GUN VIOLENCE PROBLEM ANALYSIS SUMMARY REPORT

Washington, D.C.
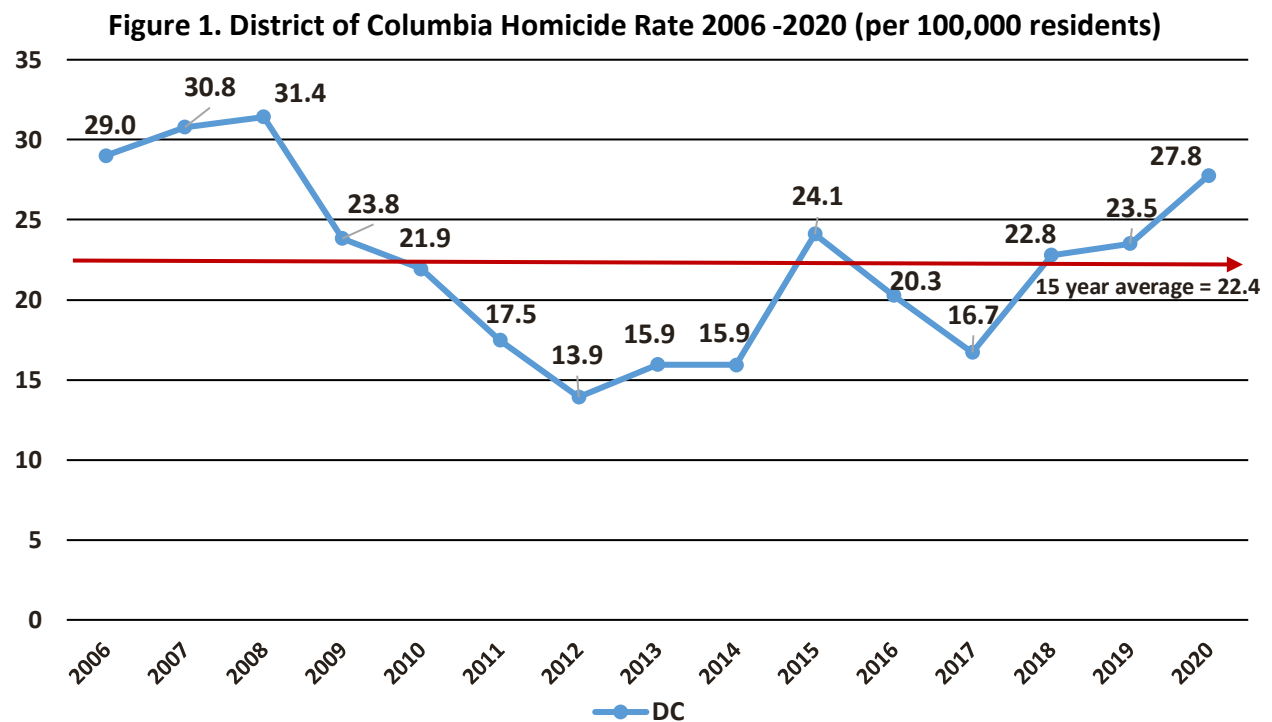
National Institute for
Criminal Justice Reform

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Washington, DC Gun Violence Problem Analysis
Summary Report

The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) partnered with the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CCJC), the District of Columbia's Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and other local law enforcement and supervision agencies to conduct a detailed analysis of shootings and homicides in Washington, DC. A Gun Violence Problem Analysis (GVPA) is a set of analytical exercises designed to support the implementation of violence reduction strategies; the GVPA is a research-based methodology used in several cities nationally.

Homicides have risen gradually in the District since 2017 and this trend continued through 2021 as DC and other U.S. cities experienced increased violence. The DC homicide rate in 2020 was 18% higher than the city's 2019 rate (Figure 1).

