



New Member Spotlight: Johnny Rice II on Protecting Violence Interrupters

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Susannah Goodman

SSN is launching an initiative to highlight new members of the network and showcase their research. This month, we're shining a spotlight on new SSN member [Dr. Johnny Rice II](#), a longtime advocate for low-income fathers and families, and victims of violence.

For his SSN membership contribution, Dr. Rice published [an OpEd in The Crime Report](#) that explored the impact of Baltimore's uptick in gun violence on the very individuals working to break the cycle: community violence interrupters. The article was inspired by the recent deaths of Safe Streets Violence Interrupters in Baltimore and those working to make other urban communities safer. Ultimately, Dr. Rice wanted "to honor the memory of persons known and unknown who sacrificed their lives for the greater good."

In his OpEd, Dr. Rice argues that the efforts of violence prevention workers are vital to the health and safety of the communities they serve. Dr. Rice asserts that "what makes them unique service providers is their ability to offer alternatives to violence. In that way, they serve as a bridge to victims who may distrust law enforcement, and who may be considering revenge and retaliation in response to the loss of a friend or relative by taking matters into their own hands." This helps break the cycle of violence that plagues many economically depressed urban areas. But the nature of violence interrupters' work poses unique occupational hazards, putting them at an increased risk of becoming gun violence victims themselves. Dr. Rice advocates for a public health approach to address gun violence paired with heavy investment in under-resourced areas. He also urges greater protection of violence prevention workers and other community workers who willingly sacrifice their safety for that of their communities.

"To address violence in urban communities we must first invest resources, financial and human capital, in the most violent and historically under-resourced communities in the United States."

Following the publication of his piece, Dr. Rice was invited to join a [webinar panel](#) event hosted by the Center on Media, Crime and Justice at John Jay College to assess the success of violence prevention and intervention programs around the country. The event brought together a diverse group of stakeholders in the violence prevention space, including Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott whose plan to address gun violence Dr. Rice mentions in his OpEd. Dr. Rice was also invited to take part in a [local podcast](#) to discuss the value of community engagement in building bridges between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Both of these discussions served as important networking opportunities for anti-violence community partners to brainstorm viable solutions to curb violence.

Dr. Rice is currently working on a collaborative research project sponsored by the National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research and the Thurgood Marshall College Fund and several Historically Black Colleges and Universities to identify the elements that determine gun possession amongst young Black males. He hopes that the research findings will "shine some light on the issue of gun violence and result in information that can

be beneficial.”

To learn more about the project, visit [here](#).

JOHNNY RICE II

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Dr. Rice is the Chair and an Associate Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at Coppin State University. He also formerly served as the Board President for The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV). His research focuses on domestic violence, violence prevention, support for victims of violence, and policing in Black communities.