

Gun Violence in Wake County

This memo discusses the issue of gun violence in Wake County, what other localities are doing, and existing policy that could affect what the county does. Although gun violence is less common in Wake County than some of our neighbors, it is still a glaring issue that needs addressing. Statistics at the local level are less common, while state and national statistics though more available, are not necessarily representative of the county scope. Many of the recommended programs require an intersection of various county services, law enforcement, community leaders and more.

Background and Statistics

NC DHHS released a report outlining the problem of violent deaths across North Carolina using data from the North Carolina Violent Death Reporting System.¹ In 2016, North Carolina had 2,173 residents die from violence, about 63% of which were suicides and 33% of which were homicides (page iii). Of the total deaths, 63.4% were by firearm and 76.3% of those were with a handgun—shotguns and rifles were the next highest percentages but significantly lower, 10.9% and 7.5% respectively (8). The overall average rate of violent death by N.C. county was 24.5 deaths per 100,000 people, with Wake below average at 13 violent deaths per 100,000 people (14). Broken down into suicide and homicide, the N.C. county average was 17.9 suicide deaths per 100,000 people and Wake fell below average with 10.5 suicide deaths per 100,000 people (25). The N.C. county average for homicides was 7.8 deaths per 100,000 people and Wake was again below average with 3.4 homicide deaths per 100,000 people (41). The appendix has breakdowns on the statewide data with information based on race, sex, and age, with more graphics and charts in the full report.

58% of suicides used a firearm, and 76.7% of those deaths involved a handgun (19). 75.8% of homicides used a firearm, and 75.5% of those deaths involved a handgun (36). For these reasons, policy targeting handguns may be more effective than those targeting other firearms in Wake County. Some other statistics that are based on statewide numbers but that could assist with tailoring policy are:

- 17.6% of adult suicide victims were veterans in 2016 (19).
- Among other mental and physical health problems, 79.8% of those who died by suicide had depression at the time of death (30).
- 18.6% of homicides were related to intimate partner violence (v).
- 103 children died, 48% homicide and 46% suicide, in 2016 and firearms were the most common method at 49% (vi).
- From 2006 to 2015, 3,992 people died from gun assaults and 58% were black but only 22% of the state's population is black. 74% of 3,305 firearm assault patients at 14 trauma centers were black from 2013-2014.²

¹ <https://www.injuryfreenc.ncdhhs.gov/DataSurveillance/VDRS/NCVDRS-AnnualReport-FINAL-2016.pdf>

² <https://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2018/03/23/a-call-for-gun-violence-prevention/>

- According to Raleigh Police Department data, of 1,610 violent crime incidents from 2015-2017, 38% involved a firearm which lead to 258 victims of gunshot wounds.³

Programs Warranting Further Investigation

Durham County, NC

Durham County has a more serious gun violence issue than Wake County does, as their violent death rate was 22.2 deaths per 100,000 people. The two main approaches they have taken to address the issue are to provide free gun locks and treat the issue as a public health problem.

Their Department of Public Health houses the Durham County Gun Safety Team, whose goal is to decrease childhood deaths when firearms are not properly stored.⁴ The Team works to inform community members that the safest way to store a gun is unloaded, in a gun safe, and with the ammunition stored separately. They also encourage parents to ask if the homeowner/parent owns a gun, and whether or not it is locked and unloaded, when their children visit others families. The program also provides free gun locks—through Project Child Safe and SAFE Kids of Durham—so that families that can't afford a gun safe can still have added protections in place.⁵ Passionate volunteers and community members provide individualized gun safety advice, information, and a gun lock to help those who do own guns be responsible owners.

