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Gun Violence and People with Disabilities

Editorial by Thomas C. Weiss

Brief Synopsis: Often the results of gun-related violence in America include not only death but disability as well.

"In this writer's opinion, the drivers of vehicles in America are required to have a license as well as insurance and so should gun owners."

The United States Constitution bars nearly any kind of law aimed at curbing gun violence. Yet since a string of mass shooting last year culminating in the Newtown mass shooting that claimed the lives of twenty children there have been an increasing number of people who are pushing back against the gun lobby's interpretation of the Second Amendment. As a veteran who was trained to use weapons, I can understand why.

A readily available 9mm handgun, available through most gun shops in America, fires a bullet that is capable of piercing walls. The same bullet is capable of shattering bones and leaving a person disabled for the rest of their life. The same is true of other weapons that are common in America, such as ones that fire .45 caliber rounds or others. The handguns mentioned do not include the hotly debated rifles and assault weapons presented before our government that are also available in America today.

More than fifty constitutional law scholars signed a letter explaining why the Second Amendment is not unlimited or absolute. Very few of the liberties and rights in the Constitution are absolute. One of these scholars who signed the letter is among America's greatest constitutional law scholars; his name is Laurence H. Tribe, a Harvard Law School Professor. Mr. Tribe testified before a Senate Judiciary committee, examining potential ways to decrease gun violence without infringing on the Second Amendment right to bear Arms in our nation.

Through spoken and written testimony, Mr. Tribe made it clear that efforts to reduce and not eliminate gun violence through government action are not beyond America's ability because of the Second Amendment. Recent Supreme Court rulings such as *D.C. v. Heller*, Mr. Tribe explained, found justices taking certain policy choices off the table for consideration and, "thereby cleared the path to reasonable regulations to be enacted without fear that those policy choices would ever open the door to unlimited government control or be imperiled by exaggerated interpretations of the Second Amendment."

Mr. Tribe also noted that Justice Antonin Scalia stated the court's interpretation of the Constitution leaves open a number of regulatory tools for combating the issue of gun violence in America. In written testimony Mr. Tribe stated, "Proposals to disarm the American people, to leave firearms solely in the hands of the military and the police, have been decisively taken off the table - if they were ever truly on the table - by the Supreme Court's Second Amendment decisions in 2008 and 2010 [*Heller* and *McDonald v. Chicago* respectively]." The panic by some Americans over being completely disarmed and left defenseless is unreasonable.

Gun Safety

Violence involving guns is a major problem in the United States of America. A number of people say they want a gun for self-defense, but don't take the time to learn how to use a weapon properly. They do not take any training courses related to the gun they purchase, how to care for it, keep it safe, use it - or any other education related to the weapon.

People who state they want a gun for self-defense also do not seem to understand that self-defense with a gun can be just as dangerous to them as it is to a potential attacker. The fact is - guns kept in your house for self-protection are forty-three times more likely to kill a family member or a friend than to kill in self-defense! Here are some steps to stay safe from gun violence:

- Never, ever point a gun at anyone
- Avoid neighbors you know are dangerous
- Learn to settle arguments with words and not weapons
- ****Always**** assume a gun is loaded and has the potential to go off
- Do not hang around people you know are violent or who have threatened violence towards others
- Do not put yourself in danger as a bystander - if people you know have guns and are threatening to use them get out of the area and find help

American Gun Laws are not Working

In America, more than 75% of teen killings are gun-related. In fact, an American child or teenager is 12 times more likely to die of a gun injury than a teenager in another developed nation. Approximately 5,000 children and teenagers die of gun-related suicides, homicides, and unintentional injuries every single year in America. For teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19, gun-related killings are the second leading cause of death in this nation.

The politicians of America fight over legislation concerning types of weapons and background checks, at least recently. The powerful gun lobby in this nation defends the rights of Americans to own weapons that quite plainly have no real use for either hunting or home defense. While the statistics above are nothing but shocking, they fail to mention the numbers of children and teenagers who experience disabilities related to guns.

