Ending the Silence on Gun Violence

Article published in Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
looks at firearm violence in the US

Washington D.C., February 15, 2013 – In the wake of the tragic mass shooting in Newtown, CT, in December 2012, many potential causes of gun-related violence and recommendations for curbing it have been discussed in the national media.

In an article published in the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (JAACAP) author David A. Brent and colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh School and Medicine and Harvard School of Public Health examine responses that have been proposed in the national media to address the issue of gun violence, including suicide and homicide. These proposals include: restriction of access to firearms; clinical intervention and screening about firearm storage and availability by mental health professionals; and improved access to mental health care to increase screening and identification of potential perpetrators of gun violence.

The article compares US and international data on firearm violence to show that despite similar prevalence of mental disorders compared with other high-income countries, the US has higher rates of gun violence that are proportional to its high rate of gun ownership per capita. The data also show that US youth under the age of 24 are affected by firearms violence at a higher rate than other age groups.

The authors conclude that restricting access to and safe storage of firearms has the potential to reduce firearm-related deaths by lowering the potential for accidental or impulsive gun violence. While early treatment and preventive interventions for youth at risk for mental illness and their families may have long-term potential to decrease the firearm homicide rate, the relatively low rate of homicide by individuals with mental illness suggests that short-term efforts, such as screening and emergency triage, will not significantly reduce the rate of homicide.

Dr. Brent commented, “My colleagues and I felt that we had a scientific obligation to present an overview of the overwhelming amounts of data showing a relationship between gun access and death due to firearms. While we are committed to improving access and quality of mental health care, we felt that the emphasis on mental health care to the exclusion of stricter gun control laws could squander a true opportunity to shield youth and families from the continued scourge of firearm violence.”


The article is available ‘open access’ at http://jaacap.org/webfiles/images/journals/jaac/guncontrol.pdf.

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Notes for editors
The article is available ‘open access’ at http://jaacap.org/webfiles/images/journals/jaac/guncontrol.pdf. Journalists wishing to interview the authors may contact Cristina Mestre at mestreca@upmc.edu or +1 412 586 9776.
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The journal’s purpose is to advance research, clinical practice, and theory in child and adolescent psychiatry. It is interested in manuscripts from diverse viewpoints, including genetic, epidemiological, neurobiological, cognitive, behavioral, psychodynamic, social, cultural, and economic. Studies of diagnostic reliability and validity, psychotherapeutic and psychopharmacological treatment efficacy, and mental health services effectiveness are encouraged. The journal also seeks to promote the well-being of children and families by publishing scholarly papers on such subjects as health policy, legislation, advocacy, culture and society, and service provision as they pertain to the mental health of children and families. [www.jaacap.com](http://www.jaacap.com)

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