- **Project Child Safe** provides gun locks to any county health department to “promote the safe storage of firearms in the home.”⁶ Their kits provide “a cable-style gun locking device, lock-installment instructions and a safety booklet.”⁷ The lock should be installed while the gun is unloaded, and other storage measures should still be used. The key to the lock should be stored separately and out of reach to children, and the same rule should be applied to keys for gun safes and other storage devices.⁸
 - o Cable locks work by preventing the gun from being discharged and can also lock a gun to a solid object, but the cable can be cut.
 - o Trigger locks work by blocking the trigger but don't prevent the loading of ammunition. If the gun is loaded the lock itself, or the process of installing the lock, could accidentally discharge the gun.
 - o Lock boxes, gun safes, and disassembling the gun are other options but have their own disadvantages as well.
- King County, Washington has a program called Lock It Up which is very similar to Project Child Safe and what Durham is doing in trying to educate the public about safe gun

³ <https://www.raleighnc.gov/content/CorNews/Documents/2018FirearmViolenceReport.pdf>

⁴ <http://dcpublichealth.org/services/health-education/health-promotion-and-wellness/gun-safety-program>

⁵ [https://www.injuryfreenc.ncdhhs.gov/preventionResources/docs/Casestudy_Durham\(reformatted\).pdf](https://www.injuryfreenc.ncdhhs.gov/preventionResources/docs/Casestudy_Durham(reformatted).pdf)

⁶ https://www.projectchildsafe.org/sites/default/files/PCS_FactSheet.pdf

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ https://www.projectchildsafe.org/sites/default/files/PCSBrochure_Adstar.pdf

storage. Their public health department has partnered with storage device retailers to **give 10-15% off storage devices** and lock boxes if Lock It Up is mentioned.⁹

- Another solution would be to make storage devices **tax exempt** (already law in Washington).
- A Slate article articulated that trigger locks are not necessarily an effective solution as they make loaded guns more dangerous, create the illusion of safety, make it harder to deter a criminal, and dissuade people from using more effective protection like gun safes. However, they are easily bought in large quantities, can be distributed for free, and don't require technology changes to guns.¹⁰
- *District of Columbia v. Heller* (2008) decided that handguns can't be banned and government cannot require safe storage with no exceptions for self-defense. The Court left room for restrictions to be placed like not allowing the mentally ill or felons to own guns, not allowing firearms in sensitive places, and allowing conditions on commercial sales.¹¹
- There are Child Access Prevention Laws in North Carolina that hold parents, guardians, and adults liable for allowing children access to guns without supervision and permission.¹²

As mentioned, Durham County also treats gun violence as a public health issue and has created Bull City United (BCU) under the Durham County Health Department. BCU is based on the Cure Violence model (CV) which confronts violence as a contagious disease that can be treated.¹³ From 2016 to 2017 total shooting accidents in Durham increased from 703 to 729 but shooting incidents in Southside and McDougald Terrace—the two neighborhoods BCU operated in—dropped 12% and the number of people shot dropped 43%. Furthermore, BCU works in surrounding neighborhoods to prevent retaliatory shootings. In 2017, Durham County put \$420,000 towards Bull City United.

- **Cure Violence** first began in Chicago and was created by Dr. Gary Slutkin.¹⁴ The idea is to interrupt transmission, prevent future spread and change group norms as violence, like disease, shows patterns of clusters, spread, and transmission. There are five essential components to be considered a Cure Violence program:
 - “1. Detect potentially violent events and interrupt them to prevent violence through trained credible messengers
 2. Provide ongoing behavior change and support to the highest-risk individuals through trained credible messengers

⁹ <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/violence-injury-prevention/violence-prevention/gun-violence/LOCK-IT-UP.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2013/07/trigger-locks-the-dubiously-effective-safety-measure-that-gun-control-advocates-love.html>

¹¹ <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/the-second-amendment/the-supreme-court-the-second-amendment/dc-v-heller/>

¹² <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/child-consumer-safety/child-access-prevention/>

¹³ <https://www.wunc.org/post/bull-city-united-fights-crime-durham-it-s-treatable-disease#stream/0>

¹⁴ <http://cureviolence.org/>

3. Change community norms that allow, encourage and exacerbate violence in chronically violent neighborhoods to healthy norms that reject the use of violence
 4. Continually analyze data to ensure proper implementation and identify changes in violence patterns and levels
 5. Provide training and technical assistance to workers, program managers and implementing agency covering the necessary skills to implement the model correctly (required to achieve the expected decreases in violence)”¹⁵
- Credible messengers are often referred to as violence interrupters and are conflict mediators who are trusted by the community—they can’t be seen as judgmental, an outsider, or as part of law enforcement. Ideally, they are paid by the county and working full time but it depends on the available resources. Outreach workers work with individuals by providing services relating to employment, education, and counselling.¹⁶

Group Violence Intervention (GVI)

