



C² Reflections

Critical Conversations that Lie at the Heart of Health Justice

Season 2 Episode 3: Gun Violence

By C² Host Emily Rose O’Neil

What We Learned

Our third episode of season 2 addressed how the threat of gun violence in the United States impacts the health of children, women, and communities. We had the privilege of hosting Michael Ulrich, JD, MPH, professor of Health Law, Ethics, & Human Rights at Boston University School of Public Health. He has published numerous journal articles about gun violence and its impact on health outcomes. Our conversation explored many topics related to gun violence and contains important information on the topic.

Recontextualizing Gun Violence: A challenge of addressing gun violence has been the inability to characterize it well. Professor Ulrich noted the importance of recontextualizing gun violence as a public health issue. For many years, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was prohibited from using its funding to research gun violence. As of 2020 funding has been restored, but what is left behind is a decades-long gap in the research from the country’s most senior public health institution.¹ Researching gun violence through the lens of public health means that we can more accurately assess how firearms are impacting the health of people and their communities.

¹ Weir, K. (1 April 2021.). *A thaw in the freeze on federal funding for gun violence and injury prevention research.* <https://www.apa.org>. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/04/news-funding-gun-research>

² Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health. *Homicide leading cause of death for pregnant women in U.S.* Oct. 2022. News. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/homicide-leading-cause-of-death-for-pregnant-women-in-u-s/>

Domestic Violence:

Professor Ulrich also spoke about the intersection of gun violence and domestic violence. A recent study from the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health revealed that pregnant women in the United States are more likely to die from homicide than from obstetric causes. Additionally, 68% of these homicides involve firearms.² Why is this? Ulrich’s answer: introducing a gun into an emotionally volatile situation increases the risk of firearm violence. Pregnancy can be a very stressful time emotionally and interpersonally for a woman. Bringing a firearm into the mix only heightens the chance for violence.

“To adequately address gun violence, you must also address domestic violence.”

What Resonated

My conversation with Professor Ulrich showed the interdisciplinary nature of this topic. He noted that addressing gun violence cannot be limited to the mobilization of one sector and that in order to address gun violence, we must also address other public health concerns like domestic violence. The two are not mutually exclusive issues. Our conversation highlighted the importance of approaching public health concerns with ideas and expertise from multiple sectors.