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Firearm Related Injuries, Gun Violence Cost Hospitals US$679 million

A new study reveals that the cost of inpatient hospitalisations caused by non-lethal Firearm Related Injuries (FRIs) and gun violence in the U.S. is approximately $679 million annually. The study also shows that FRIs affect the young between 18 to 24 years of age, poor and minority males (including Hispanics and Blacks) in urban settings. The authors of the study found clear geographic variations and an urban/rural divide. Western U.S. was found to have the highest odds of hospitalisations due to FRIs.

FRIs have been a source of concern in the U.S. for quite some time now. They result in thousands of deaths and injuries every year. Approximately 32,000 people died in 2013 in the U.S. because of FRIs. It is estimated that there are around 310 million firearms in the U.S. (as of 2009) and this does not include military owned weapons.

The majority of the focus has been on fatalities related to gun-violence but very little attention is paid to the economic burden and costs to the healthcare system that is associated with non-lethal FRIs. This study, conducted by Jason Salemi and co-authors examines the trends, prevalence and healthcare costs associated with FRI-associated hospitalisations in the USA over the 14-year period from 1998 to 2011.

Some of the key findings from this study include:

- Average inpatient length of stay for an FRI is around 7 days and costs an average of $22,000.
- FRIs cost hospitals over $679 million annually on inpatient care. This is equal to nearly $9 billion over the 14 year period of this study.
- The cost does not include direct medical costs for physicians, and indirect costs caused due to lost productivity as well as costs that are borne by families and society and victims of FRIs that do not attend hospitals.
- Approximately 60 percent of FRIs were associated with assault, 23% were unintentional/accidental, 8% were self-inflicted and 2% were associated with legal intervention.
- Over three quarters of FRIs had handguns involved while shotguns and hunting rifles were responsible 17.7 and 5.4 percent of the time.
- Unintentional FRIs were common in children under 14 years (around 50 percent), Whites (around 34 percent) and those in rural settings (around 48 percent)

These findings highlight the need for firearm regulation and the implementation of legislation and preventive measures that could help reduce the economic burden of FRIs on the U.S. healthcare system.
Source: Family Medicine and Community Health
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