

# Addressing global gun violence: a *Lancet* Commission on Global Gun Violence and Health



Civilian gun violence claims an estimated 600 lives every day around the world, with countless more suffering debilitating injuries that greatly reduce their quality of life.<sup>1</sup> Although homicides make up most global civilian gun-related deaths at approximately 71%, unintentional firearm discharges and self-harm are also substantial causes of mortality attributable to gun violence.<sup>1</sup> This burden disproportionately affects males and young people, and just six countries—Brazil, Colombia, India, Mexico, the USA, and Venezuela—account for two-thirds of global gun deaths.<sup>1</sup> Injuries from gun violence often result in reduced physical ability for victims, placing them and their families at an increased risk of mental ill health and substance misuse.<sup>2</sup>

Civilian gun violence often intersects with complex social issues, such as poverty, gang violence, citizens' perceptions of security, and democratisation.<sup>3</sup> With the monopoly on gun ownership no longer remaining with the state, guns exacerbate a breakdown of social order by eroding trust in institutions, which leads to a more fragmented society. Businesses, for example, become reluctant to invest in areas with perceived safety issues, leading to reduced economic opportunities; health systems have to contend with the increased likelihood of violence aimed at health-care workers.<sup>4,5</sup> In these situations, communities are no longer able to provide support to those most in need who, in turn, become even more susceptible to being the perpetrator or victim of gun violence.

Inaction on global gun violence has far-reaching consequences. The most immediate of these is the continuation of a preventable human tragedy; lives will continue to be cut short, families shattered, and communities left grappling with fear and trauma. Inaction emboldens powerful gun lobbies in specific countries to continue stifling public discourse and legislative action, making it harder for gun control measures to gain traction.<sup>6</sup>

Firearm manufacturers use some tactics, such as targeted marketing, on vulnerable populations (eg, young adults or women in minoritised groups) by portraying a disproportionate sense of threat to personal safety and making buying firearms appear attractive

through deceptive messaging.<sup>7</sup> An absence of checks and balances over such commercial tactics can create a sense of powerlessness and discourage sustained focus on the problem. Moreover, inaction leads to normalisation of violence, creating a vicious cycle that becomes harder to break with each passing generation.

The high burden of gun-related death and injury points to a need to find effective solutions and build an evidence-led, global, and renewed understanding of the relationship between guns and health. This understanding must be a multidisciplinary effort that includes the direct and indirect health outcomes associated with gun violence, as well as its economics, political economy, and sociocultural consequences. Such a reckoning must also bring together perspectives from low-income, middle-income, and high-income countries, including the lived experiences of those most affected by guns around the world, such as those living in poverty, young men, and minoritised groups. Bringing these perspectives together means assessing the epidemiological, demographic, economic, and social factors that affect the relationship between gun violence and health outcomes.

Therefore, we are pleased to announce a new *Lancet* Commission on Global Gun Violence and Health. This Commission consists of an interdisciplinary group of international experts from several disciplines and

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## Panel: Key questions to be addressed in the *Lancet* Commission on Global Gun Violence and Health

- 1 What is the best evidence available about the burden of gun violence on mortality, morbidity, and injury worldwide? How can guns be modelled as risk factors for global health?
- 2 How do guns contribute to socioeconomic health gaps worldwide, inclusive of the economic impacts of health consequences of gun violence?
- 3 What constitutes the best evidence and practice around the world on mitigating the population health consequences of gun violence?
- 4 How do differences in international gun policies and cultures influence the health consequences of gun violence?
- 5 What are the key threats to controlling the health consequences of gun violence worldwide?

fields, such as public health, economics, law, medicine, history, and political science, as well as voices from civil society and non-governmental sectors. Some of the key questions to be answered through this *Lancet* Commission are shown in the panel.

In its work, the Commission will conduct a comprehensive risk analysis on guns and analyse their global health and non-health consequences. This analysis will inform a study of options for interventions, and the results and associated policy recommendations will be formulated considering the political economy of guns and health. The *Lancet* Commission on Global Gun Violence and Health aims to combine the best of research and practice to catalyse concerted action at the national, regional, and international levels necessary to translate research findings into tangible solutions. By taking a global and interdisciplinary perspective, the Commission aims to catalyse new insights, share best practices, and create spaces for collaboration among stakeholders, such as academia, local and international health bodies, and civil society, among others. The focus is on creating high-impact policy change, leveraging existing understandings, initiatives, and frameworks—such as universal health care—and weaving in the Commission’s agenda on combating gun violence while remaining cognisant of contextual sensibilities.

Over its intended life cycle, the Commission’s outputs will be broadly disseminated in several accessible formats through the *Lancet* platform. The Commission welcomes

input from academics, policy makers, and civil society to amplify its impact to the greatest extent possible. Our aim is for this Commission to contribute to meaningful change in life outcomes of communities previously ravaged by the entirely preventable issue of gun violence.

We are the co-Chairs of the *Lancet* Commission on Global Gun Violence and Health. We declare no competing interests. The members of the *Lancet* Commission on Global Gun Violence and Health are Philip Alpers, Lorena Barberia, David Bishai, Sandro Galea, Stephen Hargarten, Adnan Hyder, Sandra Ley, Robert Muggah, Mohsen Naghavi, Binalakshmi Nepram, Iain Overton, and Jennifer Tucker.

\*Adnan A Hyder, Lorena Barberia on behalf of the *Lancet* Commission on Global Gun Violence and Health  
hydera1@gwu.edu

Milken Institute School of Public Health, George Washington University, Washington, DC 20052, USA (AAH); Department of Political Science, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (LB)

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