GVI is a form of problem-oriented policing rather than incident driven policing where community leaders, social service providers, researchers, and law enforcement come together and identify the most at-risk individuals. The model is centered around “the insight that...an incredibly small and readily identifiable segment of a given community is responsible for the vast majority of gun violence.”¹⁷ The community leaders conducts small group meetings—known as call ins—to emphasize, from a moral voice, that the shooting needs to stop. Law enforcement then emphasizes that legal action will be taken against the responsible group. At these call ins, social services are provided for education, transportation, mental health, housing, and tattoo removal—so gang-related tattoos can be removed if wanted. The partnership helps emphasize that police are working on behalf of the neighborhood. GVI can lead to a 30-60% reduction in homicides but there is a lack of federal funding given to support the project.¹⁸

- Connecticut started a fund called Project Longevity to implement GVI in 3 of its cities. Over 4 years in New Haven, there was a 56% drop in homicides and an 80% drop in police calls about shots fired.¹⁹

Hospital-based Violence Intervention Program (HVIP)

Violent injury is a predictor of more injuries and increased violence so another way to address gun violence is to focus on people coming into the hospitals. Throughout the treatment process, patients are screened to identify the risk of re-injury and are connected with case managers to help the patient with other services like housing, mental health, and education. This program ultimately saves money as hospital admissions and detentions decrease—in Oakland, CA those in the program were 70% less likely to be arrested and 60% less likely to be criminally involved.²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/other-laws-policies/intervention-strategies/>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Combination Model

Richmond, California (population of 100,000) has implemented a combination of the three models, focused on Group Violence Intervention but adding in aspects of Cure Violence and Hospital-based Violence Intervention. This program is under the city's Office of Neighborhood Safety who works with law enforcement and other community organizations. They have implemented a Peacemaker Fellowship which is a voluntary 18-month program with daily outreach, a plan for short- and long-term goals, travel, intergenerational mentoring, and social service connections. As goals are completed and people stay in the program, they receive a cash stipend. Richmond's combination of approaches has led to a decrease in violence and an increase in personal development.²¹

The following are ideas from an Everytown report on how cities can address gun violence (up to Domestic Violence). In the interest of space, I have covered the main ideas and examples but more information can be found for each topic on the pages listed—I omitted ideas that might receive backlash from the NRA.²²

Understand the major factors driving local gun violence (29)

By collecting and analyzing data, counties can better understand how to allocate resources and where the main issues are.

- "Review every homicide to understand why it happened and how that could inform future interventions" (29)
 - o Milwaukee reviews every shooting and realized they generally occur near bars, so it is now required to install security cameras if three calls to the police have been placed about a violent offense
- "Improve utility and use of crime gun trace data" (30)
 - o It is important to trace all guns as many are from, or end up in, the illegal market
 - o By working with other localities and states, and sharing information, guns can be traced more easily if they don't originate in that locality
- "Map locations where most gun crime occurs" (34)
 - o By mapping locations, law enforcement can provide additional resource and staff to the areas that most need it

Reduce the supply of illegal guns (35)

By reducing the supply of illegal guns, criminal access and misuse can be reduced.

- "Strengthen oversight of gun dealers" (36)
 - o If many guns used in crimes are traced back to a specific dealer, they may be illegally selling guns. New York City and Chicago both did investigations into certain dealers and found illegal practices
- "Foster responsible practices among unlicensed gun sellers" (37)

²¹ Ibid.

²² <https://everytownresearch.org/documents/2016/06/strategies-reducing-gun-violence-american-cities.pdf/>

- Boston and Los Angeles have completed letter campaigns to remind dealers and owners about their responsibilities under the law, reminding them the gun could be traced and providing information on how to legally transfer a firearm
 - Boston also offered free gunlocks
- “Reduce gun theft” (38)
 - Promote or require gun owners to promptly report when their gun is lost or stolen
 - Lafayette Parish, Louisiana implemented a program called Love it/Lock it to encourage people to lock their cars and they now require law enforcement to report whether a car was locked if a vehicle is robbed
 - Oakland and San Francisco, California have laws prohibiting people from leaving firearms unsecured, or in view, in unattended cars

Improve public spaces (40)

