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Short Communication

Upsurge in firearm related deaths among children and adolescent in United States: An alarming trend

Mohammad Abu Bashar^{1,*}

¹Dept. of Community Medicine & Family Medicine, Maharishi Markandeshwar (Deemed to be University), Ambala, Haryana, India



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ABSTRACT

Firearm related injuries and deaths are a major public health challenge in the developed countries such as United States (U.S.). It is one of the most common forms of suicide and homicide. Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows an alarming increase in firearm related mortality among children and Adolescents which is a cause of concern and requires strict gun licensing regulation in countries like U.S.

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In April, 2022, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), United States (U.S.) released data on mortality and its causes which reported a total of 45,222 firearm-related deaths in the U.S. in the year 2020 — an all time high.¹ Although previous analyses had shown an increasing trend in firearm-related mortality in the recent years (2015 to 2019), compared to the relatively stable rates in the earlier years (1999 to 2014),^{2,3} there was a sharp hike of 13% in the crude rate of firearm-related deaths from 2019 to 2020 in the U.S.¹ This spiky increase was mainly propelled by firearm homicides, which saw a 33.4% increase in its crude rate from 2019 to 2020, as compared to only 1.1% increase in the crude rate of firearm suicides.¹

A previous analysis, which examined data from 1990 to 2016, showed that firearm-related injuries were second only to motor vehicle crashes (both traffic-related and non-traffic-related) as the leading cause of death among children and adolescents, i.e. those aged 1 to 19 years

in U.S.⁴ Since 2016, that gap started to narrow, and in 2020, firearm-related injuries became the leading cause of death in this age group.¹ From 2019 to 2020, the relative increase in the rate of all types (suicide, homicide, unintentional, and undetermined) of firearm-related deaths among children and adolescents was 29.5% which was twice as high as compared to the relative increase in the general population showing the disproportionate affection of this vulnerable age-group by the firearm injuries.⁵ Apart from firearm deaths, deaths due to drug overdose and poisoning have also increased by 83.6% from 2019 to 2020, thus becoming the third leading cause of death in children and adolescents whereas the rates for other leading causes of death have remained relatively stable since 2016. This trend indicates that change in mortality trends among children and adolescents during the early Covid-19 pandemic period was mainly driven by firearm-related injuries and drug poisoning as COVID-19, itself, resulted in only 0.2 deaths per 100,000 children and adolescents in 2020.¹

Although these new findings are consistent with the previous evidence that firearm violence has increased

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: dr.bashartheultimate86@gmail.com (M. A. Bashar).

substantially since initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic,⁶ the reason/s for the increase is/are unclear, and it would be completely unwise to expect that firearm-related mortality among children and adolescents could later revert to pre-pandemic levels. One of the potential reasons for the increase in firearm related violence during the pandemic could be due to increase stress and loneliness arising out of prolonged home stay due to lockdowns and isolation and quarantine measures.

In conclusion, the increasing firearm-related mortality among children and adolescents in the U.S. reflects an alarming trend and demands for strict gun license regulations to protect the children and the youths from this completely preventable cause of death.

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Conflict of Interest

None.


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Author biography

Mohammad Abu Bashar, Assistant Professor  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0868-8335>

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