

Behavioral health and violence prevention in the United States: A systematic review of evidence-based community intervention strategies

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Abstract

Behavioral health challenges and violence remain significant and interconnected public health concerns in the United States, affecting individuals and communities across diverse socioeconomic contexts. This study conducts a systematic review to synthesize evidence on community-based intervention strategies that address both behavioral health and violence prevention. Following Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, a comprehensive search was conducted across major academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. A total of 179 records were identified, of which 24 studies met predefined inclusion criteria after screening and eligibility assessment. Data were extracted and analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach to identify key intervention types, implementation strategies, and outcomes. The findings indicate that community-based mental health interventions, multi-component violence prevention programs, and integrated public health approaches are effective in reducing risk factors and improving behavioral and social outcomes. Additionally, the review highlights the importance of interagency collaboration, culturally responsive practices, and data-driven policy frameworks in enhancing intervention effectiveness. Despite promising evidence, challenges such as funding constraints, implementation variability, and limited standardization persist. This review contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive synthesis of evidence-based, community-centered strategies and proposes an integrated framework for advancing behavioral health and violence prevention efforts in the United States.

Keywords: Behavioral Health; Violence Prevention; Community-Based Interventions; Public Health Approach; Integrated Systems

1. Introduction

Behavioral health issues and violence continue to represent major social and public health challenges in the United States, affecting individuals, families, and communities across diverse socioeconomic contexts (Fazel et al., 2023). Increasing rates of community violence, substance abuse, and mental health disorders have placed considerable strain on public safety systems and healthcare institutions (Castillo et al., 2020). Traditional responses, often centered on law enforcement or clinical treatment alone, have proven insufficient in addressing the complex and interrelated nature of these issues. As a result, there is growing recognition of the need for integrated, preventive, and community-centered approaches that address both behavioral health and violence at their roots (Slutkin and Ransford, 2020).

Studies have shown that, community-based intervention strategies have emerged as critical mechanisms for addressing these challenges by targeting underlying social determinants such as trauma, poverty, inequality, and limited access to resources (Kingston et al., 2021; Bonne et al., 2021). These interventions operate within the environments where individuals live and interact, thereby enabling more context-specific, culturally responsive, and sustainable solutions (Ajayi and Thompson, 2025). Evidence suggests that programs focused on community engagement, early intervention,

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and social support systems can significantly reduce risk factors associated with violence and improve behavioral health outcomes (Ajayi and Thompson, 2025; Castillo et al., 2020). Similarly, community-level violence prevention initiatives, including youth engagement programs and public health-oriented models, have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing crime and promoting social cohesion (Kingston et al., 2021; Cavanaugh et al., 2021).

In recent times, the growing conceptualization of violence as a public health issue has further reinforced the importance of prevention-oriented and evidence-based strategies. Approaches such as the Cure Violence model and other community-driven frameworks emphasize interruption of violence transmission, behavioral change, and community empowerment (Ransford et al., 2025; Slutkin and Ransford, 2020). These models highlight the role of behavioral health interventions, including trauma-informed care and mental health support, in mitigating cycles of violence and promoting long-term community resilience. Furthermore, systematic reviews have shown that integrating behavioral health services with violence prevention programs enhances the effectiveness of both domains, particularly among high-risk populations such as youth and underserved communities (Darawshy et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2021).

Despite the growing body of research, there remains a need for a comprehensive synthesis of evidence-based community intervention strategies that simultaneously address behavioral health and violence prevention within the United States. Existing studies often examine these areas in isolation, limiting the ability to develop cohesive and scalable policy frameworks (Fazel et al., 2023; Kovalenko et al., 2022). Additionally, variations in program design, implementation, and evaluation create challenges in identifying best practices and translating research findings into actionable policy recommendations.

