

Guns, Public Health and Mental Illness

Summary of the Best Available Research Evidence

The Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence believes gun violence prevention policies should be evidence-based, promote public safety, and respect individuals with mental illness. Below is a summary from the Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy's report, *Guns, Public Health, and Mental Illness*, outlining the best available research evidence.

Mental illness is not a significant predictor of violence

- Violence has many interacting factors and mental illness alone is very rarely the cause. Only 4% of violence in the United States is attributable to mental illness.
- Unless individuals have other risk factors for violence, individuals with mental health conditions are not much more likely to be violent toward others than individuals without these conditions.
- Most people with serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, are never violent toward others, and are in fact more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violence.
- However, research suggests that small sub-groups of individuals with serious mental illness, at certain times, such as the period surrounding a psychiatric hospitalization or first episode psychosis, can be at an elevated risk of violence.

There are evidence-based factors that do increase the risk of violence

- The strongest predictor of future violence is past violent behavior.
- Domestic violence increases the risk of firearm violence. Most victims of intimate partner homicide are killed with a gun and there is as much as a five-fold increased risk of intimate partner homicide when an abuser has a firearm.
- Individuals convicted of violent misdemeanors are at increased risk of future violent crimes.
- Alcohol misuse is associated with violence towards self and others, and individuals with multiple DUI arrests are at significantly higher risk of committing other misdemeanor and felony crimes.
- Illegal use of controlled substance is consistently associated with heightened risk of violence. The physical and psychological effects of controlled substances, including agitation and cognitive impairment, can heighten the risk for violent behavior. Additionally, involvement in illicit drug markets is strongly associated with violence.

Mental illness does increase the risk of suicide

- Mental illnesses such as depression significantly increase the risk of suicide, which account for 60% of gun deaths in the U.S. each year.
- Although most suicide attempts do not involve guns, over half of completed suicides are firearm suicides. Evidence shows that because of the lethality of guns, 90% of firearm suicide attempts result in death.

Source: *Guns, Public Health and Mental Illness: An Evidence-Based Approach for Federal Policy*. Consortium for Risk-Based Firearm Policy. December 11, 2013. <http://efsgv.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Final-State-Report.pdf>