

GUN VIOLENCE IS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

Office of Suicide and Violence Prevention (SVP)

Maltz Cubicle 1071E

Director: Scott Poland, EdD

Assistant Director: Juliette Hubbard, PsyD

Graduate Assistants: Sarah Ackerman, BS; Lauren Adams, BS; Taylor Tejera, MS; Kate Fitzpatrick, MS

In this Issue:

988 Information.....2

Announcements.....3

SVP Highlights/Upcoming Events.....4

The U.S. Surgeon General Declares Firearm Violence a Public Health Crisis.....6

Gun Violence and Social Determinants of Health.....8

The Detrimental Impact of Firearms on the Cycle of Domestic Abuse.....13

Gun Violence Exposure and Suicide Among Black Adults.....21

Gun Violence and Suicide in the U.S.: A Comparative Perspective and Safety Initiatives.....23

Sandy Hook Promise: Impact on Gun Violence and Mental Health.....25

Extreme Risk Protection Orders: Their Utility and Limitations.....27

The Lock-It Up! Initiative.....31

Suicide & Violence Prevention Resources.....34

"It is not enough to stop someone from dying. We have to make their life worth living."
 -Craig Bryan

Call or Text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org



“If you need to talk, the 988 Lifeline is here.”



Support from trained counselors is available 24/7!

Language interpreters can be provided. Services are available in Spanish and for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Hearing Loss ASL Users. See the following links for more information:

<https://988lifeline.org/es/servicios-en-espanol/>

<https://988lifeline.org/help-yourself/for-deaf-hard-of-hearing/>

SVP Office Cubicle

Be sure to stop by our new office space in Maltz, cubicle 1071E, and check out our Forever Frosty Corner, as well as grab additional resources on suicide and violence prevention.

Our Forever Frosty Corner honors the Forever Frosty Foundation, which was established by Damiann Bilotta and Bobby Hendel after the tragic loss of their son, Asher, who died by suicide in 2014. The Forever Frosty Foundation is dedicated to supporting teens with mental health programs and covering therapy costs. It provides reduced fees and financial assistance so that every young person can access the mental health care they need. When you visit the Forever Frosty Corner, be sure to pick up a blue heart for yourself or someone you know, and sign the Frosty Feelings Journal.

Get Involved!

Interested in joining SVP crew or writing for next edition of our semesterly newsletter?

Contact Dr. Hubbard at jh2688@nova.edu or Dr. Poland at spoland@nova.edu.



- First Year Experience presentation by Graduate Assistant Lauren Adams
- Dr. Poland gave the keynote address on youth suicide prevention at the Rocky Mountain Suicide Prevention Conference in Provo, Utah.
- Dr. Poland was a featured speaker on school safety and threat assessment at the Florida Association of School Psychologists conference in St. Augustine, Florida.
- Dr. Poland gave the keynote address on legal and ethical issues in school crisis for the Louisiana School Psychology Association conference in Lafayette, Louisiana.
- Dr. Poland gave the keynote address on recognizing and responding to the impact of screen time on youth for the Association of Pediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition Nurses conference in Hollywood, Florida.
- Dr. Hubbard gave an APDD presentation at the College of Psychology on “Suicide Prevention and Digital Media”
- Dr. Poland delivered the welcome address at the AFSP Out of the Darkness Walk, and SVP had a table at the event

Highlights



Highlights

- STEPS training by Drs. Poland and Hubbard for Miami-Dade County school mental health professionals.
- Dr. Poland provides the keynote address at the Teen Mental Health Town Hall in Coral Springs.
- Webinar on Non-Suicidal Self-Injury for the International School Counselor Association
- Drs. Hubbard and Poland presented on STEPS for the school mental health professionals in Hillsborough County.
- Dr. Poland presented on STEPS for the Academica Charter School in Miami.
- Drs. Hubbard and Poland presented on STEPs virtually for Academica Charter Schools.

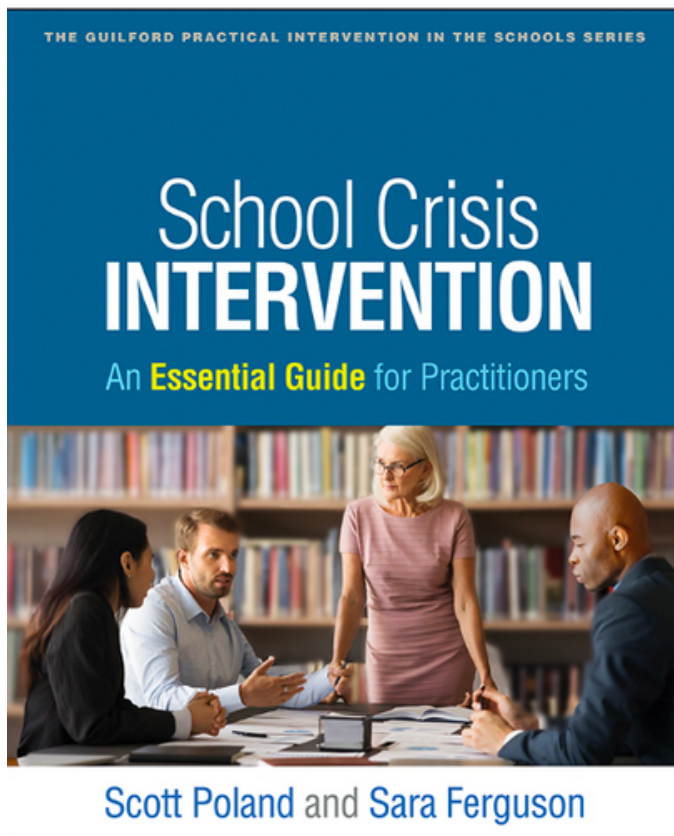


View the STEPS manual here!



- Dr. Poland and Dr. Hubbard will present on the important role of physicians in suicide prevention for all first year NSU medical students on January 15th.
- Dr. Poland will present on school violence for the clinical staff at Joe DiMaggio Hospital on February 4th.
- Dr. Poland will present on suicide prevention in schools at the International School Counselor Association Conference in the Philippines on March 13th.

Upcoming Events



Dr. Poland and Dr. Sara Ferguson, a former post-doctoral resident for SVP and an alumni from the NSU clinical psychology program, completed their second book together. This is the eighth book Dr. Poland has authored or co-authored on school crisis intervention from 1989 to 2025. The book, published by the Guilford Press, provides many practical examples of school crisis intervention.



For more information about the book, scan the code or view: www.guilford.com/p/poland

The U.S. Surgeon General Declares Firearm Violence a Public Health Crisis

Jesica Fernandez, BA

On June 25th, 2024, U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, issued an urgent advisory declaring firearm violence a public health crisis (Office of the Surgeon General, 2024). In the advisory, he emphasizes the severe and growing impact of firearm violence on Americans' physical and mental health, sharing that over half of U.S. adults have experienced firearm-related incidents directly or through family members. He highlights the disproportionate impact on Black individuals, who face the highest rates of firearm homicides, as well as on veterans, older White individuals, and younger American Indian or Alaska Native individuals, who experience high rates of suicide by firearm. Additionally, he calls attention to the most alarming aspect of firearm violence: its effect on children. Firearm violence has become the leading cause of death among children and adolescents, surpassing car accidents and drug overdoses (Office of the Surgeon General, 2024). He explains how this reality has instilled fear and trauma across communities, contributing to nationwide mental health challenges. Dr. Murthy advocates for comprehensive solutions, including community violence prevention, risk reduction strategies, and expanded mental health support, calling this both a public health and moral crisis. The advisory underscores the urgent need for united action to protect the well-being of Americans, especially children, from the devastating effects of firearm violence (Office of the Surgeon General, 2024).

Reference

Office of the Surgeon General. (2024, June 25). *Firearm violence in America*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/firearm-violence/index.html>

Gun Violence and Social Determinants of Health

George Habib, BA; Reagan Colavita, BM; Ambika Singh, BA

With the ongoing rise of gun violence in America, researchers have increasingly examined its connections to Social Determinants of Health (SDOH). SDOH encompass nonmedical factors, such as economic policies, social norms, and housing quality, that influence health outcomes (CDC, 2024). It is widely acknowledged that gun violence disproportionately affects certain populations across the United States. Over the past decade, significant research has explored the relationship between the prevalence of gun violence and its influence on SDOH. Building on this current research, we hope to look at the relationship between gun violence and SDOH as a researched phenomenon, as well as its impact on community health and overall health outcomes.