Therefore, this systematic review aims to examine and synthesize existing literature on evidence-based community intervention strategies that address behavioral health and violence prevention in the United States. The study seeks to identify effective models, assess their impact on community outcomes, and highlight key factors that contribute to successful implementation. By doing so, this review contributes to the development of integrated, data-driven, and policy-relevant frameworks that support improved public health, enhanced community safety, and sustainable violence prevention efforts.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Search Strategy

A systematic literature search was conducted across major databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect, to identify studies on behavioral health and violence prevention in the United States. Key search terms such as “behavioral health,” “violence prevention,” and “community-based interventions” were combined using Boolean operators, alongside related terms like “mental health services,” “trauma-informed care,” and “public health approaches.” Additional searches refined relevant combinations to improve accuracy. Grey literature and policy reports were also consulted, and reference lists of selected studies were manually screened. Retrieved articles were first assessed by titles and abstracts, followed by full-text screening based on predefined inclusion criteria to ensure relevance and quality.

2.2. Eligibility: Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

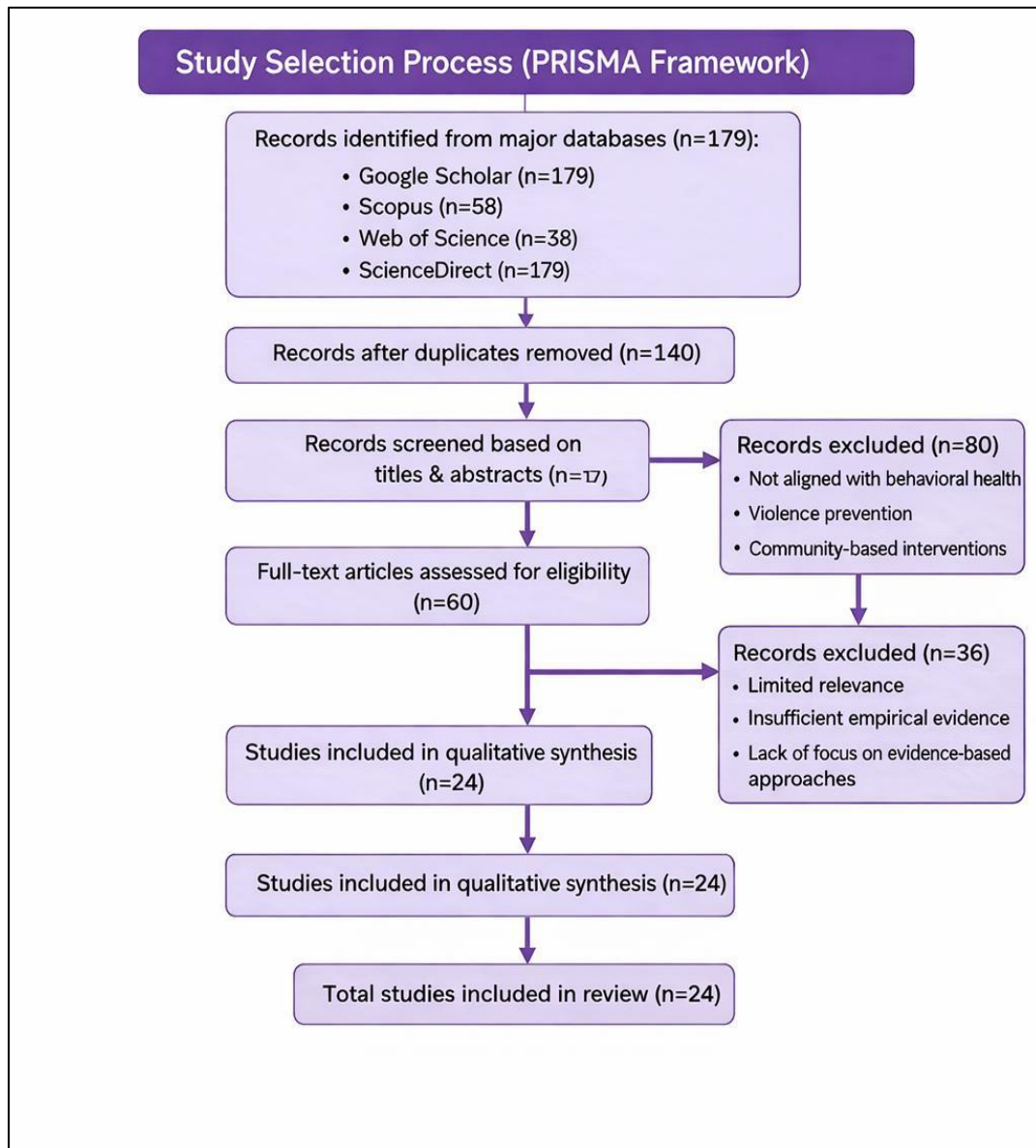
To ensure consistency and relevance, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Studies were included if they focused on behavioral health and/or violence prevention, emphasized community-based or social intervention strategies, presented evidence-based findings or systematic reviews, and were conducted within or directly relevant to the United States.