- “‘Clean and green’ vacant lots and buildings” (40)
 - Vacant space creates places to hide guns and is out of the public eye
 - Philadelphia is working with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society to turn vacant space into green space
- “Shine a light on high-crime areas” (41)
 - Lack of lighting can make people less likely to report or intervene in a crime
 - New York City gave \$1.5 million to increase lighting in the areas with the highest crime rates—lighting pathways, public areas, and doorways

Leave fewer gun crimes unsolved (42)

- National Integrated Ballistics Identification Network (42)
 - Allows police to match evidence with other agencies nationwide to match ammunition markings
- “Use acoustic technology to detect gunfire as it occurs” (43)
 - Sensors throughout the area can geolocate where a gun is discharged so police can recover evidence more quickly and can pick up on crimes that may go unreported
 - Both Omaha, Nebraska and New York City have implemented
- “Respond when criminals try to buy guns and fail background checks” (44)
 - Colorado requires law enforcement be notified when a gun buyer fails a background check, possibly leading to an arrest in another crime. Colorado also made it a misdemeanor to lie on a background check form when trying to buy a gun
 - The Boulder District Attorney is actively working to enforce these laws

Offer positive alternatives to youth with risk factors for violent behavior (50)

- Chicago organization Youth Guidance created a program called Becoming a Man (50)
 - uses Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to help participants learn how to respond with non-violence and to help them understand the links in emotional behavior

- “Provide summer employment programs for students in high-violence neighborhoods” (51)
 - o One Summer Plus in Chicago gives 8th-12th graders 8 weeks of part time employment at the minimum wage
 - o Some participants also received a mentor and some received CBT like those in the Becoming a Man program

Domestic Violence

When an abuser has access to a firearm, the victim is 5 times more likely to be killed, and each year 600 women in the U.S. are shot to death by intimate partners. Over 300,000 domestic abusers “have been blocked from buying guns by the federal background check system” but abusers can still get guns from private sellers.²³ There are some federal policies that restrict certain domestic violence offenders and abusers subject to protective orders from having guns but there are many loopholes including the relationship of the offender to the victim. The 2005 Violence Against Women Act requires notification to offenders about these federal laws and any relevant state or local laws, but doesn’t require the surrender of firearms.

A lot of the solutions to closing the gaps of federal law would more likely be at the state level: prohibiting the purchase of ammunition, broadening the language to include any relationship and stalking, and sending information to the federal background check system. North Carolina has not closed the dating loophole completely. Most federal law requires that the abuser have lived with the victim, be a spouse, or have a child together. North Carolina has extended the policy so dating partners with a protective order can’t purchase a gun, but they have yet to extend it to dating partners when one is convicted of a domestic violence misdemeanor. North Carolina also does not currently require offenders to surrender their firearms after conviction or authorize law enforcement to remove firearms at the scene of a domestic violence incident. If Wake County can provide this authorization, they could require law enforcement to remove firearms at a domestic violence scene, require the turnover of a firearm from a convicted offender, and/or require proof in court that the guns were turned over. This can be done to law enforcement or an approved third party.²⁴

- A Washington ballot measure passed in 2018 requires the department of licensing to annually verify if those who have weapons are still allowed to possess them and to take the necessary steps to ensure that those no longer eligible do not remain in possession of firearms.
- Dallas County “requires abusers to temporarily relinquish their firearms while they are subject to a restraining order or while they are being tried for a domestic violence crime, and to permanently surrender them if they are convicted”²⁵
 - o Defendants have 72 hours to turn in their guns or swear under oath that they don’t possess any firearms

²³ <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/who-can-have-a-gun/domestic-violence-firearms/>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Page 52. <https://everytownresearch.org/documents/2016/06/strategies-reducing-gun-violence-american-cities.pdf/>

- Due to a lack of storage space, the county partnered with a local dealer to securely store the relinquished guns and to house a “deputy to oversee intake”²⁶