Figure 1. District of Columbia Homicide Rate 2006 -2020 (per 100,000 residents)

This Gun Violence Problem Analysis examined all 341 homicides occurring in the District of Columbia from January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2020, and all 522 nonfatal injury shootings that occurred from January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020. Officer-involved shootings, accidental self-inflictions, and cases of justified self-defense were excluded from our sample. The goal of this analysis is to examine the circumstances of the event itself, explore the characteristics of individuals involved, and identify the networks associated with the highest risk of violence. This

work establishes a common understanding of the local violence problem that can help guide policy, tailor interventions to those at the highest risk of violence, and inform the work of civic, community, and criminal justice leaders to reduce gun violence in The District of Columbia.

Before summarizing these findings, it is important to define several terms used throughout this report:

- **Homicide:** In this report, the term "homicide" refers to criminal homicides in which a killing was intentional or due to criminal negligence (i.e., murder or manslaughter).

- **Nonfatal Shooting:** In this report, "nonfatal shooting" refers to shooting incidents involving criminal intent in which a victim was struck by a bullet discharged from a firearm, resulting in a nonfatal injury

- **Community Supervision:** This term refers to the supervision of a defendant or convicted offender in the local community rather than in physical custody within a jail or prison. This may refer to community corrections, probation, or parole.

- **Group:** We use the term group to refer to the wide range of dynamics and structures present in criminally active street groups. Individuals at high risk for violence are likely to associate within particular groups and social networks, ranging from more highly organized, formal gangs to more loosely associated, informal neighborhood crews. Labels aside, attention to groups is important because criminally active groups, gangs, crews, and social networks tend to drive a substantial amount of violence.

Victims and Suspects of Homicides and Nonfatal Shootings

Demographics

The victims and suspects of homicides and nonfatal shootings in the District of Columbia are primarily male, Black, and between the ages of 18-34. Nearly 92 percent of victims and suspects in homicides and 88 percent of victims and suspects in nonfatal shootings were male. **About 96 percent of victims and suspects in both homicides and nonfatal shootings were Black,** despite Black residents comprising only 46 percent of the overall population in the District (Table 1). Approximately **66 percent of homicide victims/suspects and 64 percent of nonfatal shooting victim/suspects were between the ages of 18-34**, with a mean age of 29.5 and 29.8, respectively (Table 2). Across homicides and shootings, both victims and suspects are demographically similar overall.

Table 1. Homicide and Nonfatal Shooting Victims and Suspects: Sex and Race

	HOMICIDES (N=341)			NF SHOOTINGS (N=522)			DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA POPULATION
	Victims (n=354)	Suspects (n=268)	Victims & Suspects (n=622)	Victims (n=664)	Suspects (n=89)	Victims & Suspects (n=753)	
Sex							
Male	**89.0%**	**95.8%**	**91.9%**	**86.3%**	**94.4%**	**87.5%**	**47.4%**
Female	11.0%	3.8%	7.9%	13.4%	5.6%	12.5%	**52.6%**
Race							
Black	**94.1%**	**96.8%**	**95.2%**	**95.9%**	**96.6%**	**96.0%**	**46.0%**
White	1.7%	0.8%	1.3%	2.1%	-	1.9%	**37.5%**
Hispanic	3.4%	1.6%	2.7%	-	1.1%	0.1%	**10.5%**
Asian	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	1.1%	1.6%	**11.3%**
Other	0.6%	0.4%	0.5%	1.7%	1.1%	1.6%	

