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A Rise in Gun Violence: How Do Guns Control Society?

Gun violence has long been a significant and consequential problem, but in recent times, the frequency and severity of mass shootings have led to a surge in the number of people experiencing death and injury. “There are approximately 265 million privately owned guns in the U.S.”, according to researchers from Northeastern and Harvard universities (Gregory). Furthermore, there were 45,222 total gun deaths in 2020, which is a 14% increase compared to 2019, a 25% increase from five years prior and a 43% increase from over 10 years ago (Gramlich). In light of the negative impacts that gun violence causes, more effective ways of reducing gun violence are needed, namely, the involvement of healthcare professions, complete disposal of guns among citizens, and the usage of smart guns.

Gun control policies have been part of American history since its early days, with laws designed to prevent gun violence in place for many years. Despite these longstanding laws, gun violence continues to escalate, resulting in ongoing and devastating consequences for the nation. Although the historical timeline of gun control reveals increasingly strict gun laws, unfortunately, the frequency of gun violence has not diminished—passing stricter gun laws does not have a huge impact in reducing gun violence. According to ThoughtCo, gun control legislation has included acts such as the Federal Firearms Act of 1938, which was the first law to regulate the sale of firearms. Secondly, The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (1994) banned the production, usage, ownership, and import of 19 types of assault weapons. In

addition, the Fix Gun Checks Act of 2015 required background checks for all gun sales, including ones over the internet (Longley). All of these gun control laws were implemented with the intention of reducing gun violence through stricter regulation of firearms; however, as the U.S. The Department of Justice shows that in 1938, the total number of gun deaths was 31,331; and in 1994, the number of total fatal and nonfatal firearm violence increased to 1,585,700. These statistics demonstrate that government efforts to implement ‘stricter’ gun control laws have not effectively reduced or controlled the incidence of gun violence. To this day, different types of gun laws exist in various states across the United States. Firstly, California has a firearm mortality rate of 8.4 per person. Current gun laws in California prohibit bringing a firearm into public areas and openly carrying a loaded or unloaded gun (“California Gun Laws - Top 12 Questions Answered”). In New York, it is illegal to “possess machine guns, short-barreled rifles, and short-barreled shotguns”. Additionally, it is illegal to carry a concealed firearm without a license and to carry a concealed firearm in public locations even with a license (“New York Gun Control Laws”). In Washington D.C., concealed carry is legal only with a Concealed Carry Pistol License and licenses are available to residents at least 21 years old. (Sadowski). Data on the increasing number of gun deaths, overall fatal and non-fatal firearm violence reveals that despite having different gun laws, these states have similar mortality rates and a growing number of gun deaths per year. This suggests that the effectiveness of ‘strict’ gun laws in controlling gun violence is uncertain. Ultimately, only the complete disposal of guns can significantly reduce the impact of firearms related violence.

Needless to say, gun violence has numerous negative impacts, including significant economic costs as its primary consequence. “American taxpayers pay \$30.16 million every day in police and criminal justice costs for investigation, prosecution, and incarceration” (“The

Economic Cost of Gun Violence”). Government revenues collected from tax payments could be spent on other parts of society like improving facilities, purchasing goods and services, or even implementing welfare benefits. However, out of 2.05 trillion of government revenue of a year (“Your Guide to America’s Finances”), 557 billion is used for gun violence consequences. The bigger the cost is, the greater the chance that society will experience an economic downfall.

Gross domestic product (GDP) of the United States includes consumption, investments, government spending, and exports and imports; they all have a direct relationship with GDP.

Therefore, if government spending increases, GDP will increase. If the government were to increase funds for gun violence prevention, it would have to divert resources from other crucial areas such as healthcare and social security. Furthermore, such an increase in spending may also necessitate a tax hike, leading to a decrease in GDP and an increase in national debt, potentially resulting in an economic recession. The impacts of gun violence are felt far beyond the loved ones of its victims; society as a whole must grapple with the aftermath and effects of such violence. Moreover in the labor force market, “employers lose an average of \$1.47 million on a daily basis in productivity, revenue, and costs required to recruit and train replacements for victims of gun violence” (“The Economic Cost of Gun Violence”). With each increase in the number of gun violence incidents, the number of victims also rises, including workers and employees who may find themselves caught in the crossfire. An increase in work-related injuries or fatalities can as well have a detrimental effect on businesses and companies, impacting their finances and resources. To maintain productivity, they must allocate substantial funds towards recruiting and training new employees. In the aftermath, businesses may need to spend an excessive amount of time and money hiring new employees and replacing those affected.