Buyback Programs

Buyback programs are rather controversial and don’t generally work as well as officials hope in the United States. Australia implemented a buyback program in 1996 after 35 people were killed and 28 were injured. In an attempt to curb possession and the use of semi-automatic rifles, Prime Minister John Howard pushed to pass the National Firearms Agreement which restricted legal ownership, created a registry, required permits for new purchases, and banned automatic/semi-automatic rifles and shotguns. In order to get guns already in possession back, Australia paid a fair price based on market values to those who turned guns in and gave legal amnesty to those who returned a gun that was illegally owned. After seizing and destroying 650,000 guns, Australia saw a decline in suicide and homicide rates and gun ownership hasn’t increased to make up the difference of guns bought back. The drop in suicide was statistically significant and the buyback may have reduced mass shootings as well. Since suicide is impulsive and not often repeated, decreasing the number of guns available meant that fewer people were committing suicides that they were less likely to survive.²⁷

Washington did a buyback program for bump stocks this past March (there is now a federal ban against bump stocks). The state gave \$150 per bump stock and used all 1,000 of their vouchers but there are still over 500,000 bump stocks in the U.S. Buybacks are voluntary but the items turned in often aren’t what is used in violent crime anyways. Oftentimes the guns are older and broken and not the newer high-caliber guns that cause the most harm. In a lot of cases the incentive to turn in the item is higher than the price of buying a new one on the market—for example Baltimore offered \$25 for high-capacity magazines that only retailed for \$9-\$15.²⁸

- To make buybacks as effective as possible, money should be offered for semi-automatic handguns, proof of residency should be required so non-local dealers don’t use the program to liquidate their inventory, and there should be community drop off locations in high risk neighborhoods.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ <https://www.vox.com/2015/8/27/9212725/australia-buyback>

²⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/21/us/bump-stock-buybacks.html>

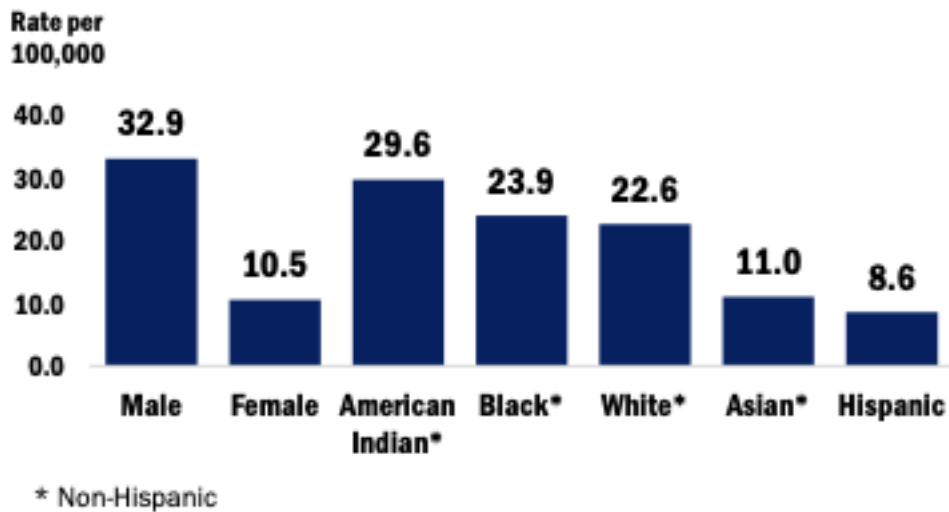
²⁹ <https://everytownresearch.org/documents/2016/06/strategies-reducing-gun-violence-american-cities.pdf/>

Appendix

Appendix 1.

“Figure ii: Overall violent death rates by sex and race/ethnicity in North Carolina, 2016.” Page iii. <https://www.injuryfreenc.ncdhhs.gov/DataSurveillance/VDRS/NCVDRS-AnnualReport-FINAL-2016.pdf>

Figure ii: Overall violent death rates by sex and race/ethnicity in North Carolina, 2016