Table 2. Homicide and Nonfatal Shooting Victims and Suspects: Age

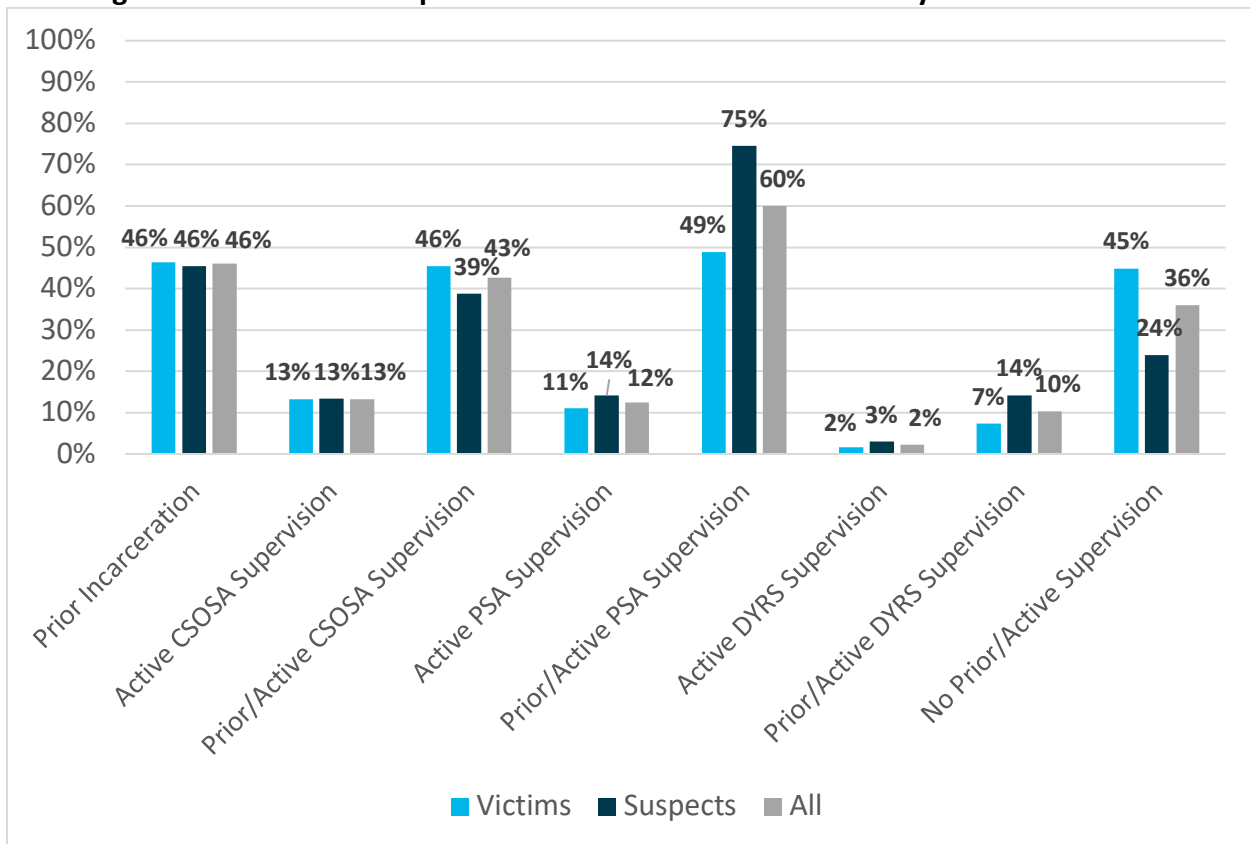|	HOMICIDES (N=341)			NF SHOOTINGS (N=522)		
	Victims (n=354)	Suspects (n=268)	Victims & Suspects (n=622)	Victims (n=664)	Suspects (n=89)	Victims & Suspects (n=753)
Age						
17 & under	7.3%	10.9%	8.8%	11.6%	9.0%	11.3%
18-24	**26.8%**	**38.7%**	**31.6%**	**30.6%**	**28.1%**	**30.3%**
25-34	**35.3%**	**31.9%**	**34.0%**	**32.8%**	**38.2%**	**33.5%**
35-44	15.3%	9.2%	12.8%	14.3%	18.0%	14.7%
45-54	7.3%	6.7%	7.1%	5.9%	3.4%	5.6%
55 & older	7.9%	2.5%	5.7%	4.5%	2.3%	4.3%
Mean Age	31.2	27.2	29.5	29.7	30.3	29.8

Criminal Justice System Involvement

A victim or suspect was noted to have prior criminal justice system involvement if they were arrested in DC or other jurisdictions, regardless of conviction, prior to their involvement in the homicide. Prior arrests and felony arrests count to unique arrest events. Offense totals count the number of unique criminal offense types, even if they occurred within the same arrest event. For example, an arrest with burglary-related charges and drug-related charges would be counted as one arrest but two offenses. Incarceration and community supervision status is presented for a) only those with prior CJ system contact and b) the entire population of victims and suspects.

