

Wednesday, 9 May 2018

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What I ask myself when I think about gun violence

Confessions of a communications person whose tweets mostly include shotgun pellets, guns or a combination of the two.

Launched today, SEESAC's Armed Violence Monitoring Platform (AVMP) is a digital platform fact-checking the firearms incidents happening in South East Europe daily. Data based. Visualized. Check what the data says and make your own analysis: <http://www.seesac.org/AVMP/>

Asking 'how many people are being affected by gun violence in South East Europe' is inevitable when your daily vocabulary includes: 'small arms and light weapons', AK-47, 'firearms focal points'. The confession below is not about how many incidents with firearms have been committed since I started writing this, or about how many people were shot on Christmas in Belgrade last year, nor about how many weapons were seized in Montenegro in May 2014. That is what the Armed Violence Monitoring Platform is about. The confession below is an insight into the less popular but equally important question posed by the Armed Violence Monitoring Platform: how does the media report firearms incidents in the region and why we should care about this.



Whose business is 'domestic violence' actually?

If you were born in South East Europe, chances are that you were brought up being told by your uncle, your neighbour, the police, or the news anchor that domestic violence is none of your business. It is something that happens between partners and it should stay that way. A look at the way the media reports domestic violence in South East Europe reveals that mainstream media most of the times agree with your uncle. The average news article from the region reports firearms-related domestic violence incidents simply... not as domestic violence, but as public disputes, cosmetically enhancing the causes of domestic violence. And this is everyone's business. For many reasons, mass shootings being one of them. In July 2016, a man murdered 5 people, including his ex-wife, and injured 23 with a rifle. 5 out of 6 deadliest mass shootings in Serbia, killing 40 people and wounding 28 in the last 15 years, were committed by offenders with a domestic violence history.

Is 'who did it' all that matters?

Across the region, the answer to 'who commits most of the firearms incidents?' is men. 99% of offenders in Albania are men, playing in the same league with the rest of the region who scores over 96%. At large, limited other information but gender is too often missing from the media reports, however, the victim is almost never the centre of the story. Notably in the cases of the Republic of Moldova and Kosovo*, reporting fails to mention the age of the victim. Age-disaggregated data asks the questions beyond the obvious. Yes, it is mostly men that are both victims and offenders of gun violence. Yes, it is mostly men that commit suicide. But it is mostly men in their 50s that choose to pull the final trigger – as freshly revealed by our AVMP - flagging that maybe we should also consider the 'masculinity crisis' when fighting gun violence.

Where do we go from here?

Domestic violence is everyone's business and 'who did it' is important but it is not all that matters. Beyond these, what the AVMP revealed is that when it comes to ending gun violence forever, we must also consider the unusual suspects of the unusual suspects: the way media reports firearms incidents in this case.

What do you ask yourself when you think about gun violence? Let us know @UNDP_SEESAC.

PS: There were 2 incidents committed with firearms since I started writing this, there were no firearms-related incidents on Christmas in Belgrade last year and there were 2 weapons seized in Montenegro in May 2014.

by Olga Anghel, SEESAC Communications Consultant

About me: I think about guns more than the average person. I was born and bred in rural Romania and spent 24 out of my 28 years on the Eastern side of Europe. I tweet and I bake for @UNDP_SEESAC. My better half is on Instagram.

*References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)

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