

Obstructing Development: THE EFFECTS OF SMALL ARMS ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

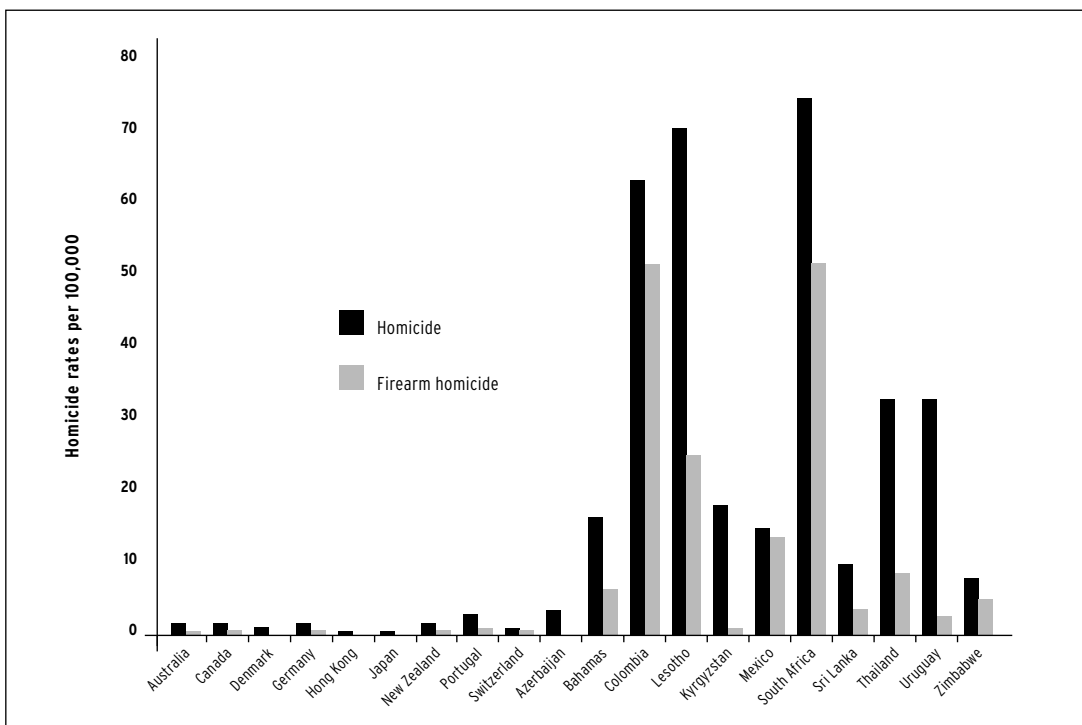
People everywhere are vulnerable to armed violence—particularly in those parts of the world where public institutions are failing and economic growth is at a standstill. But there has been surprisingly little evidence generated to date on the direct and indirect effects of small arms-related violence in developing societies. As a result, the development community is only slowly recognizing the gravity of the problem. As this chapter demonstrates, small arms availability and misuse can significantly obstruct human development, and represent a key impediment to the development aspirations of many donors, governments, and NGOs. For this reason, small arms control cannot be treated exclusively as a traditional disarmament issue, but rather as a challenge for those interested in advancing meaningful security and development.

Small arms availability and misuse has direct effects on human development that can be empirically measured and recorded. It constitutes one of the leading causes of fatal and non-fatal injury in many developing countries. The direct effects reach beyond victims' physical pain and anguish and extend to the costs of treatment and rehabilitation, the opportunity costs of long-term disabilities and the implications of lost productivity on households. In South Africa and Uganda, two countries where firearm injuries are one of the primary causes of death, a significant proportion of victims go into debt to pay medical expenses resulting from their firearm injuries. Moreover, the direct burden resulting from threat to life, combined with the indirect burden of protection and avoidance, constitute a tax on the standard of living of communities.



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A necklace of bullets adorns a Rwandan rebel fighter.

Figure 4.1 Homicide and firearm homicide rates per 100,000 in selected countries, 2000



Source: UNODC (1986-2002)

Those countries affected by endemic small arms-related violence are often excluded from investment and assistance.

The indirect effects of small arms availability and misuse on human development can be devastating but are difficult to quantify precisely. In some cases, armed violence can weaken or destroy the social and economic fabric of households, neighbourhoods, and whole societies. The indirect effects are interrelated and can include a rise in the incidence and lethality of crime, the often rapid collapse or erosion of social services, declines in both formal and informal economic activity, the distortion of investment, savings and revenue collection, and the destruction of social capital and trust. For example, unemployment and income inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean are considered critical factors in intentional firearm-related violence that disproportionately affects young males aged 15–25.

Table 4.7 Comparing homicide and unemployment in a sample of Latin American countries and cities

City	Country	National unemployment rate amongst males	City rate per 100,000	National rate per 100,000
Medellin	Colombia	18.8*	248	70.92
Guatemala City	Guatemala	5.2**	101.5	30.2
San Salvador	El Salvador	8.7*	95.4	8.9
Caracas	Venezuela	10.3**	76	15.7
São Paulo	Brazil	5.3*	55.8	29.17
Lima	Peru	7.5**	25	11.5
Mexico*	Mexico	5.5*	19.6	17.2
Santiago	Chile	4.4*	8	2.9
Buenos Aires	Argentina	16.5*	6.4	3.8

Notes: *1995. **1998.
Sources: Ayers (1998); Carneiro (2000); ILO (2001); Godnick (2002); Muggah and Batchelor (2002); UN (1998a); UN Statistics Division (2000)

This chapter describes a gradual convergence of concern between security and development agendas on small arms over the last decade. Development-oriented policy makers and practitioners have begun to attach a high priority to traditional security issues such as conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction. At the same time, many in the security sector are also taking up classic development issues such as the environment, health, and food concerns. Terrorism represents an important nexus of the two sectors: renewed commitments to alleviating poverty and harmonizing intelligence gathering are regarded as vital responses to terrorist threats. Small arms and light weapons represent another area where the two agendas coincide. But although there is a growing acceptance that small arms availability and misuse can contribute to insecurity and erode human development, a genuinely developmental approach to small arms is still in its infancy.

Three broad but interconnected developmental responses to the direct and indirect effects of small arms availability and misuse are reviewed in the chapter. The first aims to change the attitudes and behaviours of would-be small arms users in order to reduce their demand for weapons. This approach has been taken up by a number of United Nations agencies and international NGOs and integrated into more traditional development programming. The second seeks to strengthen governance associated with the regulation and ownership of small arms—particularly within the security sector and among civilians. A number of multilateral organizations and donor governments have focused on this approach. The third response adopts a pragmatic approach tied to the collection and destruction of weapons, often in exchange for development incentives, to prevent their re-circulation.

Development-oriented organizations have the potential to respond practically to small arms issues.

Though the contours of the link between small arms and development are increasingly clear, more data is needed to better quantify the direct and indirect effects of small arms on human development, and to design more appropriate policy interventions. Ideally, in-depth comparable surveys across countries should be conducted. For that, significant investment will be needed.

There is also an urgent need for donors to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of existing arms reduction interventions. Measures of success should move beyond the number of guns collected, and examine the extent to which such programmes reduce death and injury and improve the security and safety of individuals and communities. Development actors should be interested in such efforts because they can have positive repercussions on the economy, the quality of life of beneficiaries, and development project success rates.