Approximately 86 percent of homicide victims and suspects were known to the criminal justice system prior to the incident. Among all victims and suspects, about 46 percent had been previously incarcerated (Figure 2).

At least 23.3 percent of all homicide victims and suspects were under active supervision (i.e., CSOSA, PSA, or DYRS)[1]. **At least 64 percent of all victims and suspects had been under any prior or active supervision and at least 76% of homicide suspects had active or prior supervision.** Among all homicide victims and suspects, 13.3 percent were under active supervision by CSOSA and 12.4 percent were under active supervision by PSA. Only 2.3 percent of victims and suspects were under active DYRS supervision and only 10.3 percent had ever been under prior or active DYRS supervision. [2]

Figure 2. Victims and Suspects of Homicides: Criminal Justice System Involvement
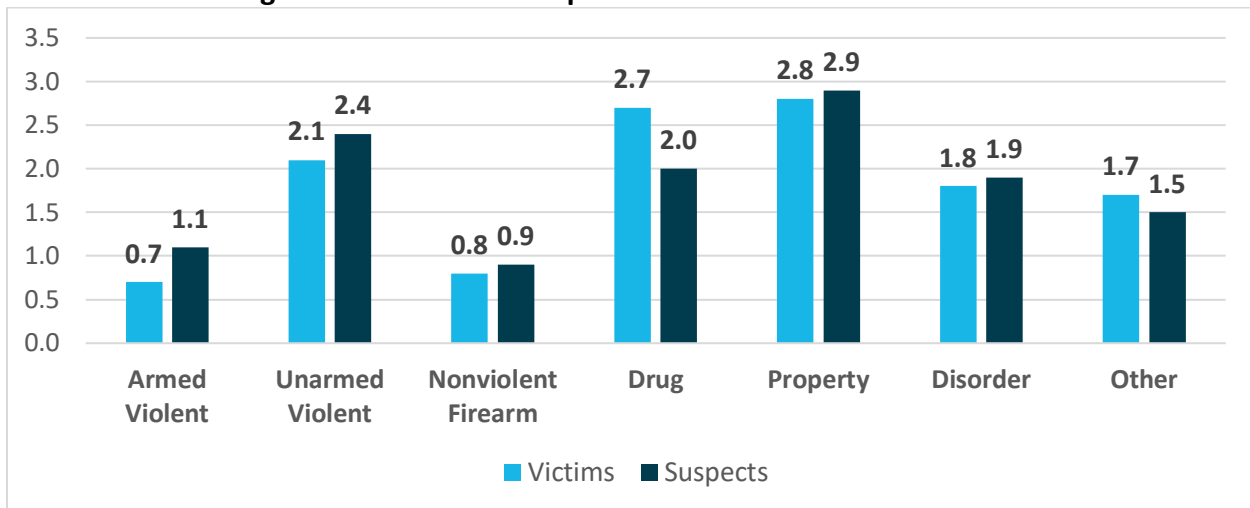

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[1] This analysis will be updated when Court Social Services Division (juvenile probation) information is provided.

[2] This report will be updated with Court Social Services Division (juvenile probation) data.

Victims and suspects were remarkably similar in terms of the average number and type of prior criminal offenses. Of those who were known to the criminal justice system prior to the homicide, most victims and suspects had been arrested for property (avg. 2.8), drug (avg. 2.4), and unarmed violent (avg. 2.3) offenses (Figure 3). **Overall, most victims and suspects with prior criminal offenses had been arrested about 11 times for about 13 different offenses by the time of the homicide. This count only refers to adult arrests and juvenile arrests were not included.**

Figure 3. Victims and Suspects of Homicides: Prior Offenses

Prior Victimization

Of the 622 unique homicide victims and suspects, 83 individuals (13.4 percent) had previously been shot or stabbed. This information was sourced from MPD police reports, so this percentage does not reflect victimization in another jurisdiction or victimization that was not reported to the police. Therefore, and based on national data, it is very likely that the rate of prior victimization is much higher.

