

Violence, health, human rights and peace

This thematic edition brings together 30 articles on the impacts of violence on individual and public health, highlighting the fact that the Unified Health System (SUS) bears the brunt of all the effects of this painful social phenomenon.

The breadth and diversity of the topics covered are a clear sign of the progress that researchers in the field have made in understanding, evaluating, and proposing ways for promoting life and peace¹. There are 20 articles on mortality that address, among other topics, armed violence, suicide, and the burden of femicide on society, including among indigenous populations. There are 10 articles on morbidity caused by violence and traffic accidents, workplace accidents, burns, suicide attempts, assaults against children, adolescents, pregnant women, and the elderly, as well as on underreporting and undetermined causes. Most of the articles are population-based and focus on 21st century data, bringing together analyses of several Latin American countries.

It is necessary to comment on violent deaths. According to a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)², approximately 27% of the 458,000 homicides reported worldwide in 2021 were committed in the following countries, which numerically occupy the top 10 places: Brazil with 47,722 (10.4% of the total); Nigeria (44,200); India (41,330); Mexico (35,700); South Africa (24,865); United States (22,941); Myanmar (15,299); Colombia (14,159); Russia (9,866); and Pakistan (9,207). Latin America and the Caribbean are the regions with the highest death rates. They are not the target of wars between countries, but they are plagued by social violence. More than 40 of the 50 most dangerous cities in the world are located there³. Some relief is that the UNODC document records a downward trend in violent mortality in the countries of this region of 14% between 2017 and 2021, except in Ecuador, Nicaragua and Panama.

The highest rates in Latin America are found in Haiti, with approximately 62 per 100,000 inhabitants; Trinidad and Tobago, 46/100,000; and Mexico 41.55/100,000. In 2021, Brazil ranked 11th, with 22.38 per 100,000 inhabitants – almost four times higher than the global average. However, the 2023 rate of 21.2 per 100,000 corroborates the downward trend.

Despite high government spending on security and high incarceration rates, drug and arms trafficking, organized crime, and gangs add to a series of social problems driven by inequality, racism, and sexism. Men are the ones who kill and die the most. And several authors in this edition note that many deaths are not recorded or are reported as having undetermined causes.

Given the limited space available, the following discussion focuses solely on the issue of femicide, linking it to high homicide rates. Marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, celebrated worldwide on November 25, UN Secretary-General António Guterres released a statement in which he affirms that femicide is “the most prevalent and prevalent human rights issue today, given that 70% of women and girls worldwide have experienced some form of violence”. The Executive Director of UN Women, Sima Bahous, considered this phenomenon a “global crisis.” However, the idea of a crisis is inaccurate, as a crisis implies something temporary. Violence against women and femicide constitute a type of structural violence that is perpetuated in time and space. The problem stems from centuries of oppression and contains the following dilemma: only female protagonism and solidarity with women can liberate men from a culture of machismo and violence.

This edition invites us to study more, understand better, and engage as scientists and citizens in favor of gender, age, social equality and peace!

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