Unfortunately, this is not an individual incident, but a recurring phenomenon in society, fueled by

the prevalence of gun violence. On the whole, gun violence causes an economic consequence of \$557 billion in an average year, which is five times the U.S. 's budget for the Department of Education. (“Economic Consequences of US Gun Violence – Project Censored”)The U.S. Department of Education is where millions of Americans receive help to get into further education like college. One of the nation’s biggest budgets is spent in aiding consequences of gun violence– signifying how big of a consequence gun violence causes. As previously noted, the economic burden of gun violence is five times larger than the budget of the education department. If gun violence were reduced, this would translate into less economic consequences and more funding available for important areas such as education.

Another serious problem that gun violence causes is the severe impact on public health. In 2016, the country's largest physicians group, the American Medical Association (AMA), adopted a policy that calls gun violence "a public health crisis" (Brady). It leaves a lasting impact on all survivors, causing fear and trauma that can persist indefinitely. The trauma from gun violence can remain within survivors indefinitely, affecting their mental health and quality of life. Survivors of gun violence may experience anxiety, stress, depression or even post-traumatic stress disorder. The harm from gun violence extends beyond just survivors to witnesses, bystanders, neighbors, and their loved ones (Brady). In addition to mental health illness, gun violence also causes physical injuries that have a significant impact on victims and their families. As guns are the leading cause of death among U.S. children and teens, data shows that “one out of every 10 gun deaths in the United States are of people age 19 or younger, including suicides” (“Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue - School of Public Health”). Children who experience physical injuries or mental illness due to gun violence face significant challenges in adolescence and adulthood, potentially impacting their academic and community opportunities. In 2020, a

total of 45,222 people died from gun-related injuries in the U.S., including 43% of murder and 54% of suicide (Gramlich). According to Wikipedia, a gunshot wound is the leading type of injury caused by gun violence, and the majority of gunshot wounds would not lead to death.

(“Gunshot Wound”) “Damages caused include bleeding, bone fractures, organ damage, wound infection, loss of the ability to move part of the body and, in more severe cases, death.”

(Wikimedia) Although the majority of victims only undergo injuries and receive medical aid, there is still a significant increase in gun deaths and injuries: “there is a 25% increase from five years earlier and a 43% increase from a decade prior.” (“Knife Deaths vs Gun Deaths 2020”) The increasing number of gun deaths and injuries directly linked to gun violence highlights the urgent need for comprehensive gun control measures in the U.S. to effectively reduce the devastating impact of this issue.

One effective solution to address gun violence is to involve healthcare professions. The involvement of doctors, therapists, and psychologists can “reduce gun violence by educating the public on gun safety, supporting legislative efforts to promote gun control, and providing much-needed counseling to those who need the service” (Ranney and Betz). They play a crucial role in predicting, preventing, and curing gun violence as they can assess the likelihood of a patient exhibiting violent behavior and thus notify law enforcement or security departments in cases where their patients with mental issues display signs of depression or anger. This action substantially combines police and healthcare department efforts to efficiently predict and prevent gun violence. Healthcare professions can also prevent gun violence by sharing their expert knowledge with the public and providing support to individuals struggling with mental health issues. Lastly, they can provide healthcare assistance and medical support for victims of gun violence. By undertaking the tasks of prediction, prevention, and treatment, healthcare

professionals can effectively aid individuals in avoiding gun violence and provide adequate care for those impacted by it.