Of those who had documented prior victimization, 98 percent of those individuals were Black males. Individuals with prior victimization were an average age of 30.6 and 66 percent of them were between the ages of 18-34. About 52 percent had been shot or stabbed within the past five years.

Incident Analysis

Homicides

This section analyzes the circumstances of homicide events from January 2019 – December 2020 (N=341). Of these, 85 percent were gun homicides. About 46 percent of homicides were confirmed to involve group members as victims, suspects, or both, and in another 26 percent of homicides, the group involvement of victims and/or suspects was unknown. Therefore, at least 46 percent and potentially up to 72 percent of homicides involved group members as victims, suspects, or both, though the exact percentage is unknown.

This analysis collected homicide circumstance information from case summaries and detective interviews (Table 3). Homicides most often occurred as a result of personal disputes between known individuals (21.1 percent). Group members were involved in a significant share of ongoing personal disputes (48.6 percent) and other personal disputes motivated by retaliation or revenge (68.8 percent). Group members were also involved in a significant share of other crimes that result in homicides like drug-related disputes (37.5 percent) and robberies (37.0 percent).

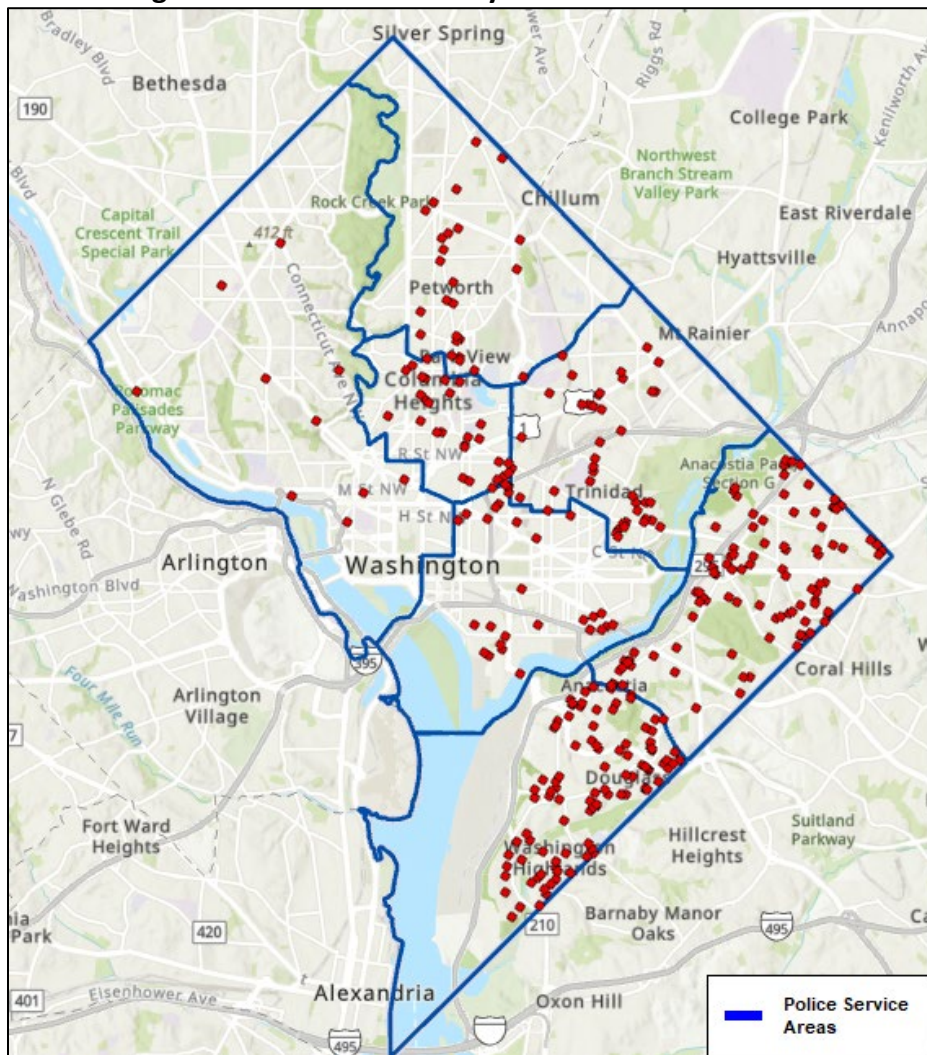### Table 3. Homicide Circumstances and Group Involvement

