Report of the working group on the economic cost of the consequences of small arms

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Participants from Europe, Africa, North America and South America contributed to discussion of four issues:

First, identifying factors or elements that should be included in efforts to characterize the economic burden of small arms and small arms injuries;

Second, identifying potential sources of information and data for analyzing and characterizing the burden of small arms;

Third, identifying obstacles to improving our knowledge of the costs/burden of small arms;

Fourth, suggestions for crafting messages about the economic burden of small arms and small arms injuries to inform the public and to use in advocacy.

1. Factors to be explored in addressing the cost or economic burden of small arms include:
   2. direct medical costs associated with treating injuries
   3. long-term medical costs including costs of rehabilitation
   4. years of productive life lost as a result of death and disability
   5. family impact where those injured are often the "breadwinner"
   6. costs of psychological sequellae to family members, especially children, of those injured
   7. impact on children in the family of those injured such as lost educational opportunities
   8. deferred opportunities by family members to engage in business (e.g., deciding against opening a business in areas of crime/violence)
   9. lost tourism, international business and investment
   10. costs of security measures
   11. costs of law enforcement
   12. costs to legal and justice (juridical) systems
   13. penal and correctional system costs
   14. lost talent and leadership (e.g., South Africa)
   15. lost quality of life (can be expressed or viewed economically)
   16. and - if we choose to do something about small arms violence and injury - there will be costs associated with data collection and analysis, advocacy, policy development and evaluation.

1. Sources of information and data about economic costs of small arms and small arms injuries include:
   1. health providers and institutions may have information to assist in establishing medical costs
   2. insurance companies
   3. security agencies (costs of alarms, bodyguards, locks, etc.)
   4. Medical examiners, coroners, morgues and other death investigators may help not only in establishing numbers but in providing information about age, occupation, etc. for computing economic costs
   5. Fire departments/ambulance services/police departments, penal systems may all provide
information about their direct costs as well as demographic information about the victims and perpetrators.

6. Economists as well as development, tourism and commerce agencies can provide information about lost business, lost productivity and other impacts.

**Discussion of data gaps:** The group preliminarily identified several areas where data are missing and recommend further discussion. These gaps include cost information related to law enforcement, penal system (imprisonment) and justice system, costs of lost employment and other economic burdens, welfare costs.

**Discussion of cost data limitations:** Among other limitations, the comparability of data from one country to another was determined to be a major problem for analytical utility. This led to a discussion of obstacles.

1. **Obstacles to improving our knowledge of the economic impact of small arms include:**
   a) comparability
   b) differing methodologies and definitions involved in data collection and maintenance
   c) willingness of data sources (from insurers to law enforcement) to provide information
   d) lack of resources to conduct small arms injury surveillance and analysis
   e) data resides in disparate 'silos'

Planning to overcome obstacles can:
1. utilize existing technologies (marking, trace, ballistics imaging as well as computer)
2. pursue (advocate for) resources for investigation, surveillance, analysis and research
3. advocate for better training of primary information recorders
4. promote collaboration with data sources (assuring that they benefit from sharing information by getting reports, etc. back)
5. advocate for better resources for primary reporters such as death investigators (Medical examiners, coroners, morgues)

4) **How should messages about cost/burden be crafted for public education and for advocacy?**

The working group notes that a discussion of the burden or costs of small arms invites an argument about the benefits of small arms. We therefore recommend that messages focus on the burden of small arms **injuries and deaths.**

Messages about the costs of injuries and deaths from small arms can include:

1. medical costs are but a small, small portion of the burden
2. noting that, beyond the more easily quantifiable costs of injury and death, there are many costs that are either indirect or difficult to establish, but are nevertheless quite large. These include:
   1. health resources diverted from other necessary care such as HIV, malaria, etc.
   2. health impacts in areas of violence where services such as immunization are depressed
   3. health impacts when providers are deterred from areas of high violence
   4. both the direct costs to law enforcement, penal and justice systems and the indirect costs where other resources are diverted (e.g., from traffic patrol etc.)
   5. lost productivity of a community.
3. unlike other products, firearms are particularly susceptible to misuse resulting in injury and death. We are all vulnerable both directly and through our pocketbooks.
4. The working group suggests using 'paradigm' cases to help educate the public and policy-makers about the costs of small arms injuries. For instance, take the cost of the
manufacture of the gun, ammunition, the purchase of a gun, and then the consequences where, for instance, a child should be killed in an unintended shooting, and go through the list above of all the social and family costs in that individual case. Such cases also allow an empathetic connection often lost by the recitation of statistics.

References include:


