WEST ATHENS-WESTMONT CALIFORNIA

THE COST OF GUN VIOLENCE

THE DIRECT COST TO TAXPAYERS
South Los Angeles has historically experienced very high rates of gun violence, but had seen a steep decline in shootings in the years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Like most urban jurisdictions around the country, South Los Angeles had a sharp spike in homicides in 2020.

Glamorized and exploited by countless movies and television shows, the portrayal of South Los Angeles has been one of gangs, drugs, guns, and police corruption, and violence. While exaggerated on all fronts, these challenges certainly exist.

Within South Los Angeles is the community of West Athens-Westmont, an unincorporated area in Los Angeles County, adjacent to Inglewood. West Athens-Westmont’s nearly 34,000 residents are about half Black, half Latino. As an unincorporated area that is not the responsibility of the City of Los Angeles and seemingly forgotten by the County, West Athens-Westmont has suffered from decades of underinvestment. West Athens-Westmont residents have experienced chronic violence, injustice, and economic disenfranchisement.

West Athens-Westmont is policed by the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. The Department has come under fire in the last few years, with the launch of a California Department of Justice investigation as well as members of the County Board of Supervisors calling for the elected Sheriff to resign. Some of that controversy is due to two deadly shootings of young men in West Athens-Westmont.

In May 2020, Sheriff deputies shot and killed 18-year-old Robert Avitia, firing 19 rounds at him. Then in September, 29-year-old Dijon Kizzee was stopped for an alleged code violation while riding his bicycle. According to witnesses, Sheriff deputies shot Kizzee 15 times, even after he fell to the ground. The killing of Kizzee sparked nightly protests in West Athens-Westmont. In addition to the police shootings, West Athens-Westmont experienced a major increase in gun violence in 2020, harkening back to the 1990’s when violence was rampant.

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When someone is shot in West Athens-Westmont, as in jurisdictions throughout the country, there is an immediate, multifaceted, and very expensive response from an array of government agencies. The Los Angeles

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Once a victim has been transported to the hospital, the cost of the Trauma Unit, surgery, and rehabilitation, are exorbitant. Costs can range from $50k to $179k per incident. With more than 2/3 of gunshot victims either uninsured or on Medi-Cal, the Cost of Violence includes a tremendous strain on the County’s hospital network.

Police investigation, a trial or court process that includes prosecution and defense costs, and court staff, make up the many costs of the court process in injury shooting and homicide cases. Due to the consequences of a homicide conviction, these cases often go to trial. Sometimes these cases involve multiple suspects with multiple court dates and separate trials. From the time of arrest, court proceedings in an injury shooting or homicide case can take two years.

The response to a severe injury shooting or homicide scene usually includes a heavy police presence, Fire/EMT response, along with medical transport. According to officials with the LA County Sheriff’s Department, up to 16 officers, including Patrol, Homicide Unit, and CSI investigators, respond to a typical homicide shooting.

Incarceration accounts for a large portion of the costs once a suspect is arrested. A stay in the LA County Jail system costs on average $143 per day. Suspects can remain in the County system for two years until trial, sentencing, and placement into the State prison system. The California State prison system costs $222 per day per day; incarceration costs of individuals convicted of attempted murder or homicide range from $637k to over $1.9 million.

The majority of these costs are covered by California’s Victim Compensation program. Costs can range from $7k to $35k per victim, and include burial expenses, lost wages for a year, medical expenses, and counseling. Other costs in this category include County services, including social services and autopsy costs, and the long-term cost of families losing a financial contributor.

California has a State Income Tax of 7.75% along with a combined State/Local Sales tax of 9.5%. When an injury shooting or homicide occurs, the State and county/ies of residence loses the ability to collect taxes (both income and sales tax) from the incarcerated suspects and homicide victims. Each incident can represent lost tax revenue of a minimum of two individuals, from 9 to 25 years.
Offi...a long incarceration period. When there are multiple victims and/or multiple suspects, these efforts multiply for a single shooting incident.