In 2019, a multi-level cross-sectional study was published using geolocated homicide data from 2015 to analyze how various factors statistically relate to the prevalence of gun violence across United States counties. The study found that increased levels of social capital, social mobility, and welfare spending were associated with reduced gun violence incidents. Conversely, factors such as neighborhood poverty, unemployment, and percentage of male residents living alone correlated with higher gun violence rates (Kim, 2019).

This study is significant as one of the first to examine gun violence and SDOH using national-scale statistical analysis. Its findings could help guide targeted efforts to reduce gun violence by addressing specific contributing factors within each county.

In another study, researchers investigated the relationship between residential racial segregation and the risk of firearm fatalities. Using county-level SDOH data from the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality, they analyzed 72 Wisconsin counties in 2019. It was found that the likelihood of firearm fatalities was 1.3 times higher in areas with high residential racial segregation compared to those with low residential racial segregation (Shour et al, 2023). This study also found that the risk of firearm fatalities was 1.2 times higher in areas with high income inequality compared to areas with low income inequality. This analysis included 802 firearm fatalities from 2019. Another study analyzed the association between food insecurity and gun violence. Researchers collected firearm injury data from 2016-2020 at the Level I trauma center of Norman E. McSwain Jr. MD, Spirit of Charity Trauma Center at University Medical Center located in New Orleans, Louisiana. Of the 3,115 patients identified with firearm injuries, 62% of patients resided in counties with high food insecurity (FI), indicating a significant association between FI and firearm injury (Ali et al, 2022).

Gun Violence and Social Determinants of Health

George Habib, BA; Reagan Colavita, BM; Ambika Singh, BA

While these statistics do not fully encompass all of the factors that contribute to gun violence, it can be helpful to understand modifiable aspects of SDOH as it relates to a community. Addressing issues like income inequality and racial segregation may offer actionable steps to mitigate gun violence and improve community health outcomes. Oftentimes, change is typically called upon directly after an incidence of gun violence. While this response is vital, focusing on large-scale community improvements can also help lower the risk of gun violence. This approach fosters change from within and potentially leads to long-term benefits overall. However, it should be emphasized that even with an enhancement of SDOH, gun violence can still occur. While understanding that SDOH provide insight into contributing factors, they cannot be solely attributed to an individual's actions in committing gun violence.

Moreover, the impact of gun violence can be further explored by investigating its impact at the community level. Exposure to gun violence in a neighborhood has been shown to have adverse effects on both short-term and long-term mental health. One study found that there was an increase in antidepressant usage among adolescents two years after a school shooting. This exemplifies the detrimental impacts that gun violence exposure has on one's long-term mental health (Rossin-Slater et al., 2020). It is crucial to acknowledge the lasting effects of gun-related violence.

This awareness can aid communities in need of improved mental healthcare policies and resources for healing.

In addition to the long-term implications of gun violence, the immediate mental health effects can be more apparent and are typically frequently attended to. In a cross-sectional study conducted at a pediatric emergency department (ED) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, researchers examined acute mental health symptoms in relation to gun violence exposure by analyzing hospital encounters from 2014-2018 (Vasan et al., 2021). It was determined that 2,629 shootings occurred during this period within a twelve zip code radius. Among the study sample of 54,341 children between ages 1.5-11, it was found that 42,913 (79.0 %) visited the ED at least once within 60 days before the shooting, and 43,143 (79.4 %) children visited the ED at least once in the 60 days following the event. Within the study period, there were a total of 128,683 visits, of which 1.89% of the total visits were mental health related. Of these mental health visits, 814 (31.0%) were within the first 60 days after the 2,629 shooting incidents. In their analysis, the study concluded that exposure to gun violence in the community is associated with a significant increase in acute mental health ED visits. The researchers highlighted the need for intervention at the public health level to address mental health incidents related to gun violence exposure.

Gun Violence and Social Determinants of Health

George Habib, BA; Reagan Colavita, BM; Ambika Singh, BA

At the governmental level, they suggested such interventions could include increased background check regulations, strengthening firearm storage requirements, and redistributing financial resources from law enforcement to mental healthcare. At the individual or community level, increased support through education, job opportunities, and interpersonal relationships are necessary to decrease gun violence and allow communities to heal from the associated trauma. In the realm of healthcare, healthcare workers must have a robust understanding of how to provide trauma-informed care. The study also proposed potential partnerships between hospitals and community organizations. With these partnerships, patients could be provided with resources such as trauma-informed mental health counseling after a traumatic event. Recognizing the more immediate outcomes of gun violence exposure is imperative, particularly in the medical field. Healthcare workers may encounter these individuals and, as a result, bear the responsibility of providing trauma-informed support to their patients.

To gain a deeper understanding of gun violence, the Prevention Institute has proposed a framework for proactively addressing gun violence trauma at the community level (Pinderhughes et al., 2015). According to this study, community-wide trauma is experienced in a triad of social-cultural, physical, and economic environments.

The social-cultural environment is described as the culmination of factors which lead to poverty and urban decline in cities. Oftentimes, this results in barriers to collective change and social connection. The idea behind the social-cultural environment is to foster a culture of trust and support through connecting individuals to a supportive community. The next concept within the triad is the physical environment. This aspect focuses on addressing the maintenance of public spaces and the systemic neglect of low-income inner city communities. The Prevention Institute suggests rebuilding public spaces to allow citizens to heal from community-level trauma through gathering in more appealing spaces. The final hallmark of community-wide trauma focuses on the economic environment. According to the Prevention Institute, the presence of poverty in neighborhoods leads to barriers when accessing educational and economic opportunities. To address this, the framework suggests improving access to work opportunities. This involves increasing access to training and educational resources to aid individuals in obtaining a well-compensated position. The triad of the social-cultural, physical, and economic environments created by the Prevention Institute is not only a solution for healing from trauma, but it also proposes ideas for how to reduce the perpetuation of gun violence.

Gun Violence and Social Determinants of Health

George Habib, BA; Reagan Colavita, BM; Ambika Singh, BA

With the rise in gun violence incidents over the years, its significance as a public health crisis has been increasingly highlighted by organizations and researchers. Firearm deaths have quickly become a significant cause of premature deaths. When looking at the CDC's "Years of Potential Life Lost" report in 2018, gun violence took more years of life away than diabetes, stroke, and liver disease combined (Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, 2020). Additionally, gun violence has a predisposition to affect those who may be considered physically healthy due to its instantaneous nature. Highlighted by John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, researchers found that gun violence continues to be the leading cause of death among children and teenagers in 2022 (Villarreal et al, 2022). Unfortunately, the issues with gun violence and young individuals has been a recurring issue as gun related death rates have doubled in the past decade for this demographic (Villarreal et al, 2022). This staggering trend has emphasized the need to treat gun violence as a public health crisis.

When discussing the topic of guns, it is important to recognize that it is often a polarizing issue. However, despite differing opinions, the negative impact of gun violence on society must be addressed with the same rigor as other leading causes of death. In response, there have been several attempts to approach gun violence through lessons learned from past public health crises.

The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, in its 2020 report, outlines a framework for addressing gun violence and highlights effective strategies used to combat other public health issues. In their report, they highlight the success of the automobile safety movement in the United States which led to an 80% reduction in car crash deaths per mile since 1967. Drawing on these successful interventions, the report suggests similar approaches to prevent gun deaths. As gun violence is increasingly recognized as a public health crisis, the successes of past interventions offer valuable guidance for a nationwide response. With improved data and understanding, a collaborative national effort will be essential to reverse the trends and create meaningful changes in affected communities.

References

George Habib B.A., Reagan Colavita B.M., Ambika Singh B.A.

