

Committee on Priorities for a Public Health Agenda to Reduce the Threat of Firearm-Related Violence Workshop

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Introduction

Most gun-related deaths and injuries are clustered in a few areas:

- ❑ Suicide
- ❑ Urban/gang & drug disputes
- ❑ Massacres and shootings
- ❑ Homicides

APA views gun violence as a complex public health problem with many psychological aspects that requires a multidisciplinary collaborative approach.

The Issue

- ❑ Gun violence is an extreme expression of aggression and conflict resolution.
- ❑ Aggression is affected by norms, beliefs and values, upbringing, life history, gender, and opportunities.
- ❑ Promotion of healthy psychological development may discourage resorting to violence and gun use.

What We Want to Know

- Who is most at risk for engaging in gun violence? (Who)
- What contributes to and makes the difference in the decision to engage in gun violence? (Why)
- How to prevent gun violence?

Psychology Contributes By:

- Understanding the likelihood of engaging in gun violence
- Developing and evaluating interventions to promote non-violent ways to resolve conflicts
- Identifying those at risk and their circumstances; and
- Treating effectively those whose mental health increases their risk for violence.

Understanding Gun Violence

Developmental history may lead to engagement in gun violence...

What in the individual's trajectory and life history contributes to gun use?

We know that..

Child maltreatment can be a risk factor for:

- other types of violence
- involvement in youth violence, IPV, sexual violence as victim and perpetrator
- being an abusive parent

Alcohol and drug abuse can also be a factor

What are other risk factors?

Understanding Gun Violence

Social Psychology asks:

- What leads someone to become overly enamored of guns and their use in the violent response to conflict?
- What circumstances trigger gun use?
- What's the psychological impact of gun ownership?
- Are there societal norms and values related to gender or other subgroups that promote the use of guns for violence?
- What makes the difference in the decision to use a gun?

Understanding Gun Violence

Clinical Psychology Asks:

- What kinds of mental health issues are more related to violent gun use?
- To what extent is susceptibility to use guns due to mental illness?
- What measures will effectively identify/screen who will use a gun?
- What's the interaction between depression and gun access and interest in suicide and violent incidents?
- Is there a role for age and gender?
- What's the role of violence as a symptom of mental health problems, and how might that relate to gun violence incidents?

Understanding Gun Violence

Community Psychology Asks:

- How do community characteristics relate to access and violent use of guns?
- How do laws and policies affect interest and the decision to engage in gun violence?
- What's the role of systems and services, or lack thereof, in prevention and treatment?

Risk Factors for Mental Health Issues : what We Know

Studies and instruments have identified early risks for mental health problems:

- Premature birth
- Prenatal exposure to alcohol and drugs
- Individual temperament
- Hyperactivity and externalizing behaviors
- Genetic basis for schizophrenia and depression
- Family interactions, parenting styles, attachment
- Traumatic stressors and exposure to violence and abuse
- Negative interpersonal contexts (e.g., abuse) which predict development of cognitive vulnerability (negative interpretations of stressful life events) that interacts with stress and produces depression

Early identification should lead to treatment, which will contribute to healthy long-term outcomes

What We Know

- Early exposure to abuse and neglect are risk factors for other types of violence, involvement in violence in teen years, IPV, sexual violence as victims and perpetrator, and being an abusive parent
- Child maltreatment is more likely to be perpetrated by parents
- Parents/caregivers are critical in providing safe, nurturing, healthy environments for children and adolescents

What We Know

- Parent training and home visitation programs have varying levels of evidence in reducing child maltreatment and abuse.
 - NREPP has list of interventions and ratings,
 - CSPV/Colorado Blueprints has lists of programs with empirical proof of effects
- Cognitive behavioral therapies are effective in treating depression
- Cognitive behavioral trauma-focused therapies involve victims' families:
 - Several have high level of evidence: PCIT, TF-CBT, CPP

What Can We Do?

Psychology is critical in interventions that...

- Promote healthy psychological development
- Promote non-violent ways to resolve conflicts
- Identify how individuals, social situations, and community characteristics might contribute to the likelihood of violence and gun use
- Treat effectively those whose mental illness may increase their risk for violence

Research Questions: Suggestions

Developmental History:

Assess the effect of family gun ownership values, family violence, parenting practices on the likelihood of aggression and use of gun in violence

Social Psychology:

Assess what (e.g., causes, circumstances, types of conflict, relationships, beliefs, social roles) makes a person decides to use gun in violence

Clinical Psychology:

Assess the relationship between different mental health problems, access to guns and use in different violent incidents involving guns

Community Psychology:

Test effectiveness of a community multidisciplinary integrated collaborative project to prevent the use of guns in violence for at-risk population

Additional Questions

1. What does it take to:

- Make sure that risk factors for mental health and behavioral problems are identified and treated?
- Have an effective mental health system?
- Implement the different proven treatment models? Parent-focused, child-focused, multicomponent?

2. What can we learn from smoking cessation, seat belt use, drinking and driving interventions?

Also...

CDC supports UNITY a youth violence prevention program implemented as a city-wide effort in cities across the country that is expanding.

DOJ supports the National Forum on Youth Violence that also addresses violence with a city-wide approach and is expanding.

We need to add the mental health perspective and psychology's contributions to these efforts.

Final Thoughts: We definitely know that

It takes:

- **time,**
- **multidisciplinary efforts,**
- **collaborative systemic approach,**
- **evaluation, and**
- **continued funding**

to tackle an issue as complex as violence and gun use

Thank you!

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