different populations. For example, police report data on citizen complaints of

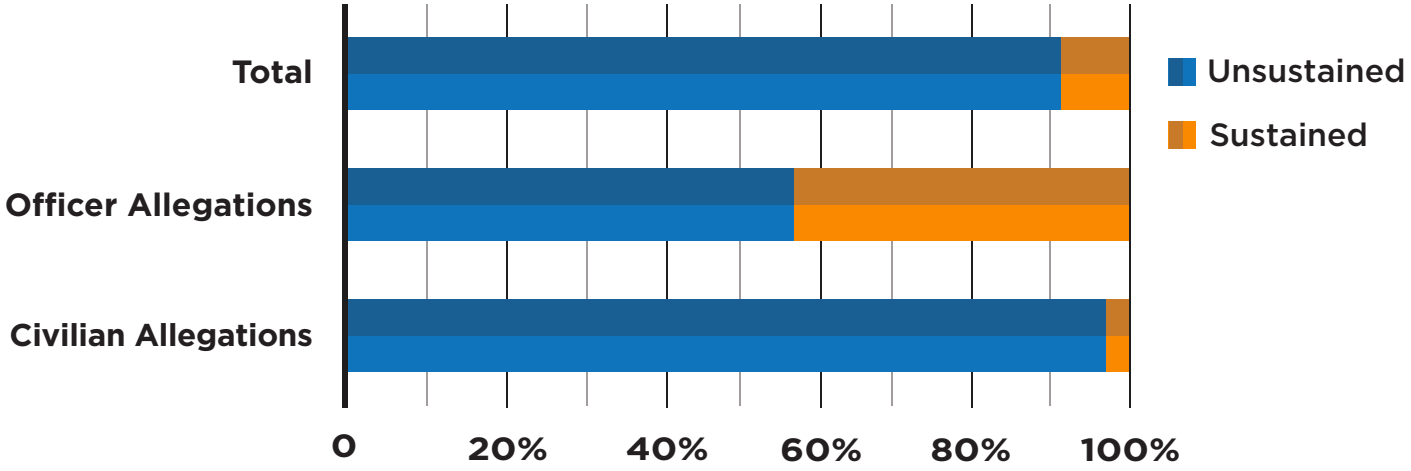
police misconduct filed between 1988 and 2018 show that young adults, ages 21 to 30, are less likely to report police misconduct relative to their share of the city population **(see Figure 8)**. This underrepresentation is concerning, since administrative data and research studies consistently show that young people in this age group have among the highest levels of negative contact with police. This underrepresentation in filed misconduct complaints suggests a reluctance to file among young people, or a lack of knowledge about how to do so.

Reimagining Justice in Chicago

When asked how to improve policing in the city, the young Chicagoans with whom we spoke typically suggested fundamental changes in the aims and operations of the Chicago Police Department. Many young people believed that we need to reimagine the purpose and place of police officers in Chicago. Some of those we interviewed advocated for more community policing. Eighteen-year-old Eduardo, a Latino from Pilsen, stated: *"If you have community police officers in their communities, they'd know the people more there, so they won't act on preconceived notions and they won't act out of fear."* Some community policing efforts are underway in Chicago: In November 2016, the superintendent of the Chicago Police Department announced an advisory panel on community policing, which released draft recommendations in August 2017.[144] It should be noted, however, that these young adults advocate for not only community policing,[145] in which officers participate in the life of neighborhoods (particularly those most heavily challenged by crime), but also for sufficient accountability and responsiveness to what people on the ground are experiencing.[146] Young adults underscored that community policing is hollow without proper training, accountability, and transparency. Some also demanded that tests of implicit or racial bias be incorporated. A lot of these recommendations squarely align with the Justice Department's investigation in January 2017, as well as with recommendations in a public draft of the upcoming consent decree.[147]

Beyond community policing, some young adults called for discussions about, and movement toward, the abolition of policing as we currently know it. Christian, a 22-year-old Latino in Albany Park, echoed the opinions of a number of young people in different neighborhoods by asserting that communities—rather than the police—should have the authority to hold their residents accountable. Farrukh, a 23-year-old South Asian American man, who also resides in Albany Park, agreed that more justice may come if community members solved problems among themselves as opposed to having police intervene.

