

AOTA's Societal Statement on Youth Violence

Youth violence is the second-leading cause of death among all youth aged 10–24 years, with 82% of these deaths being firearm related (Blum & Qureshi, 2011; David-Ferdon & Simon, 2014). Youth violence is also the primary cause of death among African American youth (David-Ferdon & Simon, 2014).

Acts of violence include bullying, verbal threats, physical assault, domestic abuse, the use of objects or weapons to harm another, and gunfire. Premature death, disability, and academic failure occur due to the violent activity that surrounds many American youth.

Risk factors that contribute to youth violence include a history of being abused or abusing others, school truancy, poor time use, exposure to crime, mental illness, drug and alcohol use, gang involvement, access to guns or other weapons, and the absence of familial and social support structures.

Rising physical and mental health care costs, decreased property values, strain on law enforcement and the juvenile justice system, as well as social services disruption are indicators of the impact that youth violence has had on the health of communities, as well as on individual participation (David-Ferdon & Simon, 2014). The severity of this issue has forced policymakers, health care providers, educators, parents, community members, and youth to recognize, examine, and attempt to alter social conditions.

Occupational therapy practitioners work directly with youth to design effective interventions that promote engagement and participation in productive and meaningful occupations and the use of healthy habits and routines (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2016). Occupational therapy practitioners can work with individuals and communities to prevent and respond to youth violence. Furthermore, practitioners play a critical role to promote the overall physical and mental health and well-being of youth. Practitioners work toward understating the occupational nature of youth violence, create collaborations, and advocate for social change. In response to the challenges faced by youth who have experienced violence, AOTA strives to prepare occupational therapy practitioners to address the mental health needs of children and adolescents across all practice settings.

References

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