In this writer's opinion, the drivers of vehicles in America are required to have a license as well as insurance and so should gun owners. In order to own a gun, people should either be a veteran of the armed forces or be required to complete training related to the use of the weapon they wish to purchase and own before they can own it. Gun-related violence has reached the point in America where irresponsible ownership of weapons is causing more deaths among children and teenagers than many types of diseases. The results of gun-related violence in this nation include not only death, but disability as well.

Resources and Citations:

Gun Violence Is Public Health Crisis in Chicago

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/social_issues/jan-june13/afternewtown_02-22.html

So far in the first two months of this year, gun deaths in Chicago have already outpaced last year's explosive rate.

Disability Law Society & American Constitution Society present "Post-Newtown Legal Reforms

<http://www.law.uchicago.edu/audio/DLS-ACS-Newtonn0211213>

This discussion, sponsored by ACS and the Disability Law Society, was held on February 12, 2013.

Grounded in Faith: Resources on Mental Health and Gun Violence

<http://www.aapd.com/resources/press-room/grounded-in-faith-resources.html>

"When discussing mental illnesses and gun violence, policy makers, media pundits and opinion leaders need to honor children and adults with disabilities," said Ginny Thornburgh, IDAC Convener and Director of Interfaith Initiatives at AAPD

Survivors of Gun Violence Push for More Help from Society

by [Irwin Arieff](#) • September 8, 2014 • [BOOKS](#) •

Source: <http://passblue.com/2014/09/08/survivors-of-gun-violence-push-for-more-help-from-society/>

When we talk about gun violence, the focus is usually on the fatalities. There can be so much to discuss after someone is shot dead.

But what about the wounded, who remain present in our lives and in our neighborhoods and require care long after the dead are taken off and buried? Governments, interest groups and activists around the world may be doing what they can to reduce the number of deaths from firearms. But for every person who is shot but not killed, the conversation is just beginning.

Ambulance crews and trauma centers must scramble to keep the victims alive while the justice system tries to track down their assailants and protect them from repeat attacks. Released from the hospital, perhaps after multiple surgeries, they proceed to rehabilitation centers, which must strive to get them back on their feet while social service programs look in on them and ensure they still have a place to live and food to eat. Every society has an obligation to organize these services, find financing for them and make sure they reach those in need.

“Survivors have needs that must be addressed. More than needs, they have rights: the right to the best attainable standards of health, the right to live independently, and the right to participate fully in all aspects of life,” said José Ramos-Horta, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and until recently a senior United Nations diplomat, as well as a survivor of gun violence.

Ramos-Horta’s directive draws us into “Gun Violence, Disability and Recovery,” a new book produced by the [Surviving Gun Violence Project](#), which is partly a volume of horror stories from around the globe, partly a guide to various approaches to aiding gun violence survivors and partly a road map to better and more ambitious ways to address survivors’ needs.

“Gun violence takes the lives of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children every year. Many millions more survive with injuries, psychological trauma, and/or impairments. Yet when states debate the weapons trade — typically only focusing on the illicit aspect — little is said about the people whose lives are ended or forever altered by their misuse,” Cate Buchanan, the book’s editor and director of the project, wrote.

Firearms are omnipresent and their impact on our daily lives is huge, wherever we live. Reliable statistics are extremely difficult to pin down on such key matters as the number of weapons in civilian hands and the number of gun deaths and injuries around the globe. But experts agree that survivors greatly outnumber those killed by armed violence.

A crucial gender distinction exists among the survivors. Young men, for whatever reasons, are far more vulnerable to gun injury (and also death) than other population segments. But the damage to women and girls does not stem from gunshot wounds alone. They are the ones who most often end up responsible for the care and support required by their injured siblings, boyfriends, husbands and fathers. The physical and emotional strains limit their ability to grow up in a healthy environment, participate in the economy, pursue a happy life, follow their dreams.

The costs, of course, are weighty, both financially and emotionally. Surviving a gun injury can be extremely expensive, particularly if rehabilitation takes time. In Burundi, for example, nearly 75 percent of gun violence victims need to go into debt or to sell their belongings to cover the cost of their health care. Heavy burdens are also imposed on the victims' families and friends.