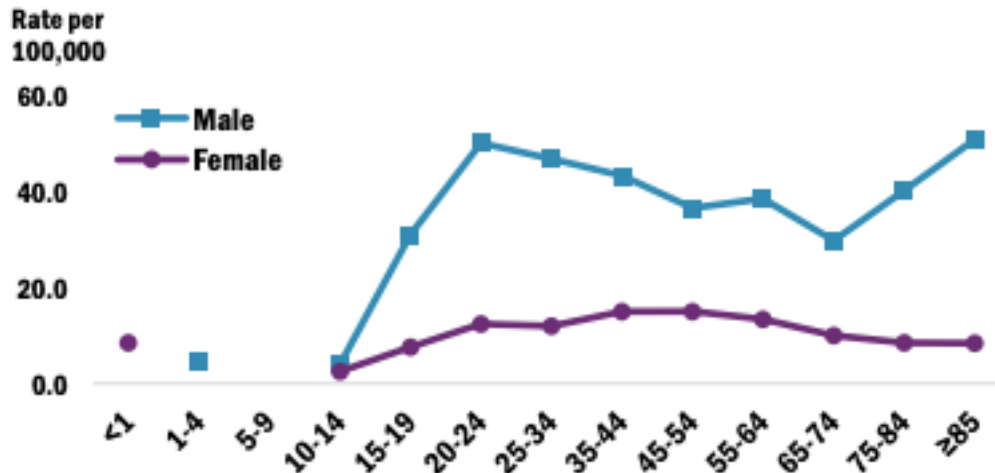


Appendix 2.

“Figure iii: Overall Violent Death Rates in North Carolina: Age Group by Sex, 2016.” Page iv.

<https://www.injuryfreenc.ncdhhs.gov/DataSurveillance/VDRS/NCVDRS-AnnualReport-FINAL-2016.pdf>

Figure iii: Overall Violent Death Rates in North Carolina: Age Group by Sex, 2016



Note: The number of deaths was too small to support a rate calculation for some age and sex groups.

Appendix 3.

“Figure iv: Suicide rates by sex and race/ethnicity in North Carolina, 2016.” & “Figure v: Suicide rates in North Carolina: Age group by sex, 2016.” Page iv.

<https://www.injuryfreenc.ncdhhs.gov/DataSurveillance/VDRS/NCVDRS-AnnualReport-FINAL-2016.pdf>

Figure iv: Suicide rates by sex and race/ethnicity in North Carolina, 2016

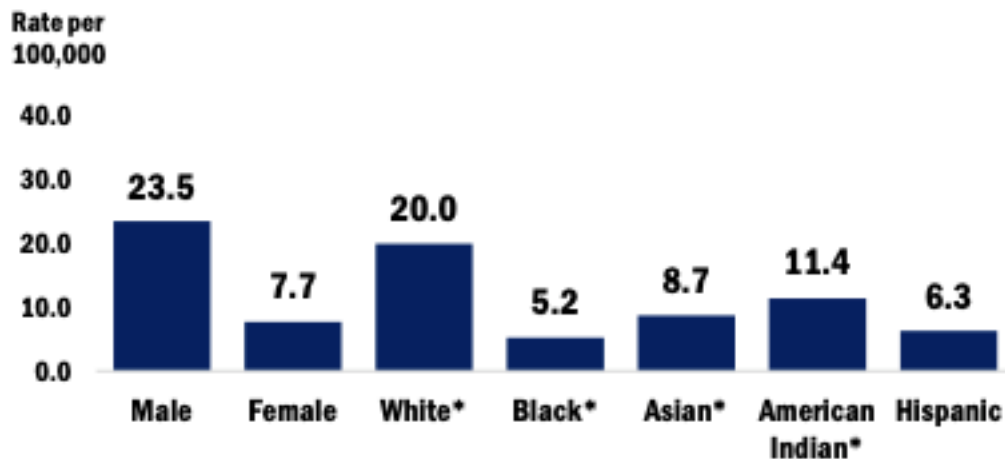
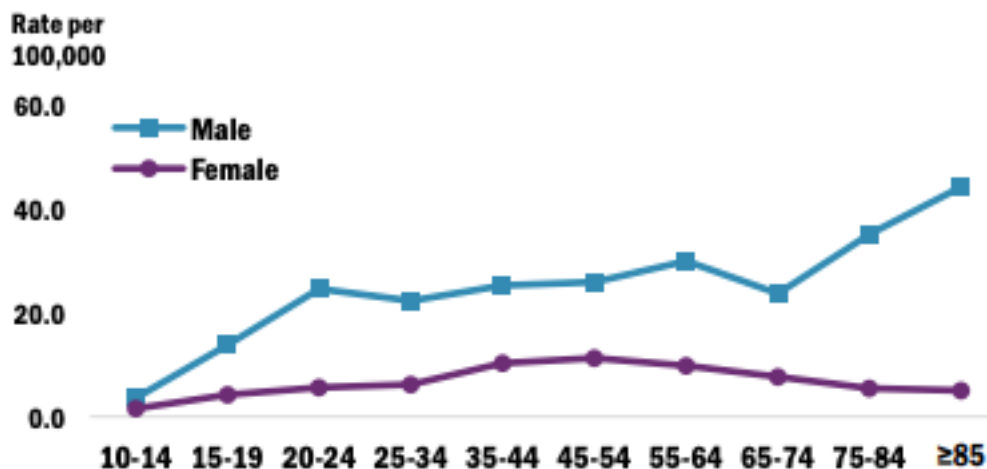