Another most effective solution to prevent gun violence is the complete elimination of gun use among citizens. There are numerous reasons why guns should be completely banned among citizens, and here are three most compelling reasons: firstly, it can reduce illegal transactions in black markets. In 2019, The Department of Justice (DOJ) concluded that “43 percent of criminals had bought their firearms on the black market” (Kenton). Comparing gun prices between legal markets and black markets, it is much cheaper and affordable to purchase guns in black markets (Minitier). Legal gun ownership and usage can create a demand for firearms, leading to an increase in illegal transactions for a cheaper purchase within the black market. Oppositely, if guns are completely banned and made illegal, there will be less people purchasing guns in black markets, giving rise to the abatement of illegal markets. Another reason to consider banning guns is that it would reduce the exposure of younger generations to weapons and their use. According to the Child Welfare League of America, “more than 5 percent of America’s children have witnessed a shooting” (Collins and Swoveland). Children’s exposure to guns during a young age affects how they treat and utilize guns when they grow up. As it is explained, repeated exposure to gun violence affects the next generation (Brady): the more children are exposed to guns at a young age, the more they view them as a casual item without caution or regard for safety. Therefore, the complete banning of guns can effectively prevent and reduce children’s exposure to guns which sets a safer environment for children to grow up in. Lastly and most importantly, gun violence threatens fundamental human rights. As Amnesty International suggests, gun violence threatens fundamental human rights– the right to live (“Amnesty

International”). The right to live means no one, including police, government, or army forces, have the right to end lives. All individuals have the basic human rights to live; everyone is valued the same in the world, and therefore no one has the right to seize the lives of others by any means. Although the Second Amendment grants individuals the right to bear arms for self-protection, it’s worth questioning whether guns are truly being used in this manner or if they are ultimately putting lives at risk. The original intent of the Second Amendment was to allow people to feel safe and protect themselves with a firearm; however, this intention can have the opposite effect when everyone owns a gun. The proliferation of guns can cause fear, tension, and even anxiety. Instead of being used for protection, firearms can become a weapon of aggression, escalating conflicts and causing harm.

While the complete disposal of guns is the most effective way to reduce and eliminate gun violence, it may be difficult for all 50 states to implement such a drastic change. For that reason, another potential solution to address gun violence is the adoption of smart guns as a replacement for traditional firearms. “Smart guns, known as personalized firearms, use technology such as radio frequency identification (RFID) or biometric recognition technology, including fingerprint readers, to prevent unauthorized users from firing the weapon; RFIDs are also used by hospitals to keep track of medical devices and log patient charts.” (Coleman) According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were 573 unintentional gun deaths of children under 18 between 2015 to 2020 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Additionally, in 2021, it is estimated that there were 379 unintentional shootings by children, causing 54 deaths (Coleman). Functions of smart guns can prevent unintentional users like younger children and people with mental illness from firing by accident (Coleman). It is important to recognize that not all gun-related incidents are intentional, and there are cases where accidents or unintentional

shootings occur. This is where smart guns can play a crucial role in preventing such incidents. Smart guns can also reduce gun violence cases caused by gun thefts. Gun theft is a major contributor to the availability of guns that fuel gun violence, including incidents of murder, assault, and car theft (Coleman). Smart guns, with their personalized identification features, will then become useless to anyone who steals a gun from its original owner since they would not be able to fire it without the original owner's identification. Last but not least, smart guns can also help with reducing teens suicide. Since there's an average of 120.5 firearms for 100 residents (Wikipedia Contributors), guns are shown to be overly accessible to teens which lead to higher chances of teen suicides. Many adolescents in the United States are at high risk of suicidal thoughts and attempts due to easy access to guns, particularly in households. The greater their exposure to guns, the greater the likelihood that adolescents may consider ending their lives. Moreover, traditional firearms are often easily accessible and simple to use, making it possible for adolescents at home to locate and fire them without much effort and knowledge. However, by restricting access to smart guns only to authorized users, the risk of adolescents using firearms without the owner's permission is greatly reduced, effectively minimizing their exposure to guns and the likelihood of accidental or intentional injuries or deaths.

Overall, the rise in gun deaths and injuries caused by gun violence is a concerning trend that demands effective solutions to combat it. While it is true that all 50 states have different sets of laws, policies, and rules regarding gun safety, only the minority of them shows improvement in restricting gun violence and reducing consequences. Given the negative impacts gun violence causes, which include huge economic costs, effects on public health, and the increasing number of deaths and injuries, solutions like the involvement of healthcare professionals, the usage of smart guns, or even the complete disposal of guns must be enacted to actively end gun violence.

Guns were originally designed to protect individuals, not to cause harm to others. Every human life is equally valuable, and as such, no one should be allowed to take away another person's life by any means through the use of gun violence.

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