These are just some of costs of each injury shooting and homicide in West Athens-Westmont. The National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR), in partnership with the Los Angeles County Office of Violence Prevention (OVP), was commissioned by the California Wellness Foundation to conduct a detailed analysis of the Cost of Gun Violence in West Athens-Westmont. NICJR and the OVP tracked the direct costs of each shooting and have deliberately used low-end estimates for each expense. Additionally, not included in this assessment are productivity losses relating to victim(s) or suspect(s) who were working at the time of the shooting. Nationally, those costs have been estimated at an additional $1-2 million for each shooting incident. Therefore, the calculated per homicide shooting cost of $2.5 million in West Athens-Westmont is a conservative estimate; the real cost is likely even higher.

In the past five years, West Athens-Westmont has had an approximate average of eight homicides per year, which result in an annual expense to taxpayers of more than $20 million.

If West Athens-Westmont could reduce its gun violence rate by just 20%, that could result in a combined government savings of $4 million every year.

Officials in West Athens-Westmont and Los Angeles County should consider greater upfront investments in gun violence reduction. Even modest investments in effective gun violence intervention strategies would reduce shootings, save lives, and generate significant fiscal savings.
GREATER COMMUNITY COST OF GUN VIOLENCE

In addition to the direct financial costs that taxpayers bear the burden of, community members in neighborhoods where rates of violence are highest, suffer from social impacts of trauma, toxic-stress, disinvestment, and community tension.

Increased levels of violence and the trauma it produces also leads to community members being desensitized. The normalization or even expectation of violence can lead to high rates of gun possession, tension, and the resolving of minor disputes with guns.

The public health approach to violence also proves that like disease, violence is a contagion and can breed in areas of social dysfunction. This is where we get the axioms hurt people, hurt people and that violence begets violence. They are not just clever clichés but based in science.

The National Institutes of Health, in its paper, “The Contagious Spread of Violence Among US Adolescents Through Social Networks" found that, “Contagious diseases and violence tend to cluster in similar ways. A cluster is an ‘aggregation of cases of a disease that are closely grouped in time and place.’ There are geographic “hot spots” for contagious diseases, such as the 2015 measles outbreak linked to Disneyland in California involving clusters of unvaccinated children. Likewise, there are geographic hot spots for violent crime on specific streets and in specific neighborhoods.” (Bond and Bushman, 2017).

Children are especially affected by the impact of violence around them. Groundbreaking research known as the ACEs study – Adverse Childhood Experiences – revealed that children who have traumatic experiences when they are young have significantly higher rates of poor health outcomes as they grow older. Experiencing violence, witnessing violence, and having close friends or family members victimized by violence produces trauma and vicarious or second-hand trauma. Studies have proven that the brain function of young people who experience trauma can be negatively affected, and that trauma can cause depression, behavioral challenges, academic disruption, and delinquency.

The direct financial burden of gun violence documented in this report also does not include the loss of resources in communities with high violence rates. Businesses, recreational centers, community events and festivals, access to fresh produce, and other resources usually flee from neighborhoods with high rates of violence.

A 2019 study conducted by the Controller for the City of Philadelphia examined the impact of gun violence on property values and corresponding tax assessments. “Our results indicate that a single homicide lowers sale prices by 2.3 percent in the immediate neighborhood (within 0.75 miles of the homicide),” states the “Report on the Economic Impact of Homicides” (Rhynhart, 2019).

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The true governmental cost of gun violence to the County and State.

**Homicide Cost**
- CRIME SCENE: $13,278
- HOSPITAL: $50,400
- CRIMINAL JUSTICE: $258,375
- INCARCERATION: $1,972,059
- VICTIM SUPPORT: $66,356
- LOST REVENUE: $163,750

**Total Cost Based on Two Suspects:** $4.8M

**Per Homicide Shooting:** $2.5M per one suspect

**Injury Shooting Cost**
- CRIME SCENE: $8,517
- HOSPITAL: $123,600
- CRIMINAL JUSTICE: $35,240
- INCARCERATION: $672,811
- VICTIM SUPPORT: $40,828
- LOST REVENUE: $32,750

