

# Strong neighborhood ties can help reduce gun violence

December 22 2014, by Karen N. Peart

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The bonds that tie a neighborhood together can help shield community members from gun violence, according to new findings by Yale School of Medicine researchers in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholars Program (RWJF CSP). The team presented their work Dec. 19 at the Institute of Medicine's Means of Violence workshop.

"Violence results in chronic community-level trauma and stress, and undermines health, capacity, and productivity in these [neighborhoods](#),"

said lead author Dr. Emily Wang, assistant professor of internal medicine at Yale School of Medicine. "Police and government response to the problem has focused on the victim or the criminal. Our study focuses on empowering communities to combat the effects of living with chronic and persistent gun violence."

Wang and her colleagues studied neighborhoods in New Haven, Connecticut with high crime statistics. They trained 17 [community members](#) in the Newhallville and West River neighborhoods in research and survey methods to gather data from about 300 of their own neighbors. This community-based participatory research—conducted during summer 2014—helped to build local engagement within these neighborhoods.

Over half of neighbors surveyed knew none or a few of their neighbors. Almost all of the study participants had heard a gun shot, two-thirds of them had a friend or family member hurt by a violent act, and nearly 60% had a friend or family member killed.

"Our study is a community-based and community-driven intervention to prevent and reduce the negative effects of gun violence in the communities affected by high rates of gun violence by strengthening social ties, bonds, resilience, or in other words, by 'putting neighbor back in hood,'" said Ann Greene, community research liaison for the RWJF CSP at Yale and chair of the West River Community Resilience Team.

Wang said preliminary findings show that social cohesion, or the strength of bonds between neighbors, is inversely associated with exposure to gun violence, and that a multi-sector approach that includes community members is required to address and prevent [gun violence](#).

"Disaster preparedness principles like community resilience can be used to improve a community's ability to band together and use resources to

respond to, withstand, recover from, and even grow from bad events," said Wang. "Core components of these principles include social and economic well being, physical and psychological health, effective risk communication, social connectedness, and integration with organizations."

Newhallville and West River community resilience team leaders are working with the Yale investigators to share data with their communities and request input about ways to strengthen neighborhood social ties. The team will partner with other organizations and city leadership to strategically implement community-member suggested input on ways to improve the neighborhoods.

Provided by Yale University

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