	All Homicide Circumstances		Proportion Group-Member Involved	
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Personal dispute	**72**	**21.1%**	**35**	**48.6%**
Group-related conflict	**38**	**11.1%**	38	100%
Instant dispute	**35**	**10.3%**	**11**	**31.4%**
Drug-related dispute	**32**	**9.4%**	**12**	**37.5**
Robbery	27	7.9%	10	37.0
Domestic violence	19	5.6%	**3**	**15.8%**
Retaliation/Revenge	16	4.7%	11	68.8%
Drug robbery	10	2.9%	2	20.0%
Mental illness	10	2.9%	2	20.0%
Internal group conflict	8	2.3%	8	100%
Child abuse/neglect	3	0.9%	-	-
Other	4	1.2%	1	25.0%
Unknown	67	19.6%	24	35.8%
TOTAL	**341**		**157**	**46.0%**

Nonfatal Shootings

Between 16-92 percent of nonfatal shootings from January 2020 – December 2020 (N=522) involved group members as victims, suspects, or both, though the exact percentage is unknown.

This analysis collected nonfatal shooting circumstance information from case summaries and data provided by detectives. Nonfatal shootings most often occurred as a result of robberies (10.2 percent) and personal disputes between known individuals (9.6 percent). Group members were involved in a significant share of drug-related disputes (27.2 percent), sudden disputes (22.2 percent), and ongoing personal disputes (20 percent)

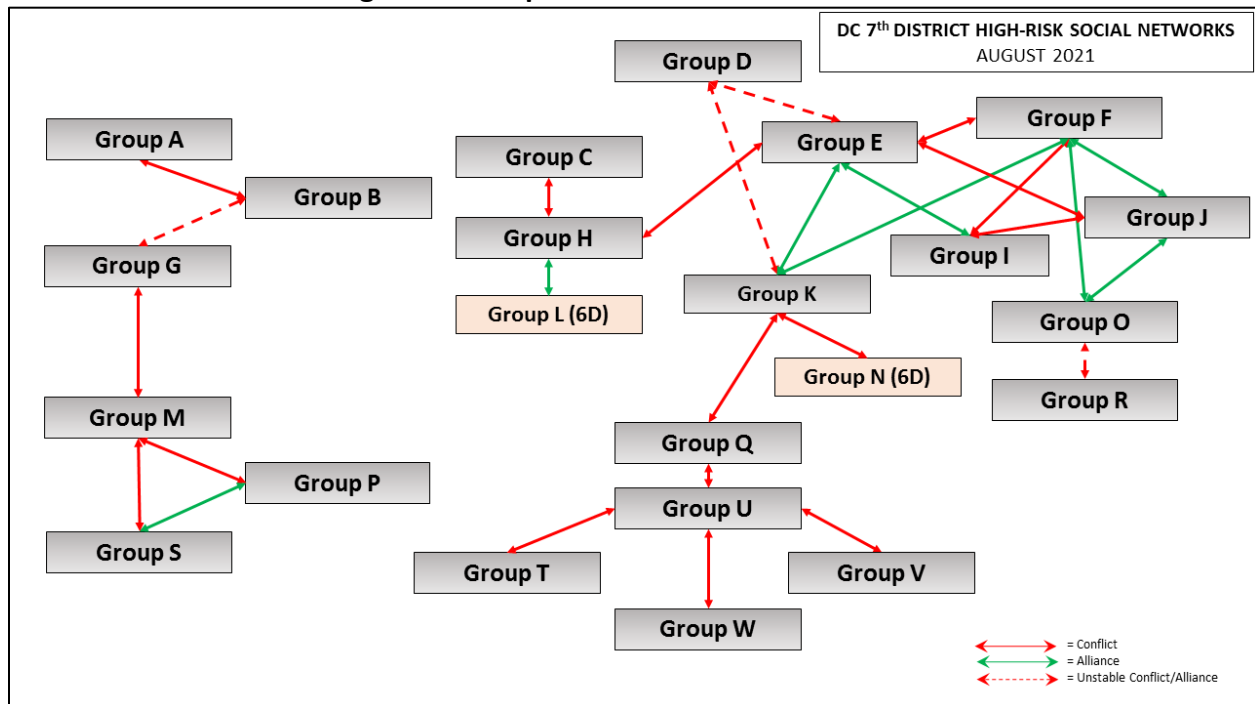**Figure 4. Homicides January 2019 – December 2020**

