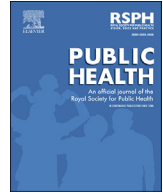




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Letter to the Editor

Firearms or SARS-Cov-2: what is the most lethal?



With 393 million guns, the US has nearly half of the firearms in the world, with more guns than US citizens (120 firearms per 100 people).¹ Fear and catastrophe are known to increase the purchase of guns,^{2,3} including events such as mass shootings or terrorist attacks, and even the Barack Obama election where sections of the population felt insecure. In late 2019, a new highly contagious virus appeared in China and spread around the world with a high mortality rate. Initially named COVID-19, the virus was renamed SARS-CoV-2, which contributed to a perceived increase in fear by reminding people of the 2003 SARS epidemic. To reduce spread of the virus, massive quarantine and containments were implemented around the world. At the time of writing, nearly 4 billion people (i.e. more than half the global population) are confined to their homes and will remain here for several weeks or months, without participation in outdoor occupational or leisure activities. Fear of dying is evident among the population. In addition to a shortage of respiratory masks and essential drugs, the unprecedented financial service market crash and knowledge of Wall Street financial dynamics adds to the perceptions of insecurity. Stress and anxiety have resulted in the irrational necessity for self-defense and the purchase of guns. Purchases of guns increased by one million in March 2020 and sales are likely to increase further in April (Fig. 1). Although only basic essentials can be purchased during containment, the National Rifle Association considered firearms

as essential products. Death by firearms is directly linked with firearm access (i.e. the availability of firearms to individuals) and the level of firearm ownership, both at the population, household and individual levels.⁴ Owning a gun increases the risk of death by domestic violence for women by 20-fold^{2,5} and the risk of suicide by 3-fold.⁶ Contrary to the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic, the current increased trend for gun ownership will not only have short-term consequences, as the risk of death increases the moment the gun is purchased, but will also have long-term consequences and subsequent increases in gun violence. All countries with enforced firearm control have seen a decrease in gun violence.⁴ Currently, nearly 50,000 people per year die or are injured by firearms in US;⁷ thus, the current unprecedented purchase of guns, in addition to the fear of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic, may result in a massive challenge for the country. We also want to acknowledge that, despite no available data for most countries in the world, the purchase of guns worldwide might be a related consequence of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic, which may increase the already-staggering number of 857 million civilian firearms in the world. Moreover, victims of gun violence would utilize intensive care unit resources, which are already under great pressure with a shortage of assisted ventilation and are vital in the context of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic. As The New York Times stated 'Please, Stop Shooting. We Need the Beds'.⁸

Number of guns per month purchased in USA and global number of SARS-Cov-2 cases

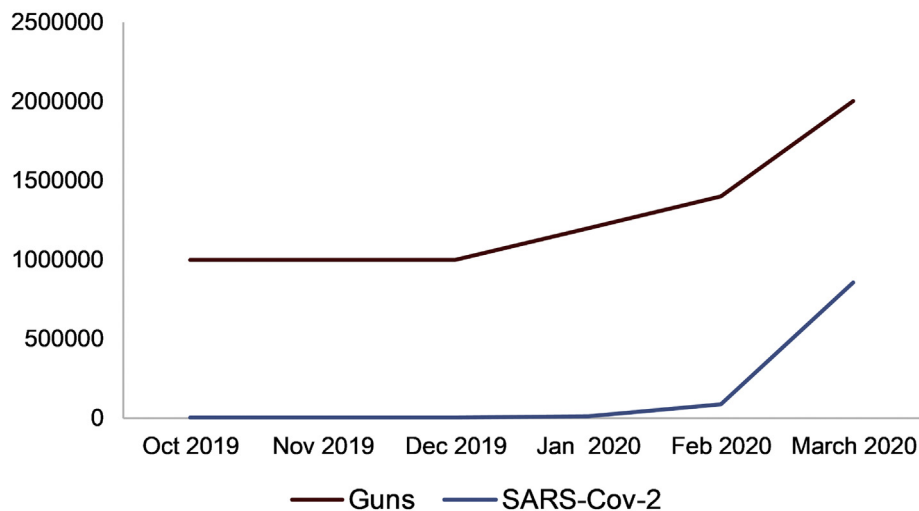


Fig. 1. Number of guns purchased in the US and the global number of SARS-Cov-2 cases per month. SARS-Cov-2, severe acute respiratory syndrome-coronavirus disease-2.

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