Studies were excluded if they were not directly related to community interventions, lacked empirical or evidence-based analysis, or fell outside the scope of behavioral health and violence prevention. These criteria ensured that only methodologically sound and relevant studies were included in the review.

2.3. Study Selection process

The study selection process was conducted systematically in accordance with PRISMA guidelines to ensure transparency and methodological rigor. An initial database search identified 179 records related to behavioral health and violence prevention in the United States. After removing 39 duplicate entries, 140 studies remained for screening. These studies were first assessed based on titles and abstracts, leading to the exclusion of 80 articles that did not align with the study’s focus on community-based intervention strategies. The remaining 60 studies underwent full-text review to evaluate their relevance and methodological quality against the predefined inclusion criteria. During this

stage, 36 studies were excluded due to limited relevance or insufficient empirical evidence. Ultimately, 24 studies met all eligibility criteria and were included in the final qualitative synthesis. These studies provide a comprehensive basis for examining evidence-based community intervention strategies targeting behavioral health and violence prevention.



Source: Author's Construct 2026.

Figure 1 Visual representation of study identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion

2.4. Data Extraction and Analysis

A structured data extraction process was employed to systematically collect relevant information from the included studies. Key data elements extracted included study objectives, intervention type, target population, study design, key findings, and implications for behavioral health and violence prevention. This process ensured consistency and facilitated comparison across studies.

The extracted data were analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and relationships across the literature. Findings were grouped into major thematic areas, including community-based mental health interventions, violence prevention strategies, and integrated public health approaches. This analytical method enabled a comprehensive interpretation of evidence and supported the development of an integrated framework for community-based intervention strategies in the United States.

2.5. Quality Appraisal of Included Studies

To enhance the rigor of the review, a quality appraisal of the included studies was conducted. Each study was assessed based on criteria such as methodological rigor, clarity of research design, relevance to the study objectives, and strength of evidence. Table 1 below outlines the quality appraisal of all included studies.

Table 1 Quality Appraisal of Included Studies

Author(s)	Study Design	Relevance to Study	Methodological Rigor	Overall Quality
Ajayi and Thompson (2025)	Review	High	Moderate	High
Bonne et al. (2021)	Evidence-based Review	High	High	High
Castillo et al. (2020)	Review	High	High	High
Cavanaugh et al. (2021)	Review	High	High	High
Chapman et al. (2024)	Empirical (Cost Analysis)	High	High	High
Dara shies et al. (2020)	Systematic Review	High	High	High
Egbuna and Cudjoe-Mensah (2025a)	Review	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Egbuna and Cudjoe-Mensah (2025b)	Case Study	High	Moderate	High
Egbuna et al. (2025)	Empirical/Assessment Study	High	Moderate	High
Evans et al. (2021)	Systematic Review	High	High	High
Fagan (2024)	Conceptual/Theoretical	Moderate	High	High
Fazel et al. (2023)	Umbrella Review	High	High	High
Gordon et al. (2025)	Empirical Study	High	Moderate	High
Kingston et al. (2026)	Empirical Study	High	High	High
Kingston et al. (2021)	Empirical/Implementation Study	High	High	High
Kovalenko et al. (2022)	Systematic Review of Reviews	High	High	High
Messman et al. (2024)	Systematic Review	High	High	High
Powell et al. (2020)	Systematic Review	High	High	High
Ransford et al. (2025)	Systematic Review	High	High	High
Rollman et al. (2024)	Systematic Review	High	High	High
Sibo and Cudjoe-Mensah (2025a)	Empirical Study	High	Moderate	High
Sibo and Cudjoe-Mensah (2025b)	Empirical Study	High	Moderate	High
Sibo et al. (2025)	Literature Review	High	Moderate	High
Slotkin and Ransford (2020)	Conceptual/Theoretical	High	High	High

