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The Reply

Erin Grinshteyn
egrinshteyn@usfca.edu

David Hemenway

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To the Editor:

We appreciate the points made by Dr. Gollub and Dr. Ben Taleb regarding our paper. ¹ They highlight the disparity found regarding unintentional deaths when comparing the United States with other high-income countries. As Dr. Gollub and Dr. Ben Taleb point out, we found that unintentional firearm deaths are 6.2 times higher in the US than they are in the other high-income countries and 12.2 times higher among children aged 5-14 years old. They also suggest that the unintentional firearm deaths are an undercount, evidence of which has been supported previously in the literature. ² A recent paper found that unintentional firearm deaths among children aged 0-14 years were actually 80% higher than what was reported using death certificate data. ³

This is the second paper using the same dataset to find the high rates of unintentional firearm deaths among US children. Using 2003 data, unintentional firearm deaths were 5.5 times higher in the US than they were in the other high-income countries and 10.6 times higher for US children aged 5-14 years old. ⁴ Unfortunately, between 2003 and 2010, this disparity between the US and other high-income countries has only grown.

Unintentional firearm morbidity and mortality is less well researched than other areas of firearm injuries. But one thing that is quite clear, as highlighted by Gollub and Ben Taleb, is the role of males in these tragedies. While maleness is a risk factor for almost all injuries, it is particularly strong for injuries involving guns. Over 80% of victims of child unintentional firearm fatalities are male, and when the victim is shot by someone else (which is the case over three quarters of the time) ⁵, some 97% of the shooters have been found to be male. ³ Unfortunately, gun-owning parents are prone to underestimate the danger from having firearms in the home, and incorrectly believe that their sons do not know where the guns are and have not played with them. ⁶

Unintentional firearm injuries among children are, of course, only one part of the US gun problem. As Dr. Gollub and Dr. Ben Taleb point out, a paradigm shift could be an important step towards reducing these injuries and deaths. More research needs to be done so that we can best learn what factors are associated with firearm shootings. When we better understand these issues, we can better prevent them moving forward.

Erin Grinshteyn, PhD; David Hemenway, PhD

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