FIGURE 7: ALLEGATIONS OF POLICE MISCONDUCT, 1988-2018 [U]



These young adults' visions of justice are also reflected in the vitality of youth-led organizing in the city. A number of Chicago-based groups are fighting for a broader, more inclusive vision of justice and liberation that centers those who are black, Latinx, women, queer, undocumented, disabled, and those who have had contact with the law. These efforts include challenging unjust policies and practices, but also go further to demand that changes in policing complement investments beyond the police force like increased funding for public schools, mental health clinics, jobs, and other actions to address problems facing communities on the South and West Sides of Chicago. These concerns are also reflected in numerous organizing activities across the city.

The #NoCopAcademy campaign is one example of an organized effort that calls current policing practices into question. In response to a plan by the city to spend $95 million to build a new police and fire training center in West Garfield Park, the #NoCopAcademy campaign, which is supported by over 100 community and social justice organizations in Chicago, challenges the creation of this center, but also advocates for redirecting such funding to youth and communities on the South and West Sides of the city. In so doing, the campaign raises the critical issues of why the city has increased police investment in black and brown neighborhoods which have experienced the state-sanctioned closure of schools and mental health facilities in the same era.[148] Importantly, in a recent report based on a large local survey, the #NoCopAcademy campaign found that residents of West Garfield Park overwhelmingly prefer that the city invest public resources in services other than the police, including education and youth programming.[149]

In addition to the opposition to the new police and fire training center, members of organizations like BYP100, Mijente,

and Organized Communities Against Deportations (OCAD) worked together to examine disparities in the Chicago Police Department's gang database (i.e. its information system of individuals suspected or found to be in gangs).[150] The research group found that 71% of the 128,000 individuals labeled as "gang-affiliated" are black, 61% are under 30 years old, and 68% have never been arrested for a violent offense or unlawful use of a weapon—all of which raise concerns about how large shares of young people in the city end up on the gang database.[151] Thus, both individually and collectively, it seems that significant numbers of young people are demanding that the city reimagine how we train, use, and fund police—and, more broadly, how we provide for the safety of all people in Chicago.

Underscoring all these efforts and recommendations is the fact that many young adults we interviewed suggested that the Chicago Police Department "must undergo broad, fundamental reform to restore ... trust."[152] As Owen, a 25-year-old black man in Englewood, stated: *"Show us that we can trust them."* Indeed, despite varied views on police that range from abolition to reform, the vast majority of young adults whom we interviewed wanted *substantial, transformative change* in the police department—and more profoundly, fundamental change in how justice is conceived and carried out in Chicago. However, numerous young adults were doubtful that the city government and the police department have the moral or political will to change current practices.

Violence, Trauma, and Healing in Chicago

Like policing, violence is a much-discussed topic in Chicago. But unlike many policy discussions that focus solely on the prevalence of gun and gang violence, this section also discusses violence against cis and trans women and gender-nonconforming individuals, and how exposure to violence shapes how young adults process, evaluate, and respond to victimization in the city. According to a recent survey by the *New York Times* and Kaiser Family Foundation, violence and crime shape the lives and perceptions of many Chicagoans. Seventy percent of those polled in the city believe it is likely that a typical young person in their neighborhood will experience violent crime.[153] Despite the overwhelming concern with violence among all those we interviewed, important racial disparities exist in exposure to violence. For instance, one-third of whites and Latinxs in Chicago report personally knowing someone who has been a victim of a crime involving a gun, compared to nearly half of African Americans.[154]

Among the young adults we interviewed, it seems that for a multitude of African Americans in Englewood, Latinxs in Pilsen, and—to a lesser degree—Asian Americans

in Chinatown-Bridgeport, exposure to violence has a become part of growing up. On the other hand, most white young adults live a different reality on the North Side. Among the white young adults we interviewed, the most common form of direct experience with violence was muggings, while some others talked about having friends or acquaintances who experienced violent crime. Meanwhile, a number of young African Americans and Latinxs reported firsthand encounters with violence and experiences of losing loved ones to gun violence.

Trauma: A Public Health Concern

Young adults who had experienced violence repeatedly talked about the lasting psychological effects of such encounters. At the individual and community level, it seems that exposure to violence has become a significant public health issue in Chicago and across the nation, particularly for young adults. In 2016, across the United States, a total of 635,477 young adults (ages 18-29) were treated in emergency departments for nonfatal injuries that resulted from assaults.[155] In 2016, there were 4,331 shooting victims and 762 homicides in Chicago, largely due to gun violence concentrated especially on the South and West Sides.[156] According to the *Chicago Tribune*, that was the most violent year in Chicago in nearly two decades.[157] Citywide data also indicates that 17- to 25-year-olds make up the largest share of victims—between 40 and 50 percent.[158] These data suggest that violence and its aftermath disproportionately affect young Chicagoans, particularly African American youth for whom such injuries are the leading cause of death.[159]

One particularly important way of thinking about violence and its aftermath is to consider how it affects individuals, their families, and their communities. Psychologists and public health experts note that exposure to community violence—experiencing or witnessing violent, physical interpersonal attack or damage—is a pervasive and unique type of injury, or *trauma*, in the lives of young people, particularly those living in cities.[160] But trauma does not cease when the violence ends. It lingers in people's minds and bodies, affecting the individual or community long after a violent event has ended or an injury has physically healed.[161] For these reasons, exposure to violence is a strong indicator for a range of social and mental health difficulties, including anxiety and depression.[162] But the story is not all bleak. Other evidence shows that people can experience personal growth after struggling with a traumatic event.[163]

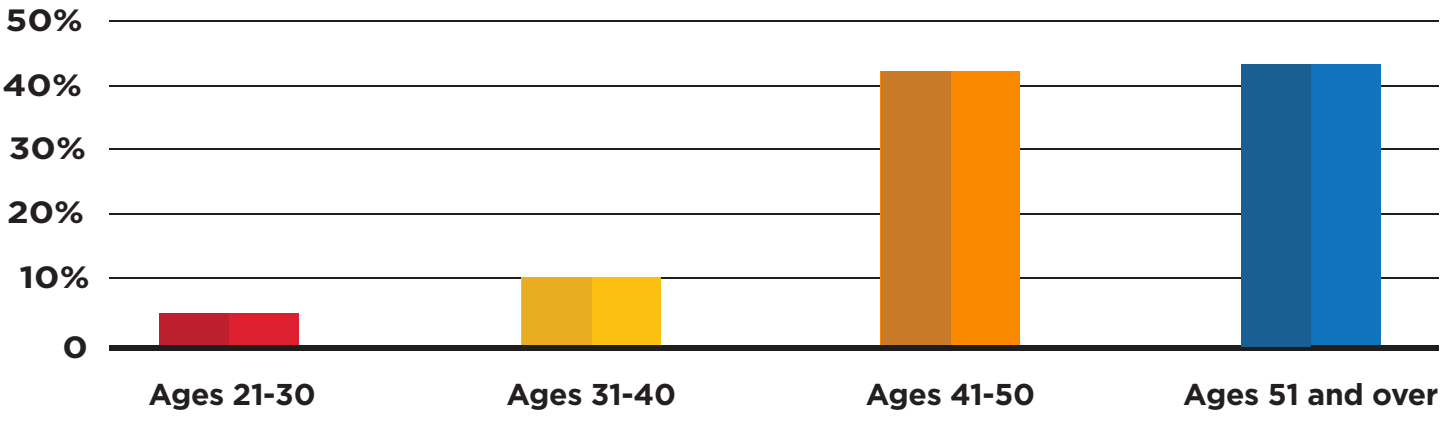
Our interviews with young people reflected this complexity in the wake of traumatic experience. The young adults we interviewed drew on an array of approaches and principles to move forward with their lives after encountering violence.

For example, some reported putting up murals or pursuing photography as a way of processing traumatic events. Others, like Ricardo, a 23-year-old Latino, have tried whatever they can to make sense of the violence they have encountered. *"I just take it in, try to write about my pain, draw it out. But sometimes, just sometimes, it's just so overwhelming that I can't. I just try singing, pray, or do whatever."*

Like Ricardo, large numbers of young people report that they are still processing the violence they have experienced. They are still healing. But more support is needed. According to 25-year-old Rebecca, a black woman from Englewood, "the mental health of the black community" is the most concerning issue. Rebecca stated that a lot of people in the city, and particularly in Englewood, are dealing with trauma, yet *"**there's not an abundance of services for mental health. ... That bothers me because I really feel like if you're not together mentally, then you really can't do much else.**"* Across different neighborhoods, young adults discussed their mental and emotional struggles after violent trauma, noting that needed supports are not equally available across Chicago. Rebecca concluded: "*There's a lot of hurt people ... a lot of people who need to heal. All these traumatic experiences—people need help. ... There needs to be a bigger attention to that.*" As Rebecca notes, people often don't receive help or know who to turn to for professional assistance. While many young adults are necessarily finding ways of coping with violence and trauma, their testimonies reveal a level of need for counseling and mental health services that the city should better address.