Figure v: Suicide rates in North Carolina: Age group by sex, 2016



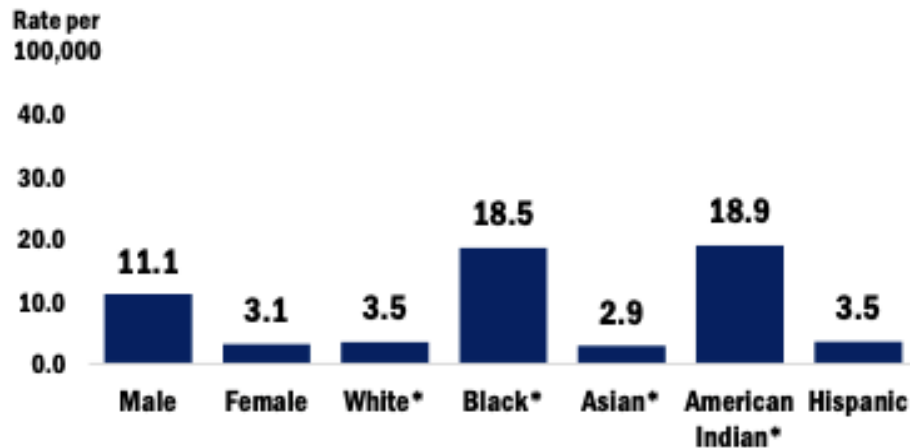
Note: All age groups had enough deaths to calculate a rate.

Appendix 4.

“Figure vi: Homicide rates by sex and race/ethnicity in North Carolina, 2016.” & “Figure vii: Homicide rates in North Carolina: Age group by sex, 2016.” Page v.

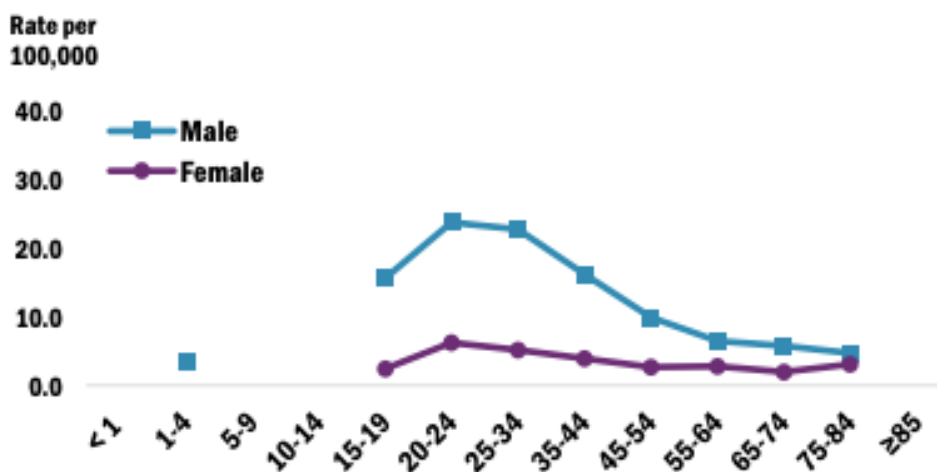
<https://www.injuryfreenc.ncdhhs.gov/DataSurveillance/VDRS/NCVDRS-AnnualReport-FINAL-2016.pdf>

Figure vi: Homicide rates by sex and race/ethnicity in North Carolina, 2016



* Non Hispanic

Figure vii: Homicide rates in North Carolina: Age group by sex, 2016



Note: The number of deaths was too small to support a rate calculation for some age and sex groups.