

An Analysis on Gun Violence

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Introduction

- Gun violence is one of the biggest public health issues of our time
- Link between gun violence and mental illness in the media should not be the sole focus in addressing the issue of gun violence
- There should be more focus on gun violence itself in order to reduce and prevent it
- More prevalent in low SES communities
- State and local gun laws
- More national restrictions on the use of guns

Gun Violence and Mental Illness?

- Many news reports about shootings (school shootings, disputes, random shootings, etc.)
- Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012
- Grabbed the entire nation's attention and brought the topic of gun violence back into discussion on a national level (Gold, 2013)
- Due to this incident, the public strongly believes that there is a link between gun violence and mental illness
- Mental health professionals have been asked what could be done to prevent individuals with mental illness from committing such crimes
- People in these individuals' lives have been blamed for not seeing the signs earlier
- Mental illness does *not* play a huge role in gun violence
- Not all individuals who use guns are mentally ill and not all individuals who are mentally ill will use guns
- Deaths by firearms vastly outnumber mass shootings (Burgason, Thomas, & Berthelot, 2014)
- Although it is important to study the context of mass shootings, it is just as important to study the nature of gun violence as an everyday occurrence

Statistics

- After car crashes, guns come second in causing injury death
- Injury by guns is one of the top three causes of premature death
- Even more people are injured in a nonfatal manner
- Firearms play a part in 67% of homicides, 43% of robberies, and 21% of aggravated assaults
- In 2008, 73% of firearms-related injuries were due to interpersonal violence
- The use of firearms are one of the leading causes of death for youth aged 15 – 24
- This outnumbers the next nine leading causes of death combined

Factors for Gun Violence

- Not mental illness, but the prevalence of firearms
- If parents keep firearms in the home, those need to be locked up to prevent their children from accessing them, which could result in injury or even accidental death
- Research has shown where there are fewer guns, there will be less gun violence
- States that restrict weapons have the lowest *per capita* homicide rates
- Many states with the weakest gun laws have the highest rates of gun violence
- States with the strongest gun laws had a lower overall gun-related fatality rate
- The U.S. has the highest *per capita* rate of gun ownership in the world, with 88.8 people out of 100 owning firearms
- The U.S. also has the highest overall firearms-related mortality rate in the world

Violence in Low SES Communities

- Research suggests that gun violence is prevalent in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities (Burgason et al., 2014)
- Guns are most commonly used because they are seen as symbols of toughness, status, and respect in these communities
- Residents who live in these communities live by "two basic orientations": "decent" and "street"
- The role of the street culture increases levels of violence
- This culture outlines behavior norms that likely impacts how violence plays out in such communities
- Individuals gain or lose respect based on how they respond to challenges
- If they respond with violence, they earn respect, despite the outcome
- If they back down, they lose respect and status, since this violates "the code of the street"
- This may result in dire consequences such as losing respect among the entire community and becoming a victim
- Most residents are "decent" and don't strongly follow "the code of the street"
- These residents understand the behavioral norms in their community and abide by them to decrease their chances of being victimized and increase their odds of surviving a violent encounter
- However, the attackers themselves abide by the code, their victims have an increased chance of being injured in assaults and even robberies

Research on Gun Violence

- Quite limited since Congress greatly reduced funding for federal research on gun violence
- Concerned that it could be used to advocate or promote gun control (Gold, 2013)
- Restrictions on releasing data on firearms
- Very few experienced investigators in the U.S. had focused their careers primarily on gun violence
- Only occasional work had been done in this field

Gun Laws & Possible Solutions

- One solution is to establish (more) minimum national restrictions on the use of guns
- Each state has adopted its own set of gun laws
- California has strong gun laws, Nevada and Arizona have weak or no gun restrictions
- Transferring guns to a different state can make things more complicated
- Chicago's restrictions on guns is more strict than guns in Indiana
- Very few federal laws restricting access to guns
- If there are more restrictions on a national level, it could reduce gun violence even more since every state and municipality would abide by the same rules
- Many guns are actually obtained without background checks in the U.S. (Hemenway & Miller, 2013)
- This makes it easier for felons to access guns
- Background checks are required in every other developed nation and should also be required in the U.S. on a national level
- Only 16 states in the U.S. currently have laws requiring background checks in the private sales of arms (Devi, 2012)
- If more gun sellers conducted background checks, this could prevent prohibited purchasers from getting more guns
- It could especially reduce violence in low SES communities
- Another restriction that could be established is by having all gun manufacturers make their guns childproof
- The guns should have safety locks to prevent them from firing if the clip is removed
- Congress has not taken action regarding gun control on a national level for quite some time
- The last federal gun law was 1994's Federal Assault Weapons Ban (Koper & Roth, 2001)
- Gun control in itself is a very controversial topic
- If more national restrictions on guns were proposed, there may be great opposition, especially from the people who strongly believe in the right to bear arms



Conclusion

- Gun violence is a very prominent issue nowadays
- If no further action is taken, gun violence may keep rising, taking away more innocent lives every single day
- By implementing national gun restrictions, it can help reduce gun violence even more than what is seen today and even put an end to gun violence

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