The quality appraisal of the included studies indicates that the majority of the selected literature demonstrates high methodological rigor and strong relevance to the research objectives. Systematic reviews, umbrella reviews, and empirical studies dominate the dataset, providing robust and credible evidence for analysis. While a few studies, particularly conceptual and case-based research, exhibit moderate methodological rigor; they offer valuable contextual and theoretical insights that complement empirical findings. Overall, the appraisal confirms that the included studies provide a reliable and comprehensive evidence base for examining behavioral health and violence prevention through community-based intervention strategies in the United States.

2.6. Quality Considerations

To ensure the reliability of the findings, only peer-reviewed and credible academic sources were included in the review. Emphasis was placed on studies employing rigorous methodologies, including systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and evidence-based program evaluations. Additionally, consistency in findings across multiple studies was used as an indicator of validity.

3. Results

3.1. Overview of Synthesized Findings

The systematic review of the 24 selected studies reveals consistent and compelling evidence supporting the effectiveness of community-based, multi-component, and integrated intervention strategies in addressing behavioral health challenges and violence prevention in the United States. Across the reviewed literature, interventions that simultaneously address behavioral health needs and the broader social determinants of health such as trauma, poverty, inequality, and limited access to resources demonstrate significantly greater effectiveness than isolated or reactive approaches.

The findings are synthesized into three interrelated thematic areas: community-based behavioral health interventions, violence prevention strategies, and integrated system approaches. A recurring pattern across these themes is the importance of early intervention, active community engagement, interagency collaboration, and the use of data-driven strategies to enhance program effectiveness and sustainability.

3.2. Summary of Key Studies and Findings

To provide a structured overview of the selected studies, Table 2 summarizes key characteristics, including the focus area, type of intervention, and major findings. This table highlights the diversity of approaches while also revealing common trends in outcomes across the literature.

Table 2 Summary of Key Studies and Findings

Author(s)	Focus Area	Type of Intervention	Key Findings
Ajayi and Thompson (2025)	Mental Health	Community-based support systems	Improved access to care and reduced disparities
Castillo et al. (2020)	Mental Health	Community interventions	Enhanced social equity and mental well-being
Gordon et al. (2025)	Crisis Intervention	Culturally competent programs	Improved outcomes in underserved communities
Kingston et al. (2021)	Youth Violence	Community prevention systems	Reduced youth violence through coordinated efforts
Bonne et al. (2021)	Gun Violence	Community-based programming	Decreased firearm-related violence
Evans et al. (2021)	Violence and Substance Use	Prevention programs	Addressing co-occurring risks improves outcomes
Kovalenko et al. (2022)	Violence Prevention	Multi-component interventions	Integrated programs are more effective
Messman et al. (2024)	School Violence	Reporting systems	Early detection reduces violent incidents
Powell et al. (2020)	Trauma Intervention	Evidence-based trauma care	Reduced long-term behavioral risks
Ransford et al. (2025)	Public Health Model	Cure Violence approach	Violence reduction through behavior change

The studies summarized in Table 2 collectively demonstrate that interventions grounded in community engagement and supported by evidence-based frameworks consistently produce positive behavioral and social outcomes. Notably, these studies emphasize prevention-oriented strategies rather than reactive responses, reinforcing the shift toward public health approaches in addressing violence.

3.3. Categorization of Intervention Strategies

To deepen the analysis, the reviewed studies were further categorized based on intervention types, key components, target populations, and reported outcomes. Table 3 presents this classification, enabling a clearer understanding of how different strategies operate and contribute to behavioral health improvement and violence reduction.

