

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

THE GLOBAL SCOURGE OF GUN VIOLENCE: A CALL FOR ACTION

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Background: Firearm injuries are critically important in criminal proceedings and jurisprudence discussions. The aim of the current study was to reinforce the growing concern of firearm violence in society and authenticate findings through autopsy examinations in the casualty department of Ayub Teaching Hospital Abbottabad. **Method:** This retrospective observational study was conducted in the casualty department of Ayub Teaching Hospital Abbottabad. Data was collected from registers spanning 1st September 2023 to 31st May 2024, after obtaining permission from the hospital administration. **Result:** Data from 56 cases were analyzed using SPSS 22. Among these, 50% suffered from firearm injuries, while the remaining 50% died due to sharp weapons, blunt weapons, poisoning, hanging, strangulation, road traffic accidents, electric shocks, or unknown causes. Of the total cases, 45 (80.4%) were male and 11 (19.6%) were female. The most affected age group was 20–40 years, comprising 36 (64.2%) cases. Furthermore, 42 (75%) cases were homicidal, 2 (3.6%) were suicidal, and 12 (21.4%) were accidental. **Conclusion:** The most common weapon used in homicidal deaths is firearms. Firearm violence should be prioritized as a critical issue in global health discussions.

Keywords: Firearms; Homicide; Gun violence

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INTRODUCTION

Gun violence is one of the most pressing public health and human rights crises of our time. According to Amnesty International, it claims more than 600 lives daily, threatening the fundamental right to life and security.¹ Easy access to firearms—both legal and illegal—exacerbates this epidemic, with devastating effects on individuals, families, and communities worldwide.

Globally, there are over one billion firearms in circulation, with 85% in the hands of private individuals. This widespread availability, coupled with socioeconomic challenges, creates conditions where firearms fuel crime, violence, and systemic inequality. Inadequate regulation further amplifies these risks, making firearms easily accessible to individuals who pose a danger to society.^{2,3}

Gun violence is a clear violation of fundamental human rights, including the rights to life, security, and health. Former President Barack Obama's "Now is the Time" plan (White House, 2013) emphasized the need for research to identify causative factors. However, many governments fail to recognize this epidemic as a human rights issue, focusing instead on political and economic considerations. This lack of recognition hinders efforts to implement effective gun control measures

and evidence-based violence prevention strategies, as highlighted by the Institute of Medicine & NRC's 2013 report.⁴

Globally, more than 250,000 deaths per year are attributed to firearms. The psychological, economic, and social impacts of gun violence shatter communities and strain public resources. Despite these significant consequences, the true danger of gun violence remains underrecognized, particularly in low-income urban areas where the crime is disproportionately prevalent.⁵

Gun violence is violence committed with different types of weapons, including shotguns, rifles, handguns, and other automatic and semiautomatic firearms. An interesting fact is the prevalence of this crime among low-income individuals, especially in urban areas.

In our legal system, the intent of the crime is a vital factor to consider under the concepts of *Mens Rea* and *Actus Reus*. These principles are similarly applied to firearm-related injuries. Studies show that in the United States, the rate of firearm crimes is 19.5% higher than in 23 other countries of similar status. Another report indicates that in America, half of all crimes involve firearm injuries, a statistic comparable to countries of African origin, Albania, Thailand, and other similar nations.⁶

Despite the significant impact of firearm-related crimes on criminal records, accurate data is unavailable even in countries where firearms are notoriously prevalent, particularly in the developing world. The lack of data is attributed to reasons such as political instability and ongoing conflicts.⁷

Firearm violence accounts for 71% of all homicides globally, with six countries—Brazil, the United States, Venezuela, Mexico, India, and Colombia—contributing to two-thirds of these deaths.⁷ Shockingly, the United States has a firearm homicide rate that is 19.5 times higher than the average of other high-income nations.⁶ In low-income urban neighborhoods plagued by inadequate policing and high crime rates, gun violence is particularly prevalent, exacerbating social inequalities.¹

Youth are disproportionately affected by firearm violence. Firearm injuries have been identified as the leading cause of death among young people in countries such as the U.S., Brazil, and Mexico.^{8,9} Globally, gun violence results in 28,000 youth deaths annually, with over 60% occurring in the Americas.¹⁰⁻¹³

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in the casualty department of Ayub Teaching

Hospital Abbottabad, Pakistan. Data was collected from the casualty department spanning from 1st September 2023 to 31st May 2024, after obtaining permission from the hospital administration. A total of 56 cases were assessed during the prescribed time period that were reported to the accident and emergency department of Ayub Teaching Hospital, Abbottabad. Data was entered and analysed using SPSS 22. Data was expressed in terms of frequencies and percentages for categorical variables like gender, types of firearm injuries etc.