- Ali, A., Broome, J., Tatum, D., Fleckman, J., Theall, K., Chaparro, M. P., Duchesne, J., & Taghavi, S. (2022). The association between food insecurity and gun violence in a major metropolitan city. *The journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery*, 93(1), 91–97.
<https://doi.org/10.1097/TA.0000000000003578>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, January 17). Why is addressing social determinants of health important? U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
<https://www.cdc.gov/about/priorities/why-is-addressing-sdoh-important.html>
- Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence. (2020). The Public Health Approach to Gun Violence Prevention. efsgv.org/PublicHealthApproachToGVP
- Kim D. (2019). Social determinants of health in relation to firearm-related homicides in the United States: A nationwide multilevel cross-sectional study. *PLoS medicine*, 16(12), e1002978. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002978>
- Pinderhughes H., Davis R., Williams M. (2015). Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience: A Framework for Addressing and Preventing Community Trauma. Prevention Institute, Oakland CA.
- Rossin-Slater, M., Schnell, M., Schwandt, H., Trejo, S., & Uniat, L. (2020). Local exposure to school shootings and youth antidepressant use. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(38), 23484–23489.
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2000804117>
- Shour, A.R., Anguzu, R., Zhou, Y. et al. Your neighborhood matters: an ecological social determinant study of the relationship between residential racial segregation and the risk of firearm fatalities. *Inj. Epidemiol.* 10, 14 (2023).
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-023-00425-w>
- Vasan, A., Mitchell, H. K., Fein, J. A., Buckler, D. G., Wiebe, D. J., & South, E. C. (2021). Association of neighborhood gun violence with mental health–related pediatric emergency department utilization. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 175(12), 1244–1251.
<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.3512>
- Villarreal, S., Kim, R., Wagner, E., Somayaji, N., Davis, A., & Crifasi, C. K. (2024). Gun Violence in the United States 2022: Examining the Burden Among Children and Teens. Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The Detrimental Impact of Firearms on the Cycle of Domestic Abuse

Janan Abu Shaban, Nidhi Chary, Kathryn Margiotta, and Priyanka Ramanathan

Domestic violence has grown to be an epidemic in the United States.

Unsurprisingly, gun violence and domestic violence are inextricably linked. Research has shown that the risk of homicide against women increases by a staggering 500% in the presence of a firearm (Domestic violence prevention, 2021). Overall, more than 4.5 million women have reported being threatened with a gun by an intimate partner (Guns and violence against women: America's uniquely lethal intimate partner violence problem, 2019). On average, 76 women each month are shot and killed by an intimate partner. Over 70% of intimate partner homicides in the United States are carried out using a gun, and 76% of these victims are women (Guns and violence against women: America's uniquely lethal intimate partner violence problem, 2019). Though anyone can be impacted by domestic violence, minority women who are lower income are disproportionately victimized (Guns and violence against women: America's uniquely lethal intimate partner violence problem, 2019).

According to the CDC, intimate partner violence is defined as “physical violence, sexual violence, stalking and psychological aggression by a current or former intimate partner (CDC, 2017).” The cycle of abuse occurs in three stages (Metropolitan Police of DC).

1. The honeymoon period occurs after violent episodes, where abusers demonstrate remorse by going above and beyond- i.e. presents, flowers, etc.
2. This is followed by the tension building phase, where irrational behavior builds up and the victim may feel like they are “walking on eggshells.”
3. A violent episode ensues and the cycle starts again. Over time, the honeymoon period shortens with each instance.

Many women become trapped in cycles of abuse and remain unaware of the severity of their situation. Pauletta, a domestic violence survivor who suffered five gunshot wounds by her partner, explained “I went through every level of abuse imaginable. Up until that point, I didn’t know I was in a domestic violence relationship; it wasn’t what I was told and taught in my community” (Beyond Bullet Wounds, Guns in the Hands of Domestic Abusers, p. 10). Trese Todd described being victimized by a gun at the hands of her abuser 30 years prior. Todd stated “you can’t imagine how terrifying it is just to know that a gun is within reach....knowing that something so lethal can kill you so fast, from so far away” (Domestic violence prevention, 2021).

NATIONAL DOMESTIC ABUSE HOTLINE

Call: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Text: Start to 88788

The Detrimental Impact of Firearms on the Cycle of Domestic Abuse

Janan Abu Shaban, Nidhi Chary, Kathryn Margiotta, and Priyanka Ramanathan

The complex feelings and mental health challenges surrounding these encounters are repeatedly expressed by victims, underscoring the need for social and legislative reform. Tragically, children are often caught in the crossfire of domestic violence, and the lack of protection afforded to domestic violence victims results in dangerous consequences. Hollie Mayers, a member of the Everytown Survivor Network, described how she felt as though the legal system failed her and her 2 year old son, Michael. While taking her son for a supervised visit to see her ex-husband, Hollie survived being shot in the face and legs by her ex-husband, but unfortunately Michael was killed before her ex husband shot himself in the head. Although Mayers had a restraining order against him in place, he was not required to surrender his gun. Courtney Weaver, a survivor of brutal domestic gun violence, described being shot in the face, through her right arm, by an abusive boyfriend after she ended her relationship with him. She expressed being terrified that he would go on to hurt others in a mass shooting. She described becoming “obsessed with the why of it” (Guns and violence against women: America's uniquely lethal intimate partner violence problem, 2019). We too are in search of the “why.”

Visit [WomensLaw.org](https://www.womenslaw.org)
for legal information for
victims of abuse

The presence of firearms can exacerbate domestic violence situations in a multitude of ways. Research indicates that not only does the risk of fatality increase by five times when a gun is involved, but that firearms can be used as a method of coercion, manipulation, and a threat to the victim as well as their families safety (Guns and violence against women: America's uniquely lethal intimate partner violence problem, 2019). In addition to perpetrators’ firearm access drastically increasing the risk of intimate partner homicide (IPH), firearm ownership by victims, themselves, is also associated with an increased risk of IPH, creating a more dangerous rather than protective situation (Domestic violence prevention, 2021). With the impact of firearm-related domestic violence on women, comes the downstream impacts on their children. Being witness to domestic violence often leaves children with severe mental health consequences long after they have left the abusive situation. Moreover, there is also a significant risk between intimate partner violence (IPV) and child abuse, both of which are exacerbated by the presence of a firearm in the abusive situation (Domestic Violence and Child Abuse, n.d.). Furthermore, in cases of IPH, children are left without their parents, further perpetuating the cycle of the trauma and socio-economic impact on future generations. These socioeconomic along with racial factors intersect with the aforementioned risks, often exacerbating barriers to safety and resource accessibility in underserved and marginalized communities.

The Detrimental Impact of Firearms on the Cycle of Domestic Abuse

Janan Abu Shaban, Nidhi Chary, Kathryn Margiotta, and Priyanka Ramanathan

Research has also addressed how post-separation abuse paired with gun ownership created increased fear and limited subjects' ability to negotiate co-parenting, leading to the exploitation of their reproductive, parenting, and economic freedoms with downstream impacts on the social determinants of their children's health. For instance, some subjects chose to forgo child support, request minimal support, or even gave up marital assets out of fear of angering their perpetrators (Zeoli et al., 2016).

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified domestic violence cases, often limiting victims' options for reporting or seeking help due to decreased trust, resource scarcity, or financial dependency on their abuser. The Council on Criminal Justice reports a shocking 8.1% increase in domestic violence cases since the stay-at-home policy. Not only was the pandemic a breeding ground for intermarital problems, but it also forcibly isolated individuals from their support systems as well as their individuality, feeding into the cycle of abuse (Warren, 2021). In the same vein, the threat of an unborn child can also pose an imminent threat to these women's safety. The Everytown for Gun Safety Support Organization explains that despite the multiple health complications that accompany pregnancy, the majority of pregnant and postpartum deaths are a result of gun-related homicide (Guns and violence against women: America's uniquely lethal intimate partner violence problem, 2019).

This statistic was yet another that presented a dramatic increase amongst the Covid-19 pandemic, at about 35% greater than before (Warren, 2021). While underreported, IPV, especially that threatened by a firearm, disproportionately affects those of minority populations, specifically Black, American Indian, and Alaskan Native women in addition to those in the LGBTQ+ community and those with disabilities (Guns and violence against women: America's uniquely lethal intimate partner violence problem, 2019). This highlights the need to address these multifaceted risk factors to create safer environments for victims and their families.