High-Risk Groups and Networks

In homicide events, between 31-33 percent of victims and **50-57 percent of identified suspects were group-involved.** In nonfatal shooting events, between 11-38 percent of victims and 15-60 percent of identified suspects were group-involved.

At least 91 groups were identified among the victims and/or suspects of homicides and nonfatal shootings that took place from 2019-2020. Of those, **19 groups were involved in three or more nonfatal shootings/homicides**. Across homicides, five core groups emerged as responsible for the most violent incidents.

Most groups/gangs in the District of Columbia are heavily engaged in narcotics sales. Many conflicts between groups and group members may evolve from drug-related disputes and social media conflicts. Group associations were noted to be growing more unstable and dynamic, with associated members frequently crossing districts, changing affiliations, and/or forming alliances with individual members across multiple groups. Figure 5 below is one of several, but one of the most violent, conflict-alliance diagrams developed through the GVPA process. The anonymized diagram represents real groups in Southeast DC.

Figure 5. Group Conflicts and Alliances in D7

Summary Findings and Recommendations

In Washington, DC, most gun violence is tightly concentrated on a small number of very high risk young Black male adults that share a common set of risk factors, including: involvement in street crews/groups; significant criminal justice history including prior or active community supervision; often prior victimization; and a connection to a recent shooting (within the past 12 months).

While the majority of people involved in shootings, as victim or suspect, are members or associates of street groups/gangs, the motive for the shooting may not be a traditional gang war. Often shootings are precipitated by a petty conflict over a young woman, a simple argument, or the now ubiquitous social media slight.

Exacerbating the social media incited shootings are music videos that promote certain neighborhoods or cliques that also "dis" other crews or individuals, sparking a series of comments and competing videos that escalate into shootings.

All of this is made possible and exacerbated by the wide availability of firearms and the culture of resolving conflicts through violence. This popular YouTube video provides a detailed explanation of one of DC's primary neighborhood conflicts, including disturbing images of firearms with extended magazines[3]: Deadly War In DC: Simple City vs 37th - YouTube

This small number of very high risk individuals are identifiable, their violence is predictable, and therefore it is preventable. Based on the assessment of data and the series of interviews conducted, NICJR estimates that within a year, there are at least 500 identifiable people who rise to this level of very high risk, and likely no more than 200 at any one given time. These individuals comprise approximately 60-70% of all gun violence in the District. Nealy 250 specific individuals were identified through the GVPA process but more importantly, the risk factors that make someone at very high risk has been identified in order to develop an on-going process to focus intervention efforts on those at very high risk.

Recommendations:
NICJR usually provides at least three to five detailed recommendations in a Gun Violence Problem Analysis. While one primary recommendation is included below, this recommendation and others will be included in a forthcoming Gun Violence Reduction Strategic Plan that NICJR is working on with CJCC, District government agencies, and community stakeholders.

Primary Recommendation:
The District should establish a clear citywide strategy that focuses intentional, structured, and intensive intervention efforts on those individuals identified as being at very high risk of being involved in gun violence. This strategy requires frequent and regular assessment of recent

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[3] While we regard this video to be highly sensationalized and grossly profiting off of senseless violence, it does accurately portray one of the District's most violent street conflicts.

shootings and identification of individuals likely to retaliate based on the findings of this report. The strategy also requires dedicated and high quality management as well as continual quality improvement and data driven performance management.