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RESEARCH ARTICLE

EXAMINATION OF THE AMERICAN CULTURAL OF VIOLENCE AND GANGS

***Dr. Deborah S. Le Blanc**

Department of Professional Studies, National University, 5245 Pacific Concourse Drive, Los Angeles, CA

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ABSTRACT

The United States also has the highest homicide-by-firearm rate among the world's most developed nations. But many gun rights proponents say these statistics do not indicate a causal relationship. After a decade long decline, gun violence is increasing in many cities in the United States. Much of this increase is being attributed to the revitalization of urban street gangs. Even in Los Angeles, where overall levels of violence continue to fall, gang violence is once again rising. Significant findings emerged from both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies confirmed the correlation between gangs and gun violence. A critical component to public safety -- including the prevention of further crime and violence -- is a successful transition for offenders into effective community-based and after care services; however, this prevention must be in an effective and humane manner. The author utilized a descriptive research approach of identifying and collecting findings on the examination of the American culture of violence. The author conducted an extensive literature review to ascertain current developments and efforts to curb gun safety laws since 2015 to 2019. As of 2019, there were no federal laws banning semiautomatic assault weapons, military-style .50 caliber rifles, handguns, or large-capacity magazines. Violence is becoming a global problem. The increase in gun/gang violence has not been limited to the US. Like Canada, Britain, especially in South London, has also experienced a spate of firearm homicides that have been attributed to conflicts among gangs and groups of youth involved in the illegal narcotics market. Findings revealed that both the United States and Canada have 'demonstrated that even after controlling for individual-level attributes gang members are more delinquent and commit more crime than do non-gang members (Esbensen and Huizinga 1993; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, and Chard-Wierschem 1993; Huizinga 1997; Thornberry et al. 2003; Huff 2004; Gatti, Tremblay, Vitaro, and McDuff, 2005)'. The key point was the connectivity between violence and gangs. "The conclusion drawn most frequently from these findings is that the observed positive relationship between gang membership and offending levels cannot be explained through a simple process of self-selection, wherein only highly delinquent youth join gangs. Instead, there are additional influences that gang membership brings to bear in facilitating higher levels of offending among individuals who join.

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INTRODUCTION

America is the land of hopes and dreams. American appears to be embracing a culture of violence as its new normal. Gun violence is plaguing America and adversely impacting its youth and future generations (Abrams, L.S. 2006). Gun ownership in the United States is rooted in the Second Amendment of the Constitution: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

"However, it is the author's belief that lack of gun control and loose gun laws are toxic environmental influences on its youth, re-entry juveniles and are contributing to increased gang violence among juveniles in America (Altschuler & Brash, (2004). America is becoming a place of violence and moral decay. According to the U.S. Council on Foreign Policy (Masters, 2019), "high-profile mass shootings in the United States in recent years have rekindled the gun control debate and raised comparisons of policies around the world". There seems to be little disagreement that, "gun violence is a contemporary global human rights issue. Gun-related violence threatens our most fundamental human right, the right to life". Fact surrounding gun violence were startling, firstly, was a daily tragedy affecting the lives of individuals around the world. More than 500 people may die every day because of violence committed with firearms.

***Corresponding author: Dr. Deborah S. Le Blanc,**
Department of Professional Studies, National University, 5245 Pacific
Concourse Drive, Los Angeles, CA.

The other alarming fact was the awareness that anyone can be affected by firearm violence but in certain situations gun violence disproportionately impacts communities of color, women and other marginalized groups in society; in recent years it has been the mainstream communities being impacted the greatest. The author examined the new norm of gun violence and gangs in America to better understand the efforts the government is making to create a safer world and less violent society for our children and grandchildren (Greenwood, 2008). The lack of gun control and loose gun laws are toxic environmental influences on its youth and are contributing to increased gang violence among juveniles in America. "Recent years have seen some of the worst mass shootings in U.S. history. They include a 2017 shooting at a music festival in Las Vegas that killed fifty-eight people, a 2018 shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, that killed seventeen, and a shooting at an El Paso, Texas, shopping center in 2019 that killed twenty-two people" (Masters, 2019). Thus, the regularity of such events has rekindled the gun control debate and invoked comparisons of U.S. gun policies and those of other wealthy democracies. Key point, the United States, with less than 5 percent of the world's population, yet "has 46 percent of the world's civilian-owned guns, according to a report by the Switzerland-based Small Arms Survey".

