

Firearm injuries documented among Syrian refugees in Antakya Turkey

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Abstract

Arab Spring, the revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests that has been taking place in the Arab world since 18 December 2010 also affected Syria. After the massacres and excessive use of force in several cities of Syria a huge number of people left their country.

Antakya was among the first cities that the Syrians looked for shelter and emergency medical care after these military attacks. Some of the injured were treated in Antakya Mustafa Kemal University Medical School Hospital

The information of the wounded will be discussed based on existing literature. Medical records of 31 refugees who applied to Mustafa Kemal University Medical School between 05.31.2011 and 06.06.2011 were examined.

The age range was between 4 years to 54 years. The mean age was 30.54 ± 10.22 . All cases were male. 29% of the injuries, lower extremity, 22.6% percent of upper extremity, 19.4% were localized to eye zone. All shootings were from long-distance. Different amount of gunshot wounds were observed in several cases. Two cases suffered from four while three cases suffered from three and five cases suffered from two gunshot wounds.

Two of the patients had died due to gunshot injury. One of the cases was a 30 year old man. Injured after a shooting that was fired from a helicopter, gunshot wound to his body had 4 pieces. The cause of death was major internal organs and vascular injury. The other case was 80 years old female, was killed in the head because of gunshot wound.

The results of excessive use of force by Syrian Security forces to their citizens during peaceful demonstrations will be analyzed by taking into consideration the gender, age, injury region, and number of the patients by this situation violating human rights.

Key Words: Firearm injuries, human rights, excessive use of force, high velocity gun shot wounds

Introduction:

Unfortunately, deaths and injuries are gradually being increased today as a result of the use of firearms in civil areas rather than battlefields. Number of civil injuries is more than 2 times of civil deaths during the war, and this ratio has been reported up to 13 times from time to time. Variations of this rate are associated with the psychology of weapon user in addition to the development of war arms and ammunitions (1). In the United States, injury-related civilian deaths due to motor vehicle accidents rank first, and deaths due to firearms injuries rank second. This ranks eight in all causes of death (2).

Numerous deaths have occurred in the civil population of Arabian world during the organized protests of spring revolution. In this article, characteristics of firearm injury after protests of civilians in Syria which was the result of disproportionate power approach of the military against civilians were investigated.

Material and Methods

Antakya (Antioch) is the nearest town for people who need first aid and shelter after developing events in Syria. Some of the injured people during protest were treated in Medical Faculty Hospital of Antakya Mustafa Kemal University. 31 patient files between 05.31.2011-06.06.2011 were retrospectively evaluated. Information of patients was analyzed with regard to age, gender, place of injury, number of injury and firing distance. All findings were discussed in the light of the literature.

Results

The age range was between 4 years to 54 years . And the mean age was 30.54 ± 10.22 . All the cases were male. 29% of the injuries, lower extremity, 22.6% percent of upper extremity, 19.4% were localized to eye zone. All of the shootings were found to be long-distance shooting. In two patients four, in three patients three and in five patients two gunshot wounds were present. Injury regions and number of patients were illustrate table-1.

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Table-1: Injury regions and number of patients.

Location	Frequency	Percent (%)
Head	3	9.7
Abdomen	1	3.2
Upper Extremity	7	22.6
Lower Extremity	9	29.0
Abdomen+Extremity	1	3.2
Eye Zone	6	19.4
Thoraks+Extremity	1	3.2
Extermities	1	3.2
Abdomen+Thoraks	2	6.5
Total	31	100

Discussion:

1.6 million people die worldwide each year due to firearm injuries according to 2000 data of World Health Organization. Suicides are responsible for 49.1 percent of these deaths. The other reasons are murders (31.3%) and wars (18.6%). 23% of the victims during the war are civilians according to a study conducted in Croatia. 15.8% of these victims were children, and 27.9 percent was women. Injuries are commonly seen in muscle tissue at rate of 37.7 percent. Bone (27.9%), abdominal region (6.2%) and thorax region (3.5%) are the other important injured regions (3). Another study which was conducted in Palestine between 2000 and 2001 has identified that 63 percent of injuries during rebellion was due to gunshot and explosion. 9 percent of the injured people were reported to be woman 3% of them were children aged less than 10, and 9 percent of them were children aged between 10-14 (4).

In a study which was conducted in Kuwait, firearm injuries composed 37percent of injuries which occurred throughout the first 2 weeks of the 2003 Gulf War, and 34 percent of them were civilians (5). Another study in Israel has reported that 6.4 percent of the casualty experienced maxillofacial trauma during the Lebanon war in 2006, and the mean age was 25.5 ± 5.7 (6). Anatomic regional distribution of the injuries is shown on the Table-1 according to military operations from Second World War until today (7). Rates was similar to our study. But the more remarkable that the number of cases in our study were injured eye area. This is the situation in our region due to the fact that we have the most advanced eye clinic think that there is more than the number of cases referred.

Table-1: Anatomic regional distribution of the injuries from selected combat operation

	World War II		Korea		Vietnam		Desert Strom		Somalia		OFI	
	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%	no	%
Head /neck/face	100.268	16.7	13.171	18.2	7569	20.6	37	23.9	17	18.3	84	18.5
Thorax/back	51.142	8.5	6.096	8.4	3222	8.8	9	5.8	7	7.5	43	9.5
Abdomen	41.170	6.9	5.045	7.0	630	1.7	3	1.9	3	3.2	7	1.5
Upper extremities	153.015	25.5	21.002	29	10009	27.2	47	30.3	34	36.6	154	33.9
Lower extremities	246.095	41.0	26.270	36.3	15012	40.9	58	37.4	31	33.3	157	34.6
Pelvis/other	8.034	1.3	759	1	298	0.8	1	0.6	1	1.1	9	2.0
Total	599.724	100	72.343	100	36740	100	155	100	93	100	454	100

Reform winds, affecting the Arab world since November 2010, led to anti-regime demonstrations and protests in Syria. Security forces have used disproportionate force against the civilian population during these demonstrations and protests. A large number of civilians lost their lives because of the violence. Numerous people were injured. We have obtained the following results after treatment of patients who were wounded and then took refuge in our country:

* All of the patients belonged to the civilian population. This situation pointed out that the security forces had brutally used physical force against the unarmed civilian population.

* Age of the patients ranged between 4 and 54. Age distribution showed that use of excessive

force was not only against the protesting people, but also against all defenseless civilian population.

* All of the injuries were firearm injury. Shootings were long-distance shots and generally targeted to extremity region. The security forces of government should gradually perform the interventions. After evaluation of the activist's reaction, the intervention should be carried out without violating human rights by verbal warning, pressurized water, tear gas and at least the unarmed physical force. Our findings demonstrated that the security forces randomly shoot over the people without distinguishing their age. This represents the most obvious example of the human rights violations.

* Hundreds of deaths have occurred according to the media in the country up to now. This was the most extreme point of the human rights violations, because they tried to kill humans.

Nowadays, education, technology and science pretty developed, and the human rights are frequently being emphasized. Unacceptable point was that civil population was exposed to violence up to death because of using their protest rights against injustice. Violence policy of government against civilians and the defenseless people with war weapons is a table of shame for humanity. All countries should do the best efforts with the assistance of policy, media and humanitarian to stop the drama of humanity.

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