Table 3 Categorization of Intervention Strategies and Outcomes

Intervention Category	Key Components	Target Population	Outcomes Reported	Supporting Studies
Community-Based Mental Health	Counseling, outreach, social support	Underserved populations, youth	Improved mental health, reduced disparities	Ajayi and Thompson (2025); Castillo et al. (2020)
Violence Prevention Programs	Education, mentoring, conflict resolution	Youth, high-risk communities	Reduced violent behavior, improved social cohesion	Kingston et al. (2021); Chapman et al. (2024)
Gun Violence Interventions	Outreach, mediation, public health models	Urban communities	Reduction in firearm-related incidents	Bonne et al. (2021); Ransford et al. (2025)
Trauma-Informed Interventions	Psychological support, early intervention	Children and adolescents	Reduced aggression and long-term risk behaviors	Dara shy et al. (2020); Powell et al. (2020)
Integrated System Approaches	Interagency collaboration, data sharing	General population	Improved prevention and intervention outcomes	Evans et al. (2021); Kovalenko et al. (2022)

The categorization presented in Table 3 reveals that effective interventions are inherently multidimensional. Programs that integrate behavioral, social, and environmental components tend to produce more sustainable and impactful outcomes. For instance, community-based mental health interventions not only address psychological needs but also incorporate outreach and social support, thereby tackling both immediate and underlying challenges.

3.4. Key Success Factors Across Studies

In addition to categorizing interventions, the review identifies several recurring success factors that contribute to the effectiveness of these programs. Table 4 summarizes these factors and links them to supporting evidence from the literature.

Table 4 Core Success Factors in Intervention Effectiveness

Success Factor	Description	Evidence from Studies
Community Engagement	Active participation of local stakeholders	Kingston et al. (2021); Cavanaugh et al. (2021)
Early Intervention	Addressing risk factors before escalation	Dara shies et al. (2020); Powell et al. (2020)
Multi-Component Design	Combining multiple strategies	Kovalenko et al. (2022); Evans et al. (2021)
Cultural Competence	Tailoring interventions to populations	Gordon et al. (2025)
Interagency Collaboration	Coordination across systems	Kingston et al. (2021); Evans et al. (2021)
Public Health Approach	Viewing violence as preventable	Slotkin and Ransford (2020); Bonne et al. (2021)

The findings summarized in Table 4 underscore that no single factor is sufficient to ensure success. Rather, the effectiveness of intervention programs depends on the interaction of multiple elements, particularly community engagement, early intervention, and integrated system design. These factors collectively reinforce the importance of adopting holistic and participatory approaches.

4. Discussion of Key Themes

The analysis of the reviewed studies highlights several important themes within the broader context of existing literature. Community-based interventions are consistently identified as highly effective, particularly due to their ability to address context-specific needs and reduce structural barriers to care. This finding aligns with studies emphasizing that localized and culturally responsive approaches improve access to mental health services and enhance long-term behavioral outcomes (Ajayi and Thompson, 2025; Castillo et al., 2020). By engaging individuals within their social environments, these interventions contribute not only to improved well-being but also to reduced exposure to risk factors associated with violence.

Additionally, the effectiveness of violence prevention programs is strongly linked to their multi-component design. Evidence suggests that interventions combining education, behavioral support, and community engagement are better equipped to address the complex and interconnected drivers of violence (Kovalenko et al., 2022; Evans et al., 2021). This is particularly significant in addressing youth violence and substance-related risks, where single-focus interventions often fail to produce sustainable outcomes. The implication is that comprehensive program design is essential for long-term impact.

Moreover, the application of public health approaches to gun violence prevention represents a critical shift in strategy. By framing violence as a preventable condition, these approaches prioritize early intervention, behavioral change, and community mobilization. Empirical evidence from community-based firearm intervention programs and public health models supports their effectiveness in reducing gun-related incidents (Bonne et al., 2021; Ransford et al., 2025; Slutkin and Ransford, 2020). This underscores the importance of reframing violence prevention within a preventive and population-health-oriented paradigm.