"there's not an abundance of services for mental health. ... That bothers me because I really feel like if you're not together mentally, then you really can't do much else."

FIGURE 8. AGE OF COMPLAINANTS, 1988-2018 [U]



Violence against Cis and Trans Women and Gender Non-Conforming Individuals

Although most reports and discussions about violence in Chicago focus on gun and gang-related violence, the young adults with whom we spoke also identified violence against cis and trans women and against gender non-conforming individuals as a highly prevalent problem in the city. When asked, a number of young adults who identified as women or as gender non-conforming individuals reported having a range of experiences of sexual violence and victimization, including rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, and gender-based hate crimes. Several women with whom we spoke said that these experiences of sexual violence and harassment—that they personally experienced, witnessed, or heard about—began in adolescence, during the middle and high school years. For instance, Kimberly, an 18-year-old Asian American woman in Chinatown-Bridgeport, said that a friend in high school taught her how to be mindful of sexual harassment while riding and walking to and from the train. At the time of her interview, Kimberly reported that she still experienced catcalling and other sexual harassment on the street *"when I'm walking back from the train alone*," she said, which can make commuting "dangerous" and "unsafe." Few men who we interviewed, however, reported personally experiencing sexual violence or gender-based violence. Kevin, a 22-year-old black man from Englewood, gives one explanation for why few men report such experiences: *"I'm pretty sure that [personal experiences of sexual assault] is not something you talk about. I don't think that's something a man would tell another man. Even though we cool [and] we had a lot of stuff happen to each other, that's not something you really tell another dude."*