Violence is on the rise across the country, as is gang-related violence, with no sign that it will let up anytime soon, according to a leading expert. Gangs come from all walks of life, for many different reasons. Color, race, creed does not discriminate against gangs; every culture has its gangs. There are many different reasons on why the gang culture is so strong in today's society (Hagedorn, 2005). According to researchers we just aren't paying attention to the reasons. Lack of gun control laws may increase violent and criminal activities more in the future. Laws like this one may be contributors to greater moral decay and violence in the years ahead. Juveniles of color are uniting and also taking matters in their own hands, as they see more and cases of societal inequality and injustice. According to empirical research conducted by the Government and Canada, "one of the more robust findings to emerge from both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of youth addresses the relationship between gang membership and individual levels of delinquency and offending" (GC). Findings revealed that both the United States and Canada have demonstrated that even after controlling for individual-level attributes gang members are more delinquent and commit more crime than do non-gang members (Esbensen and Huizinga 1993; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, and Chard-Wierschem 1993; Huizinga 1997; Thornberry et al. 2003; Huff 2004; Gatti, Tremblay, Vitaro, and McDuff, 2005). The key point was the connectivity between violence and gangs. "The conclusion drawn most frequently from these findings is that the observed positive relationship between gang membership and offending levels cannot be explained through a simple process of self-selection, wherein only highly delinquent youth join gangs. Instead, there are additional influences that gang membership brings to bear in facilitating higher levels of offending among individuals who join. This is especially true for behaviors related to guns and violence" (Tiet, 2010).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Author utilized a descriptive research approach of identifying and collecting findings on the examination of the American

culture of violence. The author conducted an extensive literature review to ascertain current developments and efforts to curb gun safety laws since 2015 to 2019. The review of literature used was an evaluation of previous studies on the topic of violence and gun laws in America which examined the arguments objectively and without bias. The research goal of the literature review was to address the following research questions: (1) What is the current status of gun law reform in the United States? (2) What impact, if any, has state law made on reducing or curbing violence? (3) What is the relationship, if any between the lack of gun laws and the rise of gang activity in the United States (Tiet, 2010).

RESULTS

Gun ownership in the United States is rooted in the Second Amendment of the Constitution: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." However, shootings are becoming the new norm with unchecked frequency. Moreover, "gun violence is becoming a contemporary global human rights issue. Gun-related violence threatens our most fundamental human right, the right to life," according to the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations. The overall results revealed the following major findings: (1) "As of 2019, there were no federal laws banning semiautomatic assault weapons, military-style .50 caliber rifles, handguns, or large-capacity magazines. There was a federal prohibition on assault weapons and large-capacity magazines between 1994 and 2004, but Congress allowed these restrictions to expire." And (2) that in January 2016, President Barack Obama took several actions intended to decrease gun violence, including a measure requiring dealers of firearms at gun shows or online to obtain federal licenses and conduct background checks. And (3), as reported previously from the Government of Canada, robust findings emerged from both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies confirmed the correlation between gangs and gun violence in its research on youth which addressed the relationship between gang membership and individual levels of delinquency and offending. Many youth's in the juvenile justice system often struggle with educational deficiencies, mental illnesses, and substance abuse, and return to communities with high rates of crime, poverty and poorly performing schools (Tita 2007). A critical component to public safety -- including the prevention of further crime and violence -- is a successful transition for offenders into effective community-based and after care services; however, this prevention must be in an effective and humane manner.

As previously stated, federal law provides the basis for firearm regulation in the United States, but states and cities can impose further restrictions. Some states, such as Idaho, Alaska, and Kansas, have passed various laws attempting to nullify federal gun legislation, but legal analysts say these are unconstitutional" (Masters, 2019). Further, findings did reveal that state laws such as Stand Your Ground laws are associated with an increase in firearm homicides and injuries and do not deter crime. Human life is valuable; and more should be done to help society see the value and sanity in its protection. On the other hand, some research supports the notion of evidence that stand-your-ground laws may increase homicide rates only moderately, and further evidence that such laws may increase firearm homicides is very limited.

And moreover, that evidence for the effect of stand-your-ground laws on other types of violent crime is inconclusive. Lastly, more research is needed to ascertain, what impact, if any, has state law made on reducing or curbing violence?

DISCUSSION

Studies revealed that United States also has the highest homicide-by-firearm rate among the world's most developed nations. But many gun rights proponents say these statistics do not indicate a causal relationship. After a decade long decline, gun violence is increasing in many cities in the United States. Much of this increase is being attributed to the revitalization of urban street gangs. Even in Los Angeles, where overall levels of violence continue to fall, gang violence is once again rising. Gangs then were seen as organizations that were positive and benefited the struggling community. They offered resources and protection to community members, more specifically females who feared their neighborhood (Moore, 2001). The inability to find a job and the struggling economy made gang life incredibly attractive to both males and females (Molidor, C.E. (1996). We must do more as a nation to prepare our youth for survival and safety.

Further, 'Stand Your Ground' laws upend centuries of traditional self-defense doctrine and threaten public safety by encouraging armed vigilantism, allowing a person to kill another person in a public area even when they can clearly and safely walk away from the danger. These laws are associated with increases in homicides and injuries across different demographics and neighborhoods, while disproportionately impacting communities of color. They encourage the escalation of violence in avoidable situations and do not deter crime. It is my belief, that laws such as this are influencing greater violence and criminal activities among juveniles and gang members nationwide; and that they too are taking the law into their own hands. This article produced descriptive information to guide further studies. Moreover, future empirical study is needed to explore reasons our government has not tighten gun control laws and what Americans can do as a nation to combat rising gang violence by creating greater opportunities for education and economic success for our youth (Greenwood, 2008); in addition further research is needed to refine methodological issues related to treatment outcome studies for youth involved in the criminal justice system.

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