

Reverse US funding freeze on research into gun violence, say experts

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A ban on federal funding of research into gun violence initiated by Congress in 1997 must be overturned to improve understanding of gun use and how best to control it, argue experts in *The BMJ* today.

In an editorial, Margaret Winker and [colleagues](#) say the move has had "a chilling effect on gun violence research to this day" and they argue that "US history and the [political pressure](#) brought to bear by the National Rifle Association have so far proved impossible to defy."

In the US, one person is killed by a firearm every 17 minutes, 87 people are killed each day, and 609 are killed every week on average, they write. Guns were responsible for 33,599 deaths in 2014, of which 63% were suicides, 34% homicides, and 2% were unintentional shootings

The problem is worldwide, they add, "although few countries have guns embedded in the national psyche to quite the same extent as the US."

The toll of gun violence is not just premature [death](#), they explain, but a series of serious snowball effects in education, health, incarceration, family instability, and social capital," making it a classic public health problem.

They note that a public health approach has been effective in tackling other injury problems, such as those from road traffic incidents. But say, unfortunately, "US political forces and special interest groups have blocked any public health approach to [gun violence](#)."

They believe that research is needed on all aspects of gun policies and safety, "including evaluating state policies, improving understanding of the effects of restricting access to firearms and other lethal means for people at risk of suicide, and evaluating the effectiveness of community and school gun safety training."

For instance, a gun owner's license, already required in some states, should be a requirement in all states and tracked nationally, they argue. "Just as driving tests and licensing do not stop people from driving unless they can no longer do so safely, gun ownership should be a privilege, retained only while safe ownership remains possible and revoked when safety is in question."

By taking basic steps to permit public health research, "we can finally begin to understand the sources of the current epidemic of violence and how best to control it," they conclude.

More information: Editorial: Unsafe and understudied: the US gun problem, The *BMJ*, www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.i578

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