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El Salvador: Gun Violence

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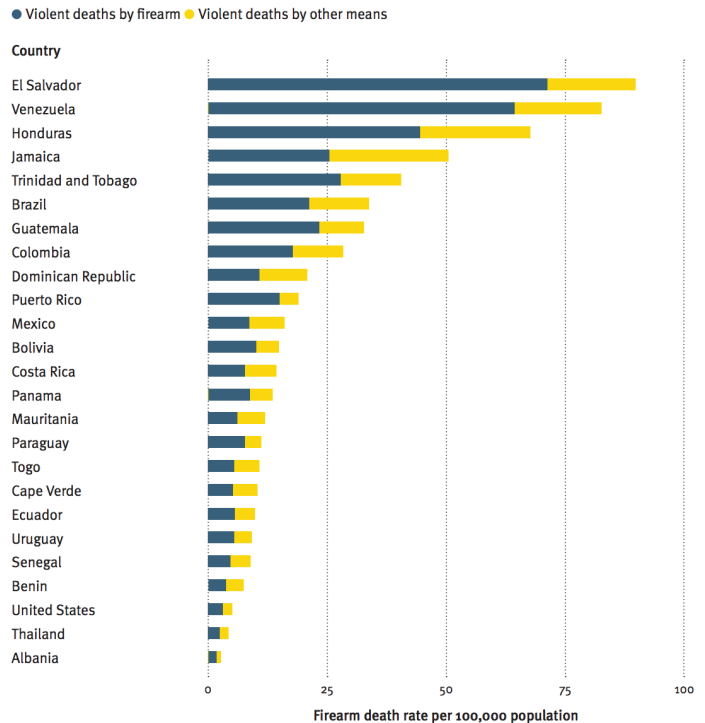
Overview

El Salvador is a Central American country bordering the North Pacific Ocean between Guatemala and Honduras. The population of 6,721, 011 people is predominantly mestizo (a mixed race, typically Spaniard and American Indian) and white. El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated country in Central America. Although it is the smallest country in land area in Central America, El Salvador has a population that is 18 times larger than Belize (CIA, 2018). El Salvador achieved independence from Spain in 1821 and from the Central American Federation in 1839. Their independence was not achieved without the death of 75,000 people in a civil war, and now El Salvador is beset by one of the world's highest homicide rates and pervasive criminal gangs. The country's government is a presidential republic that consists of judicial, legislative, and executive branches. Such a small country geographically that is densely populated is bound to have economic issues; as of 2017 the public debt was 68.1% of the gross domestic product (CIA, 2018).

Gun Violence

With a mortality rate of 5.8 per 1,000 people, most of these deaths are caused by violent firearm use (CIA, 2018). Gun violence is transmitted through social contagion and demographic risks such as age, sex, and neighborhood. The youth especially are targeted by gun violence, mainly people between the ages of 15 and 24. In 2010 there was no state-sponsored program in El Salvador for the physical and psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration of those who are left with chronic injuries as a consequence of gun violence (Crespin, 2010). Since then until 2015, Salvadorans were registering firearms at a

rate of 11,000 per year (Martel, 2016). The figure below compares El Salvador's rate of violent deaths by firearm compared to other high risk countries in the world.



Source: Small Arms Survey (n.d.)

Figure 1. Small Arms Survey, 2017

Epidemiology

Gun violence spreads across the entire world, but most severely in El Salvador where a murder occurs every hour (Aizenman, 2017). The mortality rate from firearm violence has remained essentially unchanged since just before the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, alongside this gun violence are many other forms of violence that spread like a virus. Gender plays a big role in Salvadorians "right" to violence or "normal" violence. For example, narratives suggest that men have more "right" to use violence than women because their gender identity prescribes the use of force. Women as mothers may discipline their children with violence, since it is "for their own good" (Hume, 2008).

Symptoms and Diagnosis

Symptoms may include anger problems, fascination with weapons, boasting about combat, loner, suicidal ideation, homicidal ideation, stalking, paranoia, violence and cruelty, interest in previous shootings, acting out, police contact, use of drugs and alcohol, and more (APHA, 2018). The issue of gun violence is complex and deeply rooted in our culture, which is why we must take a public health approach to ensuring our families and communities are safe. People can be diagnosed if they attempt the use of guns to hurt or kill alongside the “symptoms” listed above (APHA, 2018).

Public Health Problem and Solution

People that co-offend with individuals they are close to is a connection channel for spreading “infection.” Studies examine “time” as a factor, individuals involved in a shooting where someone else was injured were also shot 125 days after their “infector” fell pray to gun violence. Shootings can be seen as symptoms, but violence is the true disease (Lerner, 2018). Negativity and anger can be spread from just a few words exchanged between people, a chain reaction of hate. El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras consistently rank among the most violent countries in the world. El Salvador became the world’s most violent country not at war in 2015, when gang-related violence brought its homicide rate to 103 per hundred thousand. It has since fallen by one third (Labrador & Renwick, 2018). Yet, all three countries have significantly higher homicide rates than neighboring Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama. This is presented in Figure 2. Protective measures include educating yourself on

gun violence and learning how to help people in an emotional crisis (Lerner, 2018).



Figure 2. Renwick and Ro, 2016

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