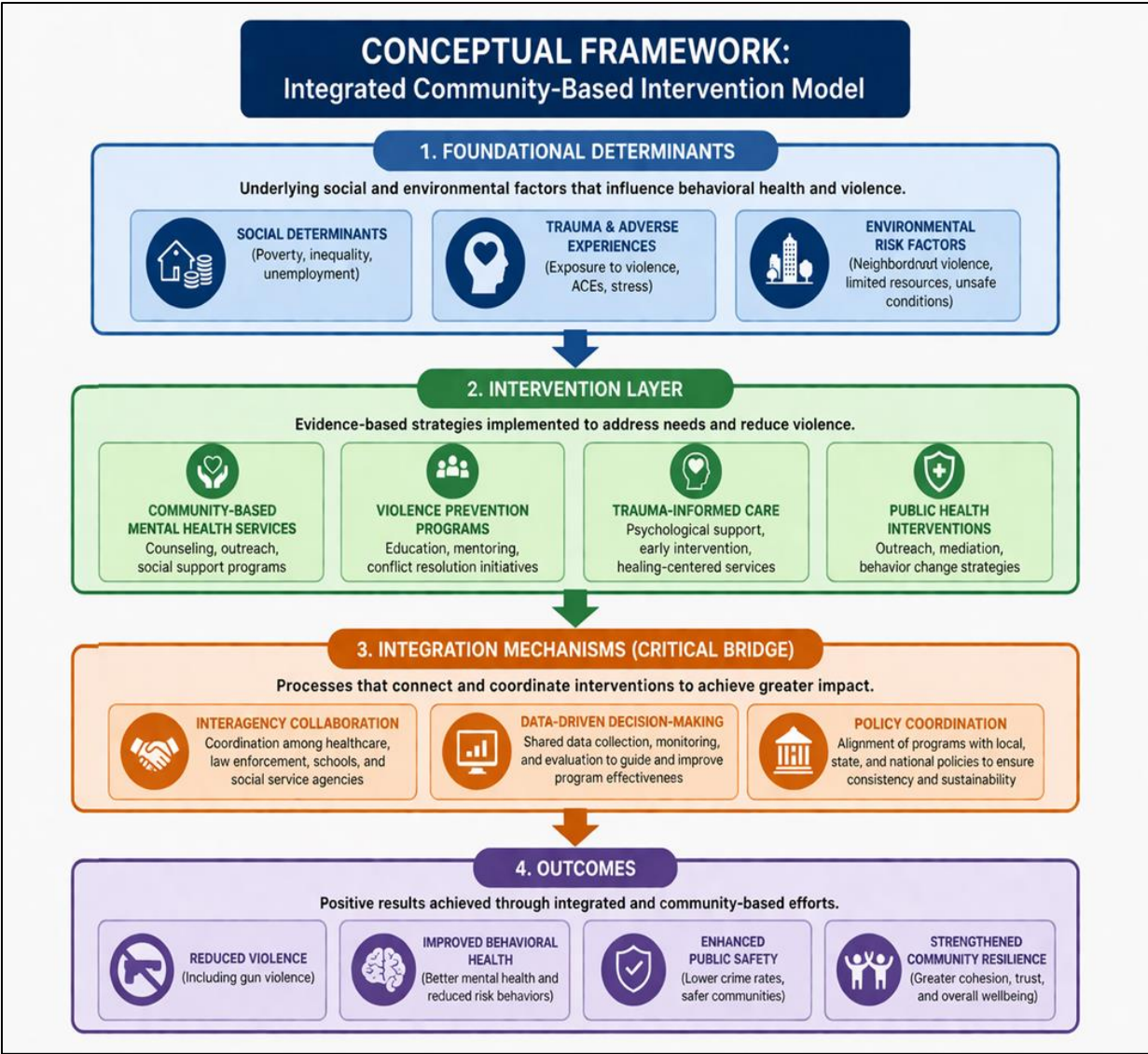
Furthermore, the integration of behavioral health and public safety systems emerges as a central determinant of successful outcomes. Studies demonstrate that coordinated approaches addressing mental health, trauma, and substance use alongside violence prevention led to more effective and sustainable results (Darawshy et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2021). This highlights the “so what” of the findings: without integration, interventions remain fragmented, limiting their overall effectiveness and scalability.