**Total Cost Based on Two Suspects:** $1.6M

**Per Injury Shooting:** $913k per one suspect

- **Police Response:** $6,444
- **Scene Cleanup:** $2,500
- **Fire/EMT:** $2,927
- **Ambulance:** $1,407
- **EMR/Trauma Center:** $5,200
- **Gunshot Surgery:** $45,200
- **DA & Public Defender:** $219,139
- **Court Process:** $22,836
- **Pre-Trial Incarceration:** $104,390
- **Prison Placement:** $1,867,669
- **Corner's Office:** $2,500
- **Income & Sales Tax Revenue:** $163,750 (both suspect & murder victim)
- **Total Cost Based on Two Suspects:** $4.8M
- **Per Homicide Shooting:** $2.5M per one suspect
- **Police Investigation:** $16,400
- **Victim of Crimes:** $32,800
- **Receiving Social Service Benefits:** $31,056 (one year support for two families)
- **Injury Shooting:** $32,750 per one suspect
- **DA & Public Defender:** $3,114
- **Court Process:** $3,114
- **Pre-Trial Incarceration:** $568,421
- **Prison Placement:** $1,972,059
- **Per Injury Shooting:** $913k per one suspect
- **Victim of Crimes:** $32,750
- **Receiving Social Service Benefits:** $15,528 (one year support for one family)
- **Income & Sales Tax Revenue:** $32,750
- **Total Cost Based on Two Suspects:** $1.6M

**Notes:**
- All costs are based on the assumption of two suspects per shooting.
- Costs include police response, fire/EMT services, emergency room/trauma center, criminal justice, incarceration, victim support, and lost revenue.
## Data Sources

### Police Response
- Interviews with top officials of the LA County Sheriff's Department
- LA County government salaries (Link)

### Fire/EMT Transport
- L.A. Fire Department (Link)
- LA County EMS contract (Link)

### Scene Clean Up
- Aftermath
- Steri-Clean

### Notes
- Initial police response to a homicide scene typically includes 4-5 Patrol, 1 Sergeant, 3 Gang Unit, 2 Detectives, 2 CSI, and 1 Forensic tech. They remain on the scene up to 8 hours.
- Initial police response to an injury shooting scene typically includes 3 patrol, 2 Detectives, 1 Sergeant and 1 CSI tech. They remain on the scene from 2-4 hours.

### Subject: Police Investigation
- Comparative interviews with police departments across the nation.
- Interviews with top officials of the LA County Sheriff’s Department
- LA County government salaries (Link)

### Notes
- Investigations typically can extend over a two year period. An average of 20 hours is spent on attempted murder cases and 400 hours for homicides cases.
- $41/hr (Detective) x 10 hours = $410
- $41/hr (Detective) x 200 hours = $8,200

### Subject: Pre-Trial Incarceration
- Total Sheriff budget (Link)
- County Jail budget (Link)

### Notes
- Total Sheriff budget = $3.3 billion
- County jail budget (27% of total) = $890 million
- Average daily population of County jail = 17,070
- Average Daily Cost Per Inmate: $143/day

### Subject: Victim of Crimes
- Crime Victims Compensation Program (Link)

### Notes
- Homicide Victim:
  - $7,500 for burial expenses
  - $400/wk x 1 year = $20,800 for victim lost wages
  - $4,500 for family grief counseling
  - Total = $32,800
- Injury Shooting Victim:
  - $400/wk x 1 year = $20,800
  - $4,500 mental health
  - Total = $25,300

### Subject: Victim Support
- Eligibility and Benefit Amounts in State Cash Assistance Programs: TANF, SNAP (Link)

### Medical Examiner's Office
- National Average of Medical Examiner's Autopsy (Link)
- Cost per autopsy = $2,500

### Subject: Lost Tax Revenue
- Spring 2019 Income Tax (Sales Tax)

### Notes
- State income tax = 7.75%
- State/Local Sales tax = 9.5%. (Calif 6%, County 3.5%)