However, a number of young people across genders reported experiencing

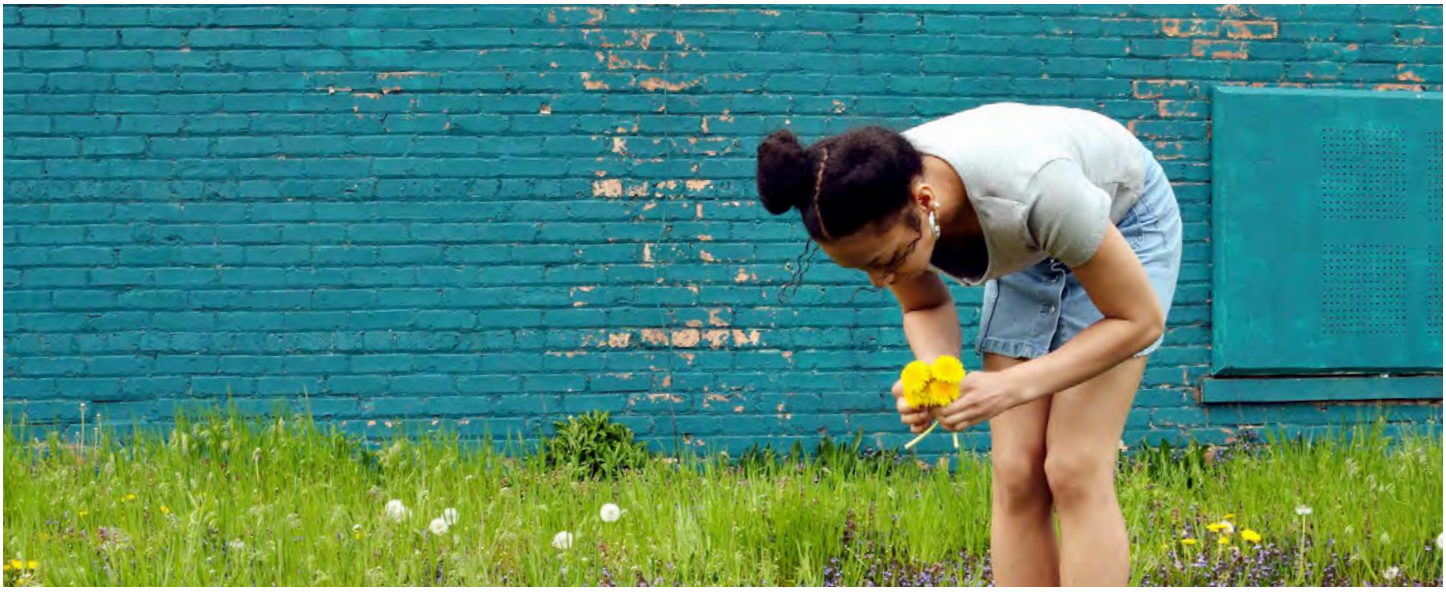


Photo by Tonika Johnson

domestic violence firsthand or witnessing the women in their lives, cis and trans, deal with domestic abuse from primarily cis men. Several women and men across racial/ethnic communities also mentioned that they had current friends or family members who were in abusive domestic relationships. Data from the city underlines the above observations that intimate partner violence and abuse are critical though often undiscussed dimensions of violence in Chicago. For example, in 2017, 16% of reported crimes in Chicago were domestic-related, and 17% of those arrested in Chicago between 2012 and 2016 were arrested for domestic violence.[164] These statistics suggest that an important share of violent and criminal acts in Chicago take place at home and in people's personal relationships. This violence is systemic within the city's institutions as well. Just this past year, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that police had investigated more than 500 cases of sexual abuse and rape at CPS schools over the past decade.[165] Ineffective institutional procedures related to background checks, alerting Child Protective Services, and institutional secrecy and silence allowed educators accused of such acts to resign discreetly and move to other school districts.[166]

Among those we interviewed, some survivors of domestic abuse spoke directly about seeking out and receiving counseling and support. Others stated that they have hardly spoken with anyone. All, however, said that they were still dealing with the trauma of domestic and sexual violence. When asked about sexual and domestic violence, Tasha, a 27-year-old black woman, admitted, *"We don't [talk about it enough]. We don't. Even in the media they say sexual assault, not rape, so they try to gloss over it."* Reflecting on their own experience with sexual assault, Belén, a queer, non-binary Latinx young adult, said that neither they nor do their friends who have experienced rape and sexual assault talk about it. ***"I've figured out that the people that I have felt comfortable with are people who have experienced the same thing. That's always so shocking because I don't talk about it and no one talks about it."*** Simply put, while attention to gun violence in the city receives constant coverage by the media, sexual and domestic violence are critical areas of concern that do not receive the appropriate level of media attention, services, and redress needed within the city. As a result, city government fails to

"I've figured out that the people that I have felt comfortable with are people who have experienced the same thing. That's always so shocking because I don't talk about it and no one talks about it."

properly address an important source of victimization in Chicago.

In the face of these challenges, the young women with whom we spoke, especially young African American women and Latinas, had cultivated their own networks of safety and support among their friends, mothers, and grandmothers. These networks are spaces where knowledge, dignity, and resistance are used to combat the trauma resulting from sexual assault and harassment. In talking about the prevalence of sexual assault in Chicago, 18-year-old Paulina, a black woman in Albany Park, says that her mother and grandmother taught her to be careful with whom she surrounds herself. Angela, a 29-year-old black woman, who also lives in Albany Park, says that getting to know more black women in Chicago, at church and at work, has made her life better. *"**I am an individual, but my experience is not individualistic. There are so many shared similarities, where we talk about hard issues.** It's just sitting down with friends that happen to look like me and happen to go through the same exact things that I go through, and then we can laugh about those things, and we can yell about those things. That has been the most life-giving thing*."

"I am an individual, but my experience is not individualistic. There are so many shared similarities, where we talk about hard issues."

Other young women described stories of standing up to abusers, witnessing others stand up to abusers, and ensuring that other women could find protection when needed. For example, Lucía, a 25-year-old Latina from Pilsen, recounted how she would stand up to her parents' physical violence at age 12 or 13. Moreover, Gabriela, a 25-year-old Latina who also resides in Pilsen, recounted how female friends and family members would come to her and her mother to escape domestic abuse because they were "like a sanctuary" where others could find safety and advice. These networks of safety and support are of critical importance and fulfill a significant gap where other resources and institutions (e.g. counseling) are sparse or misaligned with the personal needs and desires of survivors. These informal safe spaces also resonate with the aims of notable institutions such as Resilience (formerly Rape Victim Advocates), an organization that since 1974 has worked with and provided services for survivors of sexual violence.[167]

Organizations and collectives like Resilience reveal the need for, and promise of, women- and survivor-centered empowerment advocacy, organizing, and service provision. Arguably, city, state, and

federal agencies and policymakers would do well to provide more material and capacity-building support to community members and grassroots organizations that can draw on within-community networks of safety and protection among cis and trans women and LGBTQ communities. These organizations and spaces can serve as alternative institutions to counteract the overlapping racism, sexism, and gender victimization prevalent in current institutions, including the police. In so doing, these alternative institutions are perhaps better able to advance the health, wellbeing, safety, and healing of community members across gender, race and ethnicity, and social class.