Julia Farquharson, a Canadian, wrote movingly in the book of her discovery that she could listen in on the final moments of her son's life after a shooting, via a voice-mail message he left on her cellphone. "Hearing that voicemail has been a source of continuing trauma for me," she said.

His death left her numb and eventually too sick to walk or to work. Another of her children, also traumatized by the sibling's death, descended into a life of crime and never climbed out of it. "My mind tells me I can work, but my body won't allow me to," Farquharson wrote. "I am reduced to a disability pension." Yet she became productive, launching a group called [U-MOVE](#), United Mothers Opposing Violence Everywhere, to push for programs to help those left behind.

In Guatemala, bus drivers are frequent targets of shootings; on average, a driver is killed every other day, according to the book. The dead drivers leave behind spouses and children who have lost their means of support. For a long time, the drivers' families were left to their own devices. In 2009, the widows formed an association to force the government to provide aid for surviving family members. The Ministry of Social Welfare now pays families the equivalent of \$39 a month for two years for each murdered driver's child under 16. (Alas, if a driver survives an attack, he and his family get nothing.)

In Somalia, gun violence is so common that some local tribal elders have laid out guidelines for compensating victims and their survivors. For killing a man, the payment of 100 camels is suggested, and 50 camels if the victim is a woman. For injuries, 50 camels are enough to compensate for the loss of an eye and 10 for the loss of a thumb.

Clearly, gun violence imposes burdens on governments at all levels, ranging from the need to pursue programs to reduce firearm injuries and deaths to providing the needed medical care, rehabilitation and social services.

In El Salvador, where some 3,000 people died in 2010 from gun violence and thousands more were seriously wounded, the government has sought to at least partly recover the cost of the medical care by taxing guns and ammunition, alcoholic beverages and tobacco products. The rate of taxation ranges from 2 to 30 percent.

About a third of the money is channeled to the country's Health Solidarity Fund. Set up in 2005, this agency employs more than 2,400 people and provides a variety of supplementary public health services. The tax on guns and bullets accounts for about 1 percent of the fund's budget, and gunfire survivors can benefit from several of the programs, although none of them specifically targets their needs. A separate office in the Ministry of Justice helps funnel public services to crime victims and the family members they left behind.

The quality and availability of trauma care is particularly crucial to gunfire survival; sadly, gun violence has been the catalyst for improvement and innovation in some countries, the book noted. "In Mexico and Colombia the high numbers of people injured in the 'war on drugs' have led to quality improvement being prioritized in trauma, and the Trauma Society of South Africa provides a good example of inter-disciplinary emergency care."

Another plus: efficient delivery of well-designed health care to the victims of gun violence can contribute to a country's stability "by affirming the role of the state in the visible delivery of basic services, and by supporting society's more vulnerable members," the book explained.

On the flip side, any and all shortcomings in this specialized type of care have harsh and immediate consequences. "Delays in surgery for a patient with an abdominal gunshot wound can lead to infection or death. Failure to provide early external oxygenation to a patient who has been shot in the head can lead to brain damage," the book said. "In the longer term, a lack of assistive devices such as wheelchairs or suitable beds and chairs, combined with poor access to rehabilitation, leads to pressure sores, systemic infection, and premature death."

In low- to middle-income countries, there is a constant scramble for acute-care hospital beds. This shortage, the book said, is aggravated by a parallel lack of rehabilitation facilities: where are the patients in the acute care beds to go when they need physical, occupational or speech therapy and rehabilitation after injury to their brains, spinal cords and skeletal systems?

"Do you ever live a normal life again after this?" asked Neville Beling, a South African who was shot in a bar in May 1993 and spent two years recuperating in a local hospital but has clearly not yet recovered. "The list is long of the things I no longer do, or dream about. Simple things you probably take for granted: standing at the edge of the sea and feeling the water lap at your feet. Small things are more important than the big things."

"Gun Violence, Disability and Recovery," edited by Cate Buchanan, 9781493101795

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