

“Don’t Shoot, I Want to Grow Up”: Findings of a Multi-City Youth-led Health Assessment

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Please note: In addition to educational credentials, all co-authors in this publication have relevant and unique, expertise, knowledge, lived experiences, and leadership positions as changemakers in their communities.

What Is the Problem?

- Youth of color are disproportionately exposed to toxic conditions in their living and social environments.
- Youth of color have been perceived as troublemakers and passive recipients and participants of social and health services.
- Youth of color have not been engaged meaningfully in leadership positions throughout all stages of research, program planning, or local health and community development initiatives.

What Is the Purpose of this Study/Review?

- In 2016, university researchers partnered with grassroots leaders and adult staff at community-based organizations across five U.S. cities to engage youth of color in the design and implementation of a multi-city youth-led health assessment.
- Engage youth meaningfully as co-researchers in all stages of the research and health assessments.

What are the Findings?

- Youth researchers across the five sites identified relations with police as a major risk factor to the health and well-being of youth.
- Antagonizing relationships with police and increased surveillance was exacerbated by gentrification in public spaces where youth used to congregate and limited youth’s access to resources and stress coping strategies.
- In addition to individual behaviors and factors that contributed to youth feeling stressed or unsafe, youth identified the role of structural-level factors such as racism, violence, and police brutality in aggravating youth’s health and well-being.

Who Should Care Most?

- Academic scholars, researchers, and policymakers interested in designing youth and community-based applied research and policy related to health.
- Community-based organizations working with youth and academic institutions interested in amplifying youth voices in health promotion strategies and initiatives to achieve racial justice.

Recommendations for Action

- Hire, train, and partner with youth as co-researchers to design health interventions that reflect a critical understanding of their lived experiences and realities.
- Consider sociopolitical climate and relevant contextual factors when understanding the health and well-being of youth.