Avoidance

Avoidance is among the most common strategies young adults reported practicing to protect themselves against violence. Young Latinxs in Pilsen regularly said they avoid certain areas for safety reasons. But in Englewood a number of the African Americans that we interviewed, particularly young black men, stated that they disengage from their peer group and withdraw from public spaces in order to reduce the risk of a violent encounter. Warren, a 28-year-old black man, describes this strategy: *"I try to just stay out of the way and not get involved in so much that's going on. Not be outside, not doing nothing."* Tyler, a 24-year-old black man, went into further detail:

Interviewer: *Do you ever try to avoid violence?*

Tyler: *Most definitely. … Sometimes I will not even walk down a block because I see too many people on that block.*

While most young adults reported that they become more vigilant of their surroundings after experiencing violence, the decision to disengage from peers and withdraw from public spaces has other important consequences. These

behaviors may also constrain young adults' social worlds, networks, and connection to community life. This withdrawal also potentially limits young people's capacity to act politically and voice their concerns. Political Scientist Cathy Cohen refers to this process as *a politics of invisibility*—a process whereby young people decide to pursue a strategy of making themselves invisible to the police and to other institutions that they believe threaten their safety and freedom. However, as Cohen and others note, such a strategy also decreases the possibility that these same young people will engage with individuals and institutions, often in the community, who could offer support.[168]

These experiences and behaviors contrast with those of many young whites and, to a lesser extent, Asian Americans in Chicago. Across gender, most within these two groups stated that they did not think explicitly about needing to avoid violence. That said, some white and Asian American young women did discuss precautions they take when traversing the city, including avoiding alleys and secluded places, trying not to go out late, traveling with others, and spending time with friends in familiar places. Moreover, young Asian Americans in Chinatown-Bridgeport discussed their communities' collective efforts to address theft and keep each other aware of such incidents. A surprisingly high proportion of young white and Asian American men with whom we spoke, however, said that they have not needed to exercise avoidance tactics or take precautions in Chicago. Ryan, a 26-year-old white man, for example, gave the following response when asked if he ever tries to avoid violence: *"No. I would say it's not something that passes my mind at all, really."* Farrukh, a 23-year-old South Asian man in Albany Park, similarly said, *"I don't really go out with that [the need to avoid violence] in mind."* There is, nonetheless, complexity to this story. Those few young Asian American men in Chinatown-Bridgeport who did speak about avoidance explicitly talked about avoiding certain streets and neighborhoods at night, in addition to avoiding gang-related peers and areas. Peter, a 23-year-old Asian American man living in Chinatown-Bridgeport, said he avoids violence by *"mak[ing] friends that do the same thing that I do, that stay away from violence. Stay away from certain people in my school that are part of gangs and stuff."* These differences reveal the importance of race and ethnicity, gender, place, and exposure to violence in shaping how young adults navigate the city.

Chicago: A Violent City?

Finally, we asked our respondents if they thought Chicago was a violent city. Like so many other topics, race, ethnicity, and location significantly shaped young adults' views on the topic. While many young adults we interviewed said they do think Chicago is violent, young African

Americans in Englewood—those most directly affected by violence among our interview participants—challenged the idea that Chicago is a violent city. Like young Latinxs in Pilsen, these black young adults named specific areas, streets, and street corners as hotspots for violence. But they stopped short of saying violence is inherent to the city. Young black women especially challenged the stereotype that Chicago is a violent city. Imani, a 25-year-old black woman in Englewood, makes this point plain.: *"The people are violent. That's just how I feel. It's not Chicago. Chicago's a beautiful place—the people are violent."* This does not mean that black young adults minimized the reality of violence in Englewood. David, a 23-year-old black man in Englewood, said he knows violence is a problem in the city *"just [from] growing up. All the killings. The robberies. Drugs play a role in it. The police. A lot of things play a role and it's just very violent here [in Englewood]."* But their experience of violence as an interpersonal problem compels them to echo Imani's comments, as 23-year-old Kennedy did, that Chicago is *"not a violent place, it's just the people in it that make it seem that way."*