However, despite these promising findings, persistent challenges remain. Issues such as funding limitations, lack of standardized evaluation frameworks, and institutional fragmentation continue to hinder implementation and scalability (Fagan, 2024; Rollman et al., 2024). These barriers point to the need for more coordinated, data-driven, and policy-aligned frameworks that can support the effective translation of evidence into practice.

4.1. Conceptual Framework: Integrated Community-Based Intervention Model

To synthesize the findings of this study, an Integrated Community-Based Intervention Framework is presented to illustrate the relationships between key determinants, intervention strategies, integration mechanisms, and outcomes. The conceptual framework was adapted and reconstructed by the author based on existing models and evidence from prior studies (Dara shy et al., 2020; Powell et al., 2020), with modifications to align with the specific focus of this research.

The framework is organized as a multi-layered system. At its foundation are critical determinants, including social and environmental factors such as poverty, inequality, trauma, and adverse experiences, which significantly shape behavioral health conditions and patterns of violence. Building on this foundation, the intervention layer encompasses community-based mental health services, violence prevention programs, trauma-informed care, and broader public health strategies designed to address these underlying risks. The figure below presents the adapted and reconstructed conceptual model of the Integrated Community-Based Intervention Framework.



Source: Author's construct 2026.

Figure 2 Conceptual Framework of Integrated Community-Based Intervention Model

A central feature of the framework is the integration mechanism, which functions as the connecting bridge between interventions and outcomes. This includes interagency collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and policy coordination, all of which ensure that interventions are implemented in a cohesive and coordinated manner rather than as isolated efforts. The outcomes layer reflects the intended impacts of these integrated strategies, including reductions in violence particularly gun-related incidents improvements in behavioral health outcomes, enhanced public safety, and increased community resilience.

The reconstructed framework generally demonstrates that, effective responses to behavioral health challenges and violence require an interconnected and system-oriented approach that simultaneously addresses root causes and promotes coordinated implementation.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review provides comprehensive evidence that community-based, multi-component, and integrated intervention strategies are highly effective in addressing behavioral health challenges and violence prevention in the United States. The findings demonstrate that interventions grounded in community engagement, early prevention, and culturally responsive practices significantly improve mental health outcomes and reduce various forms of violence, including gun-related incidents. A key contribution of this study is the identification of integration as a critical factor in program effectiveness. Coordinated efforts that bridge behavioral health services, public safety systems, and social

support structures yield more sustainable and impactful outcomes than fragmented approaches. Additionally, the review highlights the importance of addressing underlying social determinants such as trauma, poverty, and inequality to achieve long-term success. Despite these promising findings, challenges related to implementation, funding, and scalability persist, underscoring the need for standardized, data-driven, and policy-aligned frameworks. Overall, this study emphasizes the necessity of shifting toward holistic, preventive, and system-oriented approaches to enhance public health, strengthen community resilience, and promote safer communities across the United States.

Recommendations for Future Studies and Policy Implications

The findings of this systematic review highlight the effectiveness of community-based and integrated approaches in addressing behavioral health and violence prevention in the United States. However, several gaps remain that warrant further investigation. Future studies should focus on longitudinal and large-scale evaluations of community-based intervention programs to assess their long-term sustainability and impact across diverse populations. There is also a need for more standardized evaluation frameworks to enable comparability across studies and improve the generalizability of findings. Additionally, future research should explore the role of emerging data-driven technologies, including predictive analytics and integrated data systems, in enhancing early intervention and prevention strategies.

From a policy perspective, the evidence underscores the need for a shift from reactive, enforcement-centered approaches to preventive, community-based frameworks. Policymakers should prioritize sustained funding for integrated behavioral health and violence prevention programs, particularly in underserved communities disproportionately affected by socioeconomic disparities. Strengthening interagency collaboration between public health, criminal justice, and social service systems is essential to ensure coordinated and effective responses. Furthermore, policies that support culturally responsive interventions, workforce development, and community engagement are critical for improving program effectiveness and equity.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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