RESULTS

Data from 56 cases were analyzed using SPSS 22. The most affected age group was 20–40 years, comprising 36 (64.2%) cases. Furthermore, 42 (75%) cases were homicidal, 2 (3.6%) were suicidal, and 12 (21.4%) were accidental of the total cases included to the study, 45 (80.4%) were male and 11 (19.6%) were female.

Among these, 50% suffered from firearm injuries, while the remaining 50% died due to sharp weapons, blunt weapons, poisoning, hanging, strangulation, road traffic accidents, electric shocks, or unknown causes.

Table-1

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0–10years	2	3.6	3.6
	10–20years	6	10.7	14.3
	20–30years	18	32.1	46.4
	30–40 years	18	32.1	78.6
	40–50years	4	7.1	85.7
	>50 years	8	14.3	100.0
Total	56	100.0	100.0	

Table-2

Sex	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	male	45	80.4	80.4
	female	11	19.6	100.0
	Total	56	100.0	100.0

Table-3

weapon	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Firearm	28	50.0	50.0
	Sharp weapon	5	8.9	58.9
	Blunt weapon	2	3.6	62.5
	Poisoning	1	1.8	64.3
	Hanging	1	1.8	66.1
	Strangulation	6	10.7	76.8
	RTA	10	17.9	94.6
	Cause unknown	2	3.6	98.2
	Electric shock	1	1.8	100.0
	Total	56	100.0	100.0

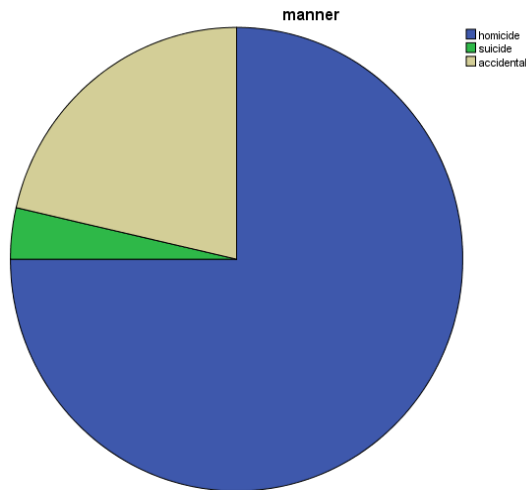


Figure-1

DISCUSSION

Guns are not a necessary or sufficient cause of violence and can be used legally for a variety of sanctioned activities, i.e., to defend against criminals. The presence of a gun may frighten a criminal away, thereby reducing the likelihood of loss of property, injury, or death. But on the other hand, they are openly used for criminal purposes by the people. These are the most lethal weapons. In Pakistan, underscoring their easy accessibility and cultural significance are contributors to the normalization of violence

Our study shows the most common age group is between 20–40 years which is in continuity with most of the studies done world-wide.¹⁴ Homicide is the manner which is mostly adopted as in studies done in United States and Pakistan.^{15–20}

While men are the primary perpetrators and victims of gun violence, women face unique risks, particularly from intimate partners with firearms. Firearms are frequently used to perpetrate sexual violence and enforce control, reflecting deeply ingrained gender norms (Arooj Azhar, 2024). The cultural association of guns with masculinity perpetuates harmful stereotypes, fostering environments where violence is normalized and even glorified. Our study shows that males are more the victims to firearms which is against a study done in Peshawar, which states that females are mostly affected.²¹

Gun violence is not confined by borders; it is a global issue that requires a global response. Governments, civil society, and international organizations must work together to tackle this crisis, using research, policy innovation, and collaboration to prevent firearm-related deaths and injuries.

The stakes are too high to ignore. Every day that action is delayed, more lives are lost, families are shattered, and communities are devastated. It is time for leaders to step up and confront gun violence with the urgency and commitment it demands.

Programs that address the underlying causes of violence, such as poverty, inequality, and lack of education are vital. Community engagement and support systems can reduce the prevalence of gun violence and its impact on vulnerable populations.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded from this study that the most common weapon of homicidal deaths is firearm. The firearm violence should be discussed on priority basis in the field of global health.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

OKJ, SS: Conceptualization of the study design, write-up, proof reading. IU, MH, Adnan, FI: Literature search, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation.

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