Media Madness: Mental Illness and Gun Access
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Introduction

- A controversy that has arisen over the years is gun control, who has the right to have access to guns and how gun control and access tie into violent crimes.
- In recent mass shootings, the perpetrators were mentally ill people who had access to guns. These recent shootings include Virginia Tech, VA in 2007, and Aurora, CO, and Newtown, CT, in 2012.
- After a mass shooting, the public is exposed to extensive news coverage of the event, as well as coverage of gun control policies proposed in response to a shooting.
- Mental health advocates contend that such news coverage leads to a negative public attitude toward persons with serious mental illness. This in turn may deter such persons from seeking help.

How do recent mass shootings involving mental illness relate to gun access?

Our research project will look at the relationship between mental illness, gun access, and the likelihood to commit violent crimes.

Research Question

How do recent mass shootings involving mental illness, gun access, and the likelihood to commit violent crimes.

Literature Review

- According to Dr. Michael Stone, “People with serious mental disorders, while more likely to commit aggressive acts than the average person, account for only about 4 percent of violent crimes overall. The rate is higher when it comes to rampage or serial killings, closer to 20 percent” (Benedict & Hartoccozis, 2013).
- It was found that the Virginia Tech school, Aurora movie theater and Newtown school shootings shared these common characteristics: “all four shooters were apparently mentally ill, and all four used guns with large capacity magazines” (Barry, McGinty, Vernick & Webster, 2013).
- Scientists were successful in conducting a survey and found that In recent mass shootings, the perpetrators were mentally ill and accessed guns. These recent shootings include Virginia Tech, VA in 2007, and Aurora, CO, and Newtown, CT, in 2012.

Research

Our research included scholarly articles from disciplines such as psychology. We also included news coverage, specifically from The New York Times, in order to investigate how these sources covered recent mass shootings. Surveys were obtained from The Journal of the American Medical Association and Psychiatric Services.

Materials

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Materials & Methods

Individuals with a history of mental disorders had almost the same amount of access as those who did not have a mental disorder. (34.1% versus 36.3%)

- Gun access to both the mentally ill and those not is about a 2.2% difference.
- Someone suffering with severe depression has almost the same amount of access to a gun than those who did not suffer with depression. (34% versus 35.5%)
- There is about a 1.5% difference.

Methods

- 36% of respondents were unwilling to work closely with a person with serious mental illness, and 30% were unwilling to have such a person as a neighbor.
- 40% of respondents believed that persons with serious mental illness are likely to be far more dangerous than the general population.

Findings

This graph shows the relationship between persons with different mental illnesses and their access to guns.

Table 4. Gun Storage Practices Among Care and Control Households at Reference Date by Type of Reference Firearm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storage Device Type of Reference Date</th>
<th>Odds Ratio (95% Confidence Interval)</th>
<th>Long Guns</th>
<th>Handguns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of cases of controls</td>
<td>370.08</td>
<td>0.14 (0.04-0.48)</td>
<td>0.30 (0.16-0.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practically</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.50 (0.14-1.88)</td>
<td>0.41 (0.13-1.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammunition locked</td>
<td>0.44 (0.20-0.98)</td>
<td>0.36 (0.13-0.96)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to gun and ammunition</td>
<td>0.52 (0.25-1.07)</td>
<td>0.54 (0.27-1.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ratio of unloaded guns to locked guns was:
- Long Guns: 0.38 to 0.24
- Handguns: 0.38 to 0.24

Conclusions

- Efforts are being made to educated children about gun safety and how to lower harm being done by guns.
- By exposing children who have more violent attitudes and are more impulsive, they are more likely to cause harm or injury especially with unsafe gun practices.
- New media portrayals of mass shootings appear to play a critical role in influencing negative attitudes towards people with serious mental illnesses and make it more likely for people to be in support of gun control policies.
- Mental illness and gun access do not result in mass shootings. In fact, we found that when gun access is almost equal between those with mental illness and those without mental illness, those with mental illness do not disproportionately commit mass shootings. There may be more factors that help explain why mentally ill people are tied into more of these mass shootings.

References


