



Firearms, Violence and Mental Illness

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Outline

- Firearm possession in the US
- Firearm violence in the US
- Firearm violence and mental illness
- Firearm harm reduction

The Second Amendment

- “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

Firearm Possession in US

- Civilian firearms: 393,000,000 (2017 estimate)
- Registered firearms: 1,000,000
- Firearms per 100: 120.48

- Police firearms: 1,016,000
- Military firearms: 4,535,380

- Source: Small Arms Survey Report, 2018

Firearm Possession in US

- Estimate of firearms purchased:

	US	Indiana
• 2021:	18,860,000	568,500
• 2020:	21,593,000	
• 2019:	13,492,000	
• 2018:	13,467,000	

- Source: FBI database on NICS firearm checks

Firearm Possession in US

- Number of firearms owned:

- 1: 32%
- 2-4: 37%
- 5 or more: 29%

- Type of firearms owned:

- Handgun: 72%
- Rifle: 62%
- Shotgun: 54%

- Source: Pew Research Center Survey, 2017

Firearm Possession in US

- Demographics of firearm ownership:

- White: 36%
- Black: 24%
- Hispanic: 18%
- Asian: 10%

- Rural: 41%
- Suburban: 29%
- Urban: 20%

- Source: Pew Research Center Survey, 2021

Firearm Possession in Indiana

- Indiana population in 2021: 6,805,985
- Estimated firearms in Indiana: 8,200,000
 - Using 120.48 firearms per 100

Firearm Violence in US

- Firearm Deaths:

	Suicide	Homicide	Police	Accident
• 2021:	26,320	20,966		
• 2020:	24,292	19,383	611	535
• 2019:	23,941	14,414		

- ~85% of the victims of both firearm suicide and homicide are male
- In 2020, firearms became the leading cause of death for age <20 (4,357)

Firearm Violence in Indiana

- Firearm Deaths in Indiana:

	Number	Rate (per 100,00)
● 2020:	1,159	17.3
● 2019:	958	14.1
● 2018:	977	14.7

- For comparison, Mississippi had a firearm death rate of 28.6 in 2020, while Massachusetts had a rate of 3.7

Violence and Mental Illness

- “The most basic lesson of this epidemiological literature is that the overwhelming majority of people with mental illness are not violent and the majority of people who are violent do not have identifiable mental illness.”
 - Rozel and Mulvey, Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 2017

Violence and Mental Illness

- People who have a serious mental illness have the same risk of causing violence as their neighbors:
 - If their mental illness is stable
 - But if their illness is active, they have an increased risk of violence
 - Which is further increased by use of alcohol and/or drugs
 - Source: MacArthur Study, 2001
- People who have a serious mental illness are thought to be responsible for ~4% of criminal violence

Violence and Mental Illness

- The victims of violence committed by people who have a serious mental illness are most likely to be family or friends
 - The risk of violence to strangers is low
 - In contrast to the public perception
- People who have a serious mental illness have a significantly higher risk of being a victim of violence than people who do not have a mental illness

Firearm Violence and Mental Illness

- There is limited research on this topic
- One study showed that <2% of people with serious mental illness engaged in firearm violence within one year of discharge from an inpatient psychiatric unit
 - Steadman, 2015

Firearm Violence and Mental Illness

- As part of the standard response of the NRA and gun advocacy groups to mass shootings, these have become linked to mental illness

Firearm Violence and Mental Illness

- The Violence Project maintains a database of mass shootings with 4 or more deaths
- Their 2021 report on 172 mass shooters from 1966 to 2019 showed:
 - 168 were male
 - 2 of the 4 females were coerced by male partners
 - Most of the shooters had complex life histories
 - 31% experienced severe childhood trauma
 - 68% of juvenile school shooters
 - >80% were in crisis at the time of the shooting

Firearm Violence and Mental Illness

- Suicide and mass shooters:
 - 30% were suicidal prior to the shooting
 - Another 39% were suicidal at the time of the shooting
 - 38% committed suicide at the scene
 - 20% were killed by police
 - >90% of school shooters were suicidal

Firearm Violence and Mental Illness

- Mental illness and mass shooters:
 - 20% had a history of inpatient psychiatric treatment
 - 29% had a history of counseling
 - 23% had a history of taking psychiatric medication
 - Comparable to US population in general
 - 27% showed evidence of a psychotic disorder
 - 16% showed evidence of a mood disorder
 - 6% showed evidence of an autism spectrum disorder

Firearm Violence and Mental Illness

- The role of psychosis in mass shootings:
 - No role 69%
 - Small role 11%
 - Significant role 9%
 - Primary role 11%

Firearm Harm Reduction