These views may also be influenced by the fact that many young adults in the South and West Sides have encountered violence up close, as well as the poverty and joblessness that often perpetuates it. Eduardo, an 18-year-old Latino in Pilsen, made this point, viewing violence as a kind of tool used among those with very few means: *"**There's a lot of violence [on the South Side] because there's no opportunity to find jobs and there's no opportunity to seek mental health or any other resources.** So violence is a resource used to gain money, gain power, gain family."* Eduardo's perspective on violence in Chicago differs greatly from the reports of white and Asian American young adults we interviewed. These young adults stated that Chicago is a violent city, and pointed to the media and policy reports as evidence that "the South Side" generally was the most violent area. For example, 19-year-old Mei, a Chinese American woman from Bridgeport, said "definitely" when asked if she thinks Chicago is a violent city: *"Definitely a violent place. And it's statistically one of the most violent places in America. In fact, my mom has been talking about moving away from Chicago for a while."*

"There's a lot of violence because there's no opportunity to find jobs and there's no opportunity to seek mental health or any other resources."

The views on violence and danger in Chicago articulated by our respondents suggest how important race, ethnicity, and location are in shaping young people's

relationship to the city. Direct, personal experiences have shaped how African American young adults in Englewood think about violence in Chicago, making them more likely to see violence as a problem of individuals exerting harm onto others in their neighborhood. On the other hand, the white and Asian American young adults with whom we spoke had fewer encounters with violence and drew on news reports to shape their opinion of violence in the city, often unable to differentiate violence perpetrated by people in a neighborhood from a more generalized view of a neighborhood being violent.

Where Do We Go from Here?[169]

When asked how to address issues of violence, young adults in Chicago generally recommended what many researchers and policymakers have also recommended. First, they emphasize that addressing violence requires fundamentally addressing issues of poverty, education, jobs, and access to health care—especially mental health services. Indeed, research shows that only one-third of those in Illinois who need mental health treatment actually receive it.[170] These inequities are exacerbated for those in low-income, racially segregated communities affected by gun violence, which are also the areas with the greatest number of hospitalizations for anxiety, depression, self-medication, multiple forms of trauma, and other mental health concerns.[171]

Having said that, communities have long been leading the effort to counteract violence, to restoratively address the roots of violence, and to invest in the social and economic well-being of their residents in productive and respectful ways. As mentioned previously, youth-led activist organizations play an important role in outlining alternative approaches to safety and justice beyond policing, and in demanding more investments to address trauma and violence. And in African American, Latinx, and Asian

American neighborhoods, community groups and organizations have launched various initiatives to increase safety. For example, the Resident Association of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E.) organizes community events in the summer and fall to take over parks that have been sites of drug dealing and gang violence. These actions reclaim parks as important, positive spaces for community. Likewise, Enlace does street outreach in Little Village that includes targeted mediation and community activities to promote peace. Researchers have found that the efforts of community organizations like these have had a direct impact on reducing rates of crime and victimization in large cities around the country.[172] These local efforts have also been critical given the recent spate of mental health center closings and a severe $187 million cut in state mental health funding between 2009 and 2012.[173] Yet the efforts of these organizations are also often challenged and constrained by a lack of funding and shifting interests in philanthropic giving. As the young adults we interviewed make clear, more resources are needed to address the gaps in public services. In short, by functioning as spaces where community members can gather, share grievances, become connected, and reimagine possibilities for themselves and others, youth-led activist organizations and local grassroots organizations have demonstrated that they are a vital lifeline for positive change and wellbeing in our communities.

As the city launches and rethinks efforts to address the challenges of violence in Chicago, the young people with whom we spoke emphasized that policymakers and advocates need to consider all dimensions of violence in their problem-solving, including sexual and domestic violence. These policymakers must consider not only how geography shapes violent incidents, but also how place, race, and ethnicity shape how Chicago's young people *process* and *negotiate* violence and trauma in their daily lives. Young adults are holders of critical knowledge related to these issues. Put simply, to create more effective policy that addresses violence in Chicago, city government would do well to center the experiences of young adults and follow the lead of local community and activist organizations that are already doing the work to address these critical issues.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

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