

Gunshot injuries occur primarily in Miami-Dade's poor, black neighborhoods

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Gunshot wound injuries in Miami-Dade County are clustered in predominantly poor, black neighborhoods, according to a new study from the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.

"These findings offer evidence to support urgent, targeted community engagement and prevention strategies to reduce local firearm violence," said Tanya L. Zakrison, M.D., M.H.Sc., M.P.H., assistant professor in the DeWitt Daughtry Family Department of Surgery and a surgeon at the Ryder Trauma Center at UM/Jackson Memorial Hospital.

Zakrison sponsored the study, "Geo-demographics of Gunshot Wound Injuries in Miami-Dade County, 2002-2012," published recently in the journal *BMC Public Health*. Co-authors were Justin Stoler, Ph.D., M.P.H., assistant professor in the College of Arts and Sciences, whose research focuses on health disparities, and Laura Zebib, a former UM student and Miller School intern who is now an M.P.H. student at Columbia University.

"We found that the epicenter of [gun violence](#) persisted in these socially and economically marginalized neighborhoods throughout the 11-year study period, implying that gun control, anti-violence, and policing strategies have been ineffective," said Zakrison. "We hope to engage local community groups and municipal politicians to find new societal-level interventions that will help eliminate systemic inequalities, also known as structural violence, evident in Miami that lead to direct violence related to firearms."

The Miller School researchers reviewed 4,547 Miami-Dade cases involving an intentional firearm-related injury from 2002 to 2012. The fatality rate of injured patients was 15.4 percent. "Gun violence in Miami-Dade County is twice the national average," Zakrison said. "From a public health perspective, this is a crisis."

Zakrison said more funds are needed on a national level for firearm research and injury prevention programs. "Firearm-related violence is a greater problem in societies like the United States that have extreme inequality of wealth," she said. "It also stems from a culture of fear that has permeated society so that people feel they need a gun."

She added that the United States has the world's largest incarcerated population with 2.7 million people in prison. "When inmates are released, it is very difficult for them to obtain regular employment, so they are pushed back into high-risk alternatives for income, fueling the intra-community [violence](#) in Miami-Dade," she said. "We need to make changes in our society so all human beings have an opportunity to realize their full potential."

Provided by University of Miami Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine

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