In the United States, federal law prohibits the purchase and possession of firearms by individuals convicted of domestic violence. Despite this, a significant majority of firearms used by domestic abusers are obtained by legal means (Giffords, 2024). This is due to numerous shortcomings in federal law surrounding gun regulation, according to Giffords (2024), which fail to protect victims of domestic violence.



**National Teen Dating
Abuse Helpline**

Call: 1-866-331-9474 or 1-
866-331-8453

Text: "loveis" to 22522

The Detrimental Impact of Firearms on the Cycle of Domestic Abuse

Janan Abu Shaban, Nidhi Chary, Kathryn Margiotta, and Priyanka Ramanathan

First and foremost, federal gun regulation exempts private firearm sellers from performing background checks, allowing convicted domestic abusers to evade screenings that would otherwise restrict them from purchasing firearms. Even when subject to background checks, however, gaps within federal legislation allow many perpetrators with demonstrated histories of domestic abuse to access firearms. For instance, federal law defines an “intimate partner” as a spouse or former spouse of, someone who shares a child with, or someone who cohabitates or has cohabitated with the victim (U.S. Department of Justice, 2006). This has resulted in what is known as a “dating loophole,” despite data showing that more than half of all intimate partner homicides are committed by dating partners (Sorenson, S. B., & Spear, D., 2018). The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of 2022 partially closed this loophole by including dating partners in domestic violence firearms restrictions, but not in domestic violence protective order (DVPO) restrictions. Federal law currently prohibits those subject to DVPOs from purchasing or possessing firearms to protect only “intimate partners,” and only if a protective order was issued after notice and a hearing; it does not prohibit those subject to emergency ex parte DVPOs from gun access.

Additionally, federal law does not prohibit those convicted of misdemeanor stalking crimes from possessing or purchasing guns, despite data suggesting that stalking by a current or former intimate partner is a strong predictor of future violence (McFarlane et al., 1999). Lastly, while the 2005 and 2022 Violence Against Women Reauthorization Acts attempt to restrict firearm purchases by domestic violence offenders, neither require state or local governments to remove firearms already possessed by offenders prior to becoming prohibited (Giffords, 2024).

Due to these gaps in federal law, many states have adopted laws to tighten firearms restrictions for people who commit domestic abuse. While thirty states have exceeded federal law to allow more comprehensive firearm restriction to domestic violence offenders, only seventeen of these states authorize or require courts to order firearm relinquishment following a conviction. Regarding individuals subject to DVPOs, twenty-eight states require courts to remove firearms following a DVPO and twenty-five states prohibit firearm access to those subject to emergency ex parte orders. In order to ensure the immediate protection of victims of domestic violence, twenty-eight states authorize law enforcement officers to remove firearms when they arrive at the scene of a domestic violence incident, with only half of these states requiring their removal. Lastly, just thirty-one states restrict gun access to dating partners subject to protective orders (Giffords, 2024).

The Detrimental Impact of Firearms on the Cycle of Domestic Abuse

Janan Abu Shaban, Nidhi Chary, Kathryn Margiotta, and Priyanka Ramanathan

In order to prevent domestic abusers from acquiring firearms, universal background checks are critical. Approximately 1 in 15 background check denials are connected to domestic abuse. However, without universal background checks on firearms sales, several avenues remain available for domestic abusers to purchase firearms untraced. In fact, 20% of all firearms are obtained through private sales (Brady United, 2023). In the sixteen states that required background checks for all handgun gun sales, 38% fewer women were killed by their intimate partner with a gun since those laws went into effect (The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, 2016). Additionally, DVPO policies which included dating partners, emergency protective orders, and firearm relinquishment provisions were associated with a much greater decrease in intimate partner homicide compared to states that did not exceed federal law in their DVPO policy (Zeoli et al., 2018).

Between 2018 and 2022, the five states with the greatest number of intimate partner homicides involving a firearm were Texas, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee (Brady United, 2023). The state of Florida, for instance, does not require background checks to be performed on private firearms sales and has not exceeded federal law to authorize or require that firearms be surrendered following a domestic violence incident or conviction.

Nor does the state of Florida prohibit firearms purchases from those subject to emergency protective orders or extend DVRO restrictions to dating partners (Giffords, 2024). It is clear that in order to protect victims of domestic violence, laws must be written, enforced, and implemented to both restrict the purchase and require the relinquishment of firearms – which are designed to cause life-threatening harm – by those with demonstrated histories of domestic abuse.

If physicians are equipped to advise patients on diet and exercise for heart disease, what is to stop them from addressing another prevalent public health crisis? There are currently two orders in place to protect victims of violence: ERPOs (Extreme Risk Protection Orders) and DVPOs (Domestic Violence Protective Orders). Relatives or intimate partners can petition for a DVPO (Lisa, 2021). While 21 states allow law enforcement officers and household members to petition for an ERPO, clinicians are permitted to do so in Maryland, Hawaii, DC, Connecticut, Michigan, Colorado and New York (State-By-State, 2024). It is important to allow clinicians accessibility to invoke these protections for their patients, because healthcare settings are often the only settings where victims have total privacy from their abusers.

The Detrimental Impact of Firearms on the Cycle of Domestic Abuse

Janan Abu Shaban, Nidhi Chary, Kathryn Margiotta, and Priyanka Ramanathan

Identification of a domestic violence situation may be the biggest hurdle, as victims may be financially dependent on their abuser or fear for the safety of their children, thus making the disclosure of abuse less likely. Healthcare providers are often situated closely to domestic violence victims as confidants, where they have the opportunity to assist patients in navigating out of unsafe circumstances. Physicians can use screening tools to ascertain whether their patients are victims of IPV, including: WAST (women abuse screening tool), PVS (partner violence screen), or HARK (humiliation, afraid, rape, kick). It is important to take a humanistic approach when supporting a victim of IPV by asking questions in a way that does not solidify their identity as just a victim. According to the American Medical Association Journal of Ethics, healthcare providers should aid in advocacy, research, education, expert advice, and gatekeeping (Slutkin et al., 2009). The establishment of specific guidelines for healthcare workers when caring for victims of IPV, combined with the ability to invoke legal protections, is paramount to ensuring patient safety.

Intimate partner violence is challenging enough to navigate on its own. When firearms are involved, one cannot deny the fact that existing legislation is failing the very citizens it claims to protect. In this scenario, as with many others, knowledge becomes the key to making a difference.

Healthcare workers are in a unique position to have direct confidential patient contact and also advocate for reform by viewing gun violence under the public health crisis lens. Currently, the legal routes healthcare workers can take to protect their patients through ERPOs are limited on a state by state basis. In the meantime, knowledge about gun laws and lobbying for change could very well be the difference between life and death for a patient. Through knowledge and advocacy, we as a society can protect those who need it the most.

Shelters

<https://lotushouse.org/>
<https://widdbroward.org/get-help/>

References

Janan Abu Shaban, Nidhi Chary, Kathryn Margiotta, and Priyanka Ramanathan

Brady United Against Gun Violence (2023). Beyond Bullet Wounds, Guns in the Hands of Domestic Abusers.

<https://www.bradyunited.org/resources/research/guns-in-the-hands-of-domestic-abusers>

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention & Control. “Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices (May 2017).

Domestic Violence and Child Abuse. (n.d.). Center for Violence Prevention.
<https://violence.chop.edu/domestic-violence-and-child-abuse>

Domestic violence prevention. Alliance for Gun Responsibility. (2021).
<https://gunresponsibility.org/solution/domestic-violence-prevention/>

Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. (2024). Domestic violence & firearms. Giffords. Retrieved November 2, 2024, from
<https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/who-can-have-a-gun/domestic-violence-firearms/>

Guns and violence against women: America’s uniquely lethal intimate partner violence problem. Everytown Research & Policy. (2019).
<https://everytownresearch.org/report/guns-and-violence-against-women-americas-uniquely-lethal-intimate-partner-violence-problem/>

Lisa, G. (2021, February 25). How You Can Help With Intimate Partner Violence - CLOSLER. CLOSLER; Johns Hopkins Medicine. <https://closler.org/lifelong-learning-in-clinical-excellence/how-you-can-help-with-intimate-partner-violence>

McFarlane, J. M., Campbell, J. C., Wilt, S., Sachs, C., Ulrich, Y., & Xu, X. (1999). Stalking and intimate partner femicide. *Homicide Studies*, 3(4), 300–316.

Slutkin, G., Ransford, C., & Zvetina, D. (2009). How the Health Sector Can Reduce Violence by Treating It as a Contagion. *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 20(1), 47–55.
<https://doi.org/10.1001/journalofethics.2018.20.1.nlit1-1801>.

Sorenson, S. B., & Spear, D. (2018). New data on intimate partner violence and intimate relationships: Implications for gun laws and federal data collection. *Preventive Medicine*, 107, 103–108.

References

Janan Abu Shaban, Nidhi Chary, Kathryn Margiotta, and Priyanka Ramanathan

- State-by-State. (2024, March). The National ERPO Resource Center; John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. <https://erpo.org/state-by-state/> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the United States Attorney, District of Maine. (2006, January). List of federal domestic violence statutes/offenses.
- The Cycle of Violence | mpdc. (n.d.). Mpdc.dc.gov. <https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/cycle-violence>
- The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence. (2016, October). Domestic violence and guns in the United States: A lethal combination.
- Warren, J. (2021, February 24). New Analysis Shows 8% Increase in U.S. Domestic Violence Incidents Following Pandemic Stay-At-Home Orders. Council on Criminal Justice. <https://counciloncj.org/new-analysis-shows-8-increase-in-u-s-domestic-violence-incidents-following-pandemic-stay-at-home-orders/>
- Zeoli, A. M., Malinski, R., & Turchan, B. (2016). Risks and Targeted Interventions: Firearms in Intimate Partner Violence. *Epidemiologic Reviews*, mxv007. <https://doi.org/10.1093/epirev/mxv007>
- Zeoli, A. M., McCourt, A., Buggs, S., Frattaroli, S., Lilley, D., & Webster, D. W. (2018). Analysis of the strength of legal firearms restrictions for perpetrators of domestic violence and their associations with intimate partner homicide. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 187(11), 2365-2371. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwy174>

Gun Violence Exposure and Suicide Among Black Adults

Lolita Bell, BA

In neighborhoods across the country, we witness community strength and individual resilience, yet the mental toll of gun violence often remains unseen and unspoken. For many Black Americans, gun violence is more than a statistic; rather, it is a lived experience that can lead to mental health struggles. According to Dr. Daniel Semenza and his research team, there is a strong correlation between exposure to gun violence and increased suicide risk within Black communities. The impact of gun violence does not only affect adults but adolescents and children as well. For the first time in 2020, gun-related deaths surpassed motor vehicle deaths. According to the analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Black youth accounted for 47.1% of the over 4,000 firearm-related deaths. Moreover, firearm deaths among Black youth increased by 108.3% from 2013 to 2020, compared to a 47.8% increase for White youth (National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, 2023). This alarming statistic highlights the systemic issues of gun violence, especially its impact on the Black community across generations.

Semenza's study finds that Black adults who are exposed to gun violence—either directly, indirectly, or even hearing about it within their communities—face an increased risk of suicidal ideation and attempts. Not only does one occurrence of gun violence increase the risk of suicide within Black communities, but Semenza's research found that multiple exposures significantly increase the risk.

In fact, the study found that 12% of the participants were exposed to three or more types of gun violence. Each additional exposure to gun violence increased the risk of suicidal ideation by 69%.

The study collected data from 3,015 Black adults from a nationally representative survey focusing on personal experiences with gun violence and self-reported suicidal thoughts and behaviors. The study found that approximately 23% of participants reported experiencing suicidal thoughts at some point in their lives, and participants who knew somebody who was shot or threatened by firearms had a 44% increase in lifetime suicidal ideation. Moreover, the findings showed that direct experiences, such as being shot, made individuals almost four times more likely to consider suicide. Additionally, individuals who were threatened by a gun and were already experiencing suicidal ideation doubled the likelihood of planning a suicide attempt. Lastly, the results found that individuals who knew somebody shot and were directly affected by gun violence had higher rates of dying by suicide.

Given the high statistics of suicidal ideation and attempts within Black communities exposed to gun violence, explaining the connection between gun violence and ideation is critical. Semenza's study found that repeated exposures to gun violence are correlated with a sense of hopelessness and disconnection.

Gun Violence Exposure and Suicide Among Black Adults

Lolita Bell, BA

Especially in communities where gun violence is frequent and unavoidable, the impact leads to significant psychological struggles. The study discusses the Three-Step Theory of Suicide (Klonsky & May, 2015), which explains that people are more likely to act on suicidal thoughts when they feel disconnected from others. Therefore, for Black individuals within a community with repeated gun violence, it can increase their feelings of disconnection from others, which can lead to suicide.

This research is extremely important for public health. Addressing gun violence within Black communities is not just about reducing physical harm, but it is about tackling the generational trauma and rising suicide rates among Black individuals. It suggests the need to address the intergenerational challenges of mental health and community resilience among Black individuals. There is a need for laws and solutions to be in place regarding gun violence, especially in communities where gun violence is extremely prevalent. Addressing gun violence in Black communities is not just about reducing physical harm; it is about tackling mental health, community resilience, and social networks.

Resources

- Call 988 national prevention suicide and crisis lifeline
- Community violence intervention programs:
 - <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/center-for-gun-violence-solutions/solutions/community-violence-intervention>
- Suicide prevention resource center: <https://sprc.org/>

References

Semenza, D. C., Daruwala, S., Brooks Stephens, J. R., & Anestis, M. D. (2024). Gun violence exposure and suicide among Black adults. *JAMA Network Open*, 7(2), e2354953.
<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.54953>

National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. (2023, October 10). Firearm-related deaths increased among youth in 2020, greatest toll on Black youth. National Institutes of Health.
<https://www.nimhd.nih.gov/news-events/research-spotlights/racial-disparities-in-youth-firearm-deaths.html>

Klonsky E.D, & May A.M., (2015). The three-step theory (3ST): A new theory of suicide rooted in the “ideation-to-action” framework. *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy*, 8(2), 114-129.
[doi:10.1521/ijct.2015.8.2.114](https://doi.org/10.1521/ijct.2015.8.2.114)

Gun Violence and Suicide in the U.S.: A Comparative Perspective and Safety Initiatives

Kate Fitzpatrick, MS

The United States (U.S.) faces a disproportionate rate of gun violence and suicides compared to other developed nations, largely due to widespread firearm accessibility. According to the CDC (2024), guns remain the leading cause of death for children and teens aged 1-19 and contribute significantly to health disparities, especially in marginalized communities. Suicides, accounting for approximately 53% of all firearm deaths in the U.S., remain a critical issue, with recent data showing a 12% increase in gun-related suicides since 2019. A concerning trend is the rising rate among younger demographics, especially Black teens, whose suicide rates have tripled over the past two decades, surpassing those of their white counterparts for the first time in 2022.

Research by Pritchard et al. (2023) highlights the distinct pattern of gun-related suicides in the U.S. compared to nineteen other Western countries (OWC). While most countries reported a decline in suicide rates, the U.S. saw a significant rise across all age groups, particularly among young adults aged 15-34, where gun ownership was strongly correlated with higher suicide rates. This trend was supported by a significant statistical association ($p < 0.025$) between firearm access and youth suicides, emphasizing the dangerous impact of impulsive access to lethal means.

The comparative analysis revealed that while other Western nations have lower gun ownership and different cultural attitudes toward firearms, the permissive gun culture in the U.S. contributes to higher suicide rates, especially among young people facing psycho-social stress.

In response to these alarming statistics, several U.S.-based initiatives have been implemented to reduce gun-related suicides. The Be SMART campaign advocates for secure firearm storage, emphasizing its importance in preventing access by children and individuals in mental health crises. This initiative complements Project ChildSafe, which provides free gun locks and safety materials to promote responsible gun ownership. According to the CDC (2024), evidence-based policies such as Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs) or "red flag" laws have proven effective in temporarily removing firearms from individuals at high risk of harming themselves or others. Research in states like Connecticut and Indiana showed a 13% reduction in firearm suicides following the implementation of ERPOs, highlighting their potential in preventing tragic outcomes.

Further expanding on community-based interventions, the Department of Veterans Affairs has launched programs like the Safe Firearm Storage Outreach, distributing safety devices and educational materials to reduce veteran suicides. Given that veterans represent a significant portion of firearm-related suicides, these targeted efforts address a crucial demographic.

Gun Violence and Suicide in the U.S.: A Comparative Perspective and Safety Initiatives

Kate Fitzpatrick, MS

Similarly, initiatives such as domestic violence protection orders and child access prevention laws aim to limit firearm access in high-risk situations, with the goal of mitigating both homicides and suicides.

The Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions underscores the importance of comprehensive, evidence-based approaches to reduce gun violence in the U.S. (CDC, 2024). The Center has identified key policy measures, including implementing permit-to-purchase laws, investing in community violence intervention programs, and repealing "stand-your-ground" laws. These strategies aim to reduce gun accessibility, particularly in vulnerable populations, while promoting safe storage and responsible ownership. Despite these efforts, the U.S. continues to face significant challenges in lowering gun suicide rates, especially among marginalized groups like Native Hawaiian, Hispanic, Asian American, and Black female populations, all of whom experienced substantial increases in gun suicides from 2022 to 2023 (CDC, 2024).

In all, the data suggests a pressing need for a shift in the U.S. towards stricter gun safety measures and a reevaluation of firearm accessibility. By implementing more stringent safety laws and fostering a culture of responsible gun ownership, there is potential to reduce the high rates of suicide associated with firearms. Such measures could bring the U.S. closer in line with other Western nations that have successfully lowered their suicide rates through tighter gun control and better mental health support.

References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). *Firearm-related injuries and prevention strategies*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions. (2024). *Reducing gun violence: Evidence-based policies and initiatives*.
- Pritchard, J., Simons, R., & Malik, T. (2023). Comparative analysis of firearm suicides: Trends in the United States and Western countries. *Journal of Global Health and Safety*, 15(3), 205–219.

Sandy Hook Promise: Impact on Gun Violence and Mental Health

By: Lauren Adams, BS

On December 14th of 2012, a tragic massacre took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School located in Newtown, Connecticut. A gunman entered the school and began his act of terror, taking the lives of 20 children and 6 teachers and administrators. The survivors, the families, the Newtown community, and surrounding communities faced insufferable amounts of terror, grief, loss, bereavement, and trauma. However, from this heartbreaking tragedy, came advocacy for change, policies to protect our schools and community from violence, awareness, and Sandy Hook Promise.

Sandy Hook Promise is a nonprofit organization that was founded by the families of the victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. Its mission focuses on preventing gun violence through education, advocacy, and community engagement. More specifically, their mission is to “Educate and empower youth and adults to prevent violence in schools, homes, and communities.”



**Sandy Hook
PROMISE**

Over the years of the development of Sandy Hook Promise, there has been a significant impact on Gun Violence Prevention throughout the United States. Through education and awareness, Sandy Hook Promise has developed programs such as "Know the Signs." The goal of this program is to educate students, parents, and educators about recognizing warning signs of potential violence and how to intervene safely. This proactive approach aims to create safer environments in schools and communities. They emphasize ten common and potential warning signs to look for including: 1.) suddenly withdrawing from friends, 2.) withdrawing from family and activities (including online or via social media), 3.) bullying, especially if targeted towards differences in race, religion, gender or sexual orientation, 4.) excessive irritability, 5.) lack of patience, or becoming angry quickly, 6.) experiencing chronic loneliness or social isolation, 7.) expressing persistent thoughts of harming themselves or someone else, 8.) making direct threats toward a place, another person, or themselves, 9.) bragging about access to guns or weapons, recruiting accomplices or audiences for an attack, 10.) obsession with online violent content, mass shooters, or weapons, and cruelty to animals.

Through legislative advocacy, the organization advocates for gun safety laws, including universal background checks and restrictions on high-capacity magazines. They are also actively working to influence policymakers and raise public awareness about the need for sensible gun regulations.

Sandy Hook Promise: Impact on Gun Violence and Mental Health

By: Lauren Adams, BS

Furthermore, through community engagement and by involving local communities and fostering conversations about gun violence, the organization empowers individuals to take action and support one another. Their initiatives often encourage grassroots movements that promote safety and support mental health.

Not only has Sandy Hook Promise made an impact on gun violence prevention, but they have also had a significant impact on the mental health field. This comes specifically from the focus on prevention, training and resources, and collaboration with multiple mental health organizations. With the efforts to focus on prevention, Sandy Hook Promise emphasizes the importance of mental health in preventing violence. Their initiatives highlight the connection between mental health issues and the risk of violence, advocating for early intervention and support for individuals in need. The organization also provides training for educators and community members on recognizing mental health issues and understanding the importance of support systems. This helps reduce stigma and encourages individuals to seek help. Lastly, Sandy Hook Promise collaborates with various mental health organizations to enhance resources and create comprehensive strategies for violence prevention. This partnership approach aims to integrate mental health awareness into broader gun violence prevention efforts.



There has been significant success and impact thus far in the development and journey of Sandy Hook Promise. The Know the Signs Program discussed earlier in this article has had over 26.5 million participants nationwide, 268,000 tips have been anonymously reported, 700 lives were confirmed to be saved with the crisis intervention tools provided, 284 acts of violence involving a weapon were prevented, 16 planned school shootings were prevented, and Reforms were enacted as the Bipartisan Safe Communities Act was passed in 2022. Overall, Sandy Hook Promise has made significant strides in both gun violence prevention and mental health advocacy. By focusing on education, community engagement, and legislative change, they aim to create a culture of safety and support, ultimately contributing to a decrease in gun violence and improving mental health resources.

To read more about Sandy Hook Promise and their impact, please visit the link below:
<https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/>

References

About Us. Sandy Hook Promise. (2024, November 6).

Extreme Risk Protection Orders: Their Utility and Limitations

Taylor Tejera, MS

Gun-related deaths remain at the forefront of social and political discussion in the United States (U.S.). According to 2022 data, over 48,000 individuals died from gun violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). With rising national suicide rates, mass shootings, and ongoing community violence, gun use and their lethal consequences have sparked public safety concerns and demand for legal action to prevent future tragedies. However, deep-rooted firearm culture and the Second Amendment right to bear arms pose a significant challenge to enacting large-scale changes. The Pew Research Center estimates that approximately 40% of adults in the U.S. have a gun in their household, highlighting the significance of gun ownership to the average American (Schaeffer, 2023). The split opinion on whether there should be greater emphasis on protecting gun rights or stricter gun control exacerbates the challenges to enact laws that balance these needs (Schaeffer, 2023).

One effort that has been made to combat this issue while also minimizing potential socio-political back-lash is the implementation of Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs). Per the Institute of Firearm Injury Prevention (n.d.), ERPO laws, also known as “red flag laws,” temporarily deny individuals at risk for using a firearm to hurt themselves or commit violence against others from buying or possessing a firearm.

These orders are petitioned to the court, typically by law enforcement officers, though depending on the state, other individuals, such as family or healthcare workers can also petition (Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention, n.d.). Some states, such as Hawaii, Connecticut, New York, Colorado, and Maryland, permit clinicians to petition for ERPOs (The National ERPO Resource Center, n.d.). As of 2023, ERPO laws have been implemented in 21 states including the District of Columbia (Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention, n.d.). In Florida, the ERPO law is known as the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act and was passed in March of 2018 (The National ERPO Resource Center, 2024). It requires a court hearing to be conducted within 14 days of the order being filed or a temporary order can be issued if the risk is prominent (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg American Health Initiative, n.d.). Of note, this ERPO can be issued for a year, at most (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg American Health Initiative, n.d.).

Though ERPOs appear sound, it can be difficult to determine the exact impact they have on preventing harm or death. Nonetheless, some research shows support for the effectiveness of ERPOs. Swanson et al. (2024) reviewed ERPO cases involving individuals across California, Connecticut, Maryland, and Washington, using data from people who died by suicide and those who attempted it to estimate the average number of ERPOs needed to prevent a suicide.

Extreme Risk Protection Orders: Their Utility and Limitations

Taylor Tejera, MS

Their findings showed that among a sample of people who were at risk for suicide, approximately 13 to 18 ERPOs are required to be issued to prevent a suicide, emphasizing the fairly direct role these laws can have in addressing gun-related suicide. Indiana's firearm seizure laws were associated with a 7.5% decrease in gun-related suicides, ten years after their enactment (Kivisto & Phalen, 2018). Similarly, in Connecticut, these laws led to a 13.7% decrease in firearm suicides following the Virginia Tech shooting.

There is evidence that these laws are being used to prevent mass shootings as well, with Judges permitting 93% of temporary ERPOs for cases with risk of multiple victims (Zeoli et al., 2022). Despite no support for a causal relationship between the implementation of ERPOs and preventing mass shootings, Wintemute and colleagues (2019) noted that among the 21 California cases in which there were red flags for a mass shooting plan, after the ERPO was issued, there was no mass shooting or death of the individual or another person.

However, the limited awareness of these policies are a significant limitation to their effectiveness. Many law enforcement officers have some sense of familiarity with ERPOs (Pear et al., 2023) but the general public is far less familiar, as evidenced by only 65% of a Californian sample having awareness of gun violence restraining orders (Kravitz-Wirtz et al., 2021). Surprising data from physicians (i.e., emergency medicine physicians, pediatricians, and psychiatrists) showed that around 71% had no knowledge on ERPOs.

Yet, the majority of these physicians indicated that they interact with patients who would be suitable for an ERPO at least 5 times per year (Frattaroli et al., 2019). Other challenges noted by petitioners regarding the implementation of gun violence restraining orders included the following: the danger petitioners or others are susceptible to when serving the order or taking the firearm away, time-intensive nature of the process, inherent political ties, organizational difficulties, and often limited training (Pear et al., 2021).

ERPO laws and related policies may play a critical role in addressing gun violence and suicides. Greater awareness and training are necessary to increase their effectiveness and prevent further tragedy in the U.S.

To learn about Florida's law, see the following links:

http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0700-0799/0790/Sections/0790.401.html.

<https://www.flcourts.gov/Resources-Services/Risk-Protection-Orders>

References

Taylor Tejera, MS

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, July 5). Fast facts: Firearm injury and death. <https://www.cdc.gov/firearm-violence/data-research/facts-stats/index.html>
- Frattaroli, S., Hoops, K., Irvin, N. A., McCourt, A., Nestadt, P. S., Omaki, E., Shields, W. C., & Wilcox, H. C. (2019). Assessment of physician self-reported knowledge and use of Maryland's extreme risk protection order law. *JAMA Network Open*, 2(12), e1918037. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.18037>
- Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention. (n.d.). What is an extreme risk protection order? <https://firearminjury.umich.edu/what-is-an-erpo/>
- Kivisto, A. J., & Phalen, P. L. (2018). Effects of Risk-Based Firearm Seizure Laws in Connecticut and Indiana on Suicide Rates, 1981-2015. *Psychiatric Services* (Washington, D.C.), 69(8), 855–862. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201700250>
- Kravitz-Wirtz, N., Aubeil, A. J., Pallin, R., & Wintemute, G. J. (2021). Public awareness of and personal willingness to use California's Extreme Risk Protection Order Law to prevent firearm-related harm. *JAMA Health Forum*, 2(6), e210975. doi:10.1001/jamahealthforum.2021.0975
- Pear, V. A., Schleimer, J. P., Tomsich, E., Pallin, R., Charbonneau, A., Wintemute, G. J., & Knoepke, C. E. (2021). Implementation and perceived effectiveness of gun violence restraining orders in California: A qualitative evaluation. *PloS One*, 16(10), e0258547. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0258547>
- Schaeffer, K. (September 13 2023). Key facts about Americans and guns. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/13/key-facts-about-americans-and-guns/>
- Swanson, J. W., Zeoli, A. M., Frattaroli, S., Betz, M., Easter, M., Kapoor, R., Knoepke, C., Norko, M., Pear, V. A., Rowhani-Rahbar, A., Schleimer, J. P., & Wintemute, G. J. (2024). Suicide Prevention Effects of Extreme Risk Protection Order Laws in Four States. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law*, 52(3), 327–337. <https://doi.org/10.29158/JAAPL.240056-24>
- The National ERPO Resource Center. (n.d.). Clinicians. <https://erpo.org/implementer/clinicians/#:~:text=In%20a%20growing%20number%20of,court%20directly%20for%20an%20ERPO.>

References

Taylor Tejera, MS

The National ERPO Resource Center. (2024, February 15). Florida.

<https://erpo.org/state/florida/>

Wintemute, G. J., Pear, V. A., Schleimer, J. P., Pallin, R., Sohl, S., Kravitz-Wirtz, N., & Tomsich, E. A. (2019). Extreme risk protection Orders Intended to Prevent Mass Shootings: A Case Series. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 171(9), 655–658.

<https://doi.org/10.7326/M19-2162>

Zeoli, A. M., Frattaroli, S., Barnard, L., Bowen, A., Christy, A., Easter, M., Kapoor, R., Knoepke, C., Ma, W., Moloczniak, A., Norko, M., Omaki, E., Paruk, J. K., Pear, V. A., Rowhani-Rahbar, A., Schleimer, J. P., Swanson, J. W., & Wintemute, G. J. (2022). Extreme risk protection orders in response to threats of multiple victim/mass shooting in six U.S. states: A descriptive study. *Preventive Medicine*, 165(Pt A), 107304.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2022.107304>

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg American Health Initiative. (n.d.). Florida.

<https://americanhealth.jhu.edu/erpo-state/florida#:~:text=Once%20law%20enforcement%20files%20an,for%20up%20to%20one%20year.>

The Lock-It Up! Initiative: Transforming Suicide Prevention Through Safe Gun Storage in Broward County and Beyond

Sarah Ackerman, BS

Laying the Groundwork

In 2015, Barbara Markley, a Florida native and local attorney, made the decision to join the League of Women Voters of Broward County, a non-partisan organization focused on civic education and advocacy. She was particularly drawn to their Gun Violence Prevention Committee, as she was acutely aware of the gun violence epidemic sweeping the nation. The League was actively fighting against legislative proposals that would increase gun-related injuries, violence, and deaths. Initially, the committee focused on protecting children and teens from fatal gun-related injuries, which at the time were the third leading cause of death for this age group. Alarming, over the past three years, gun-related injuries have become the leading cause of death. At the time, one of the League's most pressing concerns was "campus carry", a bill allowing people to legally conceal and carry firearms on college campuses. Barbara expressed that, at first, the work felt satisfying, but she quickly realized that even when these bills were defeated, they would inevitably be reintroduced again and again, describing the process as a frustrating game of "whack-a-mole." While Barbara recognized the importance of opposing these bills, she wanted to take a more proactive stance on preventing gun violence. Her idea for the Lock-It-Up! initiative began to take shape in 2017, the year Barbara became Co-Chair of the Gun Violence Prevention Committee. Barbara recalled reading about a pediatrician in Montana distributing free gun locks to families of her patients. Intrigued by the effort, Barbara reached out to the pediatrician to explore whether a similar initiative could be brought to Broward County. She learned that the gun locks were being donated by the Veterans Association. Upon learning this Barbara connected with Gloria Lewis, the Suicide Prevention Lead at the Miami Veterans Association.

Aware of the severe impact of gun-related deaths in South Florida, Gloria was interested in collaborating to start a larger program aimed at reducing gun-related injuries and deaths in the region. Gloria recognized the issue as especially urgent in South Florida, where one in eight residents are veterans. According to the American Psychological Association (2022), veterans, in general, are 1.5 times more likely to die by suicide than non-veteran adults. Gloria believed that if they launched an initiative in Broward County, it would likely reach many veterans and their families. Limiting access to lethal means, such as firearms, is a critical component of suicide prevention. Upon discovering that most gun-related deaths are the result of suicide, and that safe firearm storage could help reduce these deaths, the Gun Violence Prevention Committee shifted its focus to suicide prevention.

The Lock-It-Up! Initiative

Through the initiative, free trigger locks and public education materials are distributed in Broward County on both an individual level, reaching households, physicians, and other professionals, and on a broader, community-wide level through efforts like their annual educational seminar in September for Suicide Prevention Awareness Month and outreach initiatives to schools. Individuals interested in receiving a free trigger can request one from the committee via email and it will be mailed to them at no cost. The lock comes with easy-to-follow instructions, making it user-friendly and effective in promoting safe firearm storage.

The Initiative's Impact

The impact of the organization's efforts, as reflected in the statistics they have collected, is truly remarkable. Barbara reported that to date, the Lock-It-Up! initiative has distributed 35,000 gun locks, over 100,000 pieces of literature, and made more than 1,000 presentations, including tabling at community events. Notably, the committee has established partnerships with over 250 community organizations and has helped assist six other local chapters of the League of Women Voters in starting their own programs. When asked about the important lessons she's learned along the way, Barbara emphasized the value of "partnering everywhere with everyone." She specifically mentioned the importance of collaborating with organizations that may have a slightly different focus. According to Barbara, connecting with these groups is only possible if you make the effort to reach out and engage with them. When asked about how the initiative has influenced her personal life, Barbara shared, "It's extremely rewarding to know we're helping to prevent death and injury from gun violence." At the Office of Suicide and Violence Prevention at Nova Southeastern University, we have witnessed firsthand the initiative's impact. Barbara generously secured several boxes of trigger locks for our office at the start of the Fall 2023 school year, which we have distributed over the past two years at the annual Broward County Out of Darkness Walk held by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP).

The Lock-It Up! Initiative: Transforming Suicide Prevention Through Safe Gun Storage in Broward County and Beyond

Sarah Ackerman B.S.

This year, one encounter during the event's tabling truly highlighted the life-changing effect of the initiative. A woman approached our table, asking about the trigger locks. After explaining more about the Lock-It-Up! initiative, she began to cry. She paused to compose herself, then, through tears, shared that her loved one had died by suicide and she had wished she had a similar device at the time of their death. She expressed her gratitude for the work we were doing and left with a lock in hand.

Not surprisingly, the initiative has been recognized in the Congressional Record and praised in *American Carnage: Shattering the Myths that Fuel Gun Violence*, authored by Dr. Tom Gabor and Fred Guttenberg. Gabor is a national and international expert on firearms and public safety while Guttenberg is an activist and father of Jamie Guttenberg, a student tragically killed in the 2018 Parkland school shooting.



League members Bradette Jepsen, Barbara Markley and Julie Morrall receive a trunk-load of gun locks for distribution in Broward County.

Gun Safety and the Role of Mental Health Professionals

When asked how mental health professionals should approach gun safety discussions with clients, Barbara emphasized the importance of clinicians feeling comfortable inquiring about firearm ownership and storage practices. These conversations, she expressed, should focus on educating clients about safe storage methods and the serious consequences of failing to secure firearms, including the increased risks of accidental injury, death, and suicide. Clinicians need to be especially mindful that firearms are the most lethal method of suicide. Further, it is crucial to communicate that the clinician's goal is not to limit the client's autonomy, but to ensure the safety of both the client and their household. A particularly at-risk subset of our population are children and adolescents, who are increasingly using firearms in suicide attempts, with some as young as ten dying by suicide from firearm use. Barbara warned that simply telling your children to "keep [their] hands off the gun" is unrealistic, and parents who believe their child will not find their gun and try to play with it are gravely mistaken. She compared using a trigger lock to safely secure a firearm with the 1970 law that required locked caps on medication bottles to prevent accidental poisonings. Barbara also shared that statistics show a large proportion of gun owners do not safely secure their firearms.

She cited a 2016 survey of 1,444 U.S. firearm owners conducted by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, which revealed that more than half (54%) of participants reported not safely storing their firearms. She emphasized, "An unlocked gun is a permanent solution to a temporary crisis." Clinicians must understand that while the desire to die and the ability to carry the act out of suicide is not made on a whim, the decision to attempt suicide or the act itself is often influenced by impulsivity in a moment of crisis and can unfold within minutes. Supporting this, a study of 153 survivors of near-lethal suicide attempts (aged 13-34) revealed that 24% made the decision to die by suicide in less than five minutes, and 70% within an hour.

Thank You

The Office of Suicide and Violence Prevention (SVP) would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Barbara and for all those involved in the efforts of the Lock-It Up! initiative. We are grateful for the incredible work they have been doing and for all the countless lives they have undoubtedly saved. We look forward to our continued partnership

Requesting a Free Trigger Lock

Anyone in the general public can request a free trigger lock, to be delivered to their home at no cost, by emailing gunsafety@lwbroward.org.

For more information about the committee's efforts, and the Lock-It Up! initiative scan the QR code.



References

Sarah Ackerman, BS

Bakshi, A., & Patel, P. (2023). Poison Prevention Packaging Act. National Library of Medicine. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK572141/>

DeAngelis, T. (2022) Veterans are at higher risk for suicide. Psychologists are helping them tackle their unique struggles. *Monitor on Psychology*, 53(8).
<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/11/preventing-veteran-suicide>

Drexler, M. (2022). Guns and suicide: The hidden toll. *Harvard Public Health Magazine*.
https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine_article/guns-suicide/

Hubbard, J., & Poland, S. (2024). Suicide Awareness & Prevention [PowerPoint slides]. Office of Suicide and Violence Prevention, Nova Southeastern University.

Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. (2018). Survey: More than half of U.S. gun owners do not safely store their guns. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2018/survey-more-than-half-of-u-s-gun-owners-do-not-safely-store-their-guns>

League of Women Voters Broward County Gun Violence Prevention Committee
<https://www.lwvbc.org/gun-violence-prevention>

The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence Statistics
<https://preventfirearmsuicide.efsgv.org/about-firearm-suicide/statistics/#:~:text=Firearms%20are%20used%20in%20half,suicide%20attempts%20result%20in%20death.&text=Every%20day%2C%2064%20Americans%20die,suicide%20%E2%80%94%20one%20every%2022%20minutes>.

RESOURCES

Center for Student Counseling and Well-Being

954-424-6911 (available 24/7)

www.nova.edu/healthcare/student-services/student-counseling.html

NSU Wellness

(mental health services for NSU employees)

1-877-398-5816; TTY: 800-338-2039

www.nova.edu/hr/index.html

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255) or 1-800-SUICIDE

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Veterans: Press “1” or Text 838255

Chat: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat

TTY: 1-800-799-4889

Crisis Text Line

Text: “Home” to 741741

Mobile Crisis Response Teams

(for on-site crisis assessment)

Broward (Henderson): 954-463-0911

Palm Beach: North: 561-383-5777

South: 561-637-2102

Miami-Dade (Miami Behavioral): 305-774-3627

Broward 2-1-1 Help Line

2-1-1 or 954-537-0211

211-broward.org

Chat:

<https://secure5.revation.com/211FirstCallforHelp/contact.html>

Palm Beach 2-1-1 Help Line

2-1-1 or 561-383-1111 or 211Palmbeach.org

Jewish Community Services of South Florida

305-358-HELP (4357); 305-644-9449 (TTY)

www.jcsfl.org/programs/contact-center/

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Locators

www.samhsa.gov/find-help

The Jed Foundation (JED)

www.jedfoundation.org

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

www.sprc.org

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

www.save.org

The Depression Center

www.depressioncenter.net

Yellow Ribbon International

www.yellowribbon.org

Florida Initiative for Suicide Prevention

www.fisponline.org

Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition

www.floridasuicideprevention.org

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/suicide

American Association of Suicidology

www.suicidology.org

RESOURCES

American Association for Suicide Prevention
www.afsp.org

**Florida Department of Children and Families:
Suicide Prevention**
www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/mental-health/suicide-prevention

Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective (BEAM): <https://beam.community/>

Black Mental Health Alliance:
<https://blackmentalhealth.com/>

Black Men Heal
<https://blackmenheal.org/>

Therapy for Black Girls:
<https://therapyforblackgirls.com/>

The Steve Fund: <https://stevelfund.org/>

Black Mental Wellness:
<https://www.blackmentalwellness.com/> Visit PsychologyToday to view a directory of Black mental health providers in Florida:
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/florida?category=african-american>

The Forever Frosty Foundation
<https://www.foreverfrosty.org>

Lock-It Up! initiative [League of Women Voters Broward County]
https://www.lwvbroward.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=869563&module_id=453932

Free cable gun locks can be requested by email and at: gunsafety@lwvbroward.org

Speak on Suicide
<https://speakonsuicide.com/>