

Guns Beget Guns

Category: Gun Violence

written by Nidhi Lal | June 11, 2022

Joanna has always been more dramatic than my other patients, but this time she seemed so much more distressed and fidgety than before. I had to ask, "How are things at home?" That was her cue to ask me to bring in my medical assistant, who has now become her friend, to help with translation. She did not want me to misinterpret anything she told me, in her broken English. And so we switched to Spanish.

She started speaking rapidly, with her voice, her eyes and her arms. She told me that her nephew was recently killed in the streets by the police. She did not know the reason for the shooting, but the family is grieving and there are many unanswered questions.

Besides the heart-wrenching grief, another consequence is that that her son now has a gun. He says it is to protect himself. He is a gang member and feels targeted by unknown members of opposing gangs. He has been cautioned by friends to keep his family indoors as they, too, may be considered targets. To me, all this sounds very unfamiliar, and I cannot believe I am hearing this in Urban America.

She has not been allowed to go to work by her son. She was able to come today, as it was a medical appointment. But she needs the money from her income to run her household, to pay for her mother's adult day care and groceries. She does not feel safe at home or on the streets; there are guns in both places. She tells me she feels gun violence only leads to more guns. This is not the American Dream she dreamed of, when she moved here for a better future.

I am able to reassure her in the exam room, but her insecurity is infectious, and now I do not feel safe in the neighborhood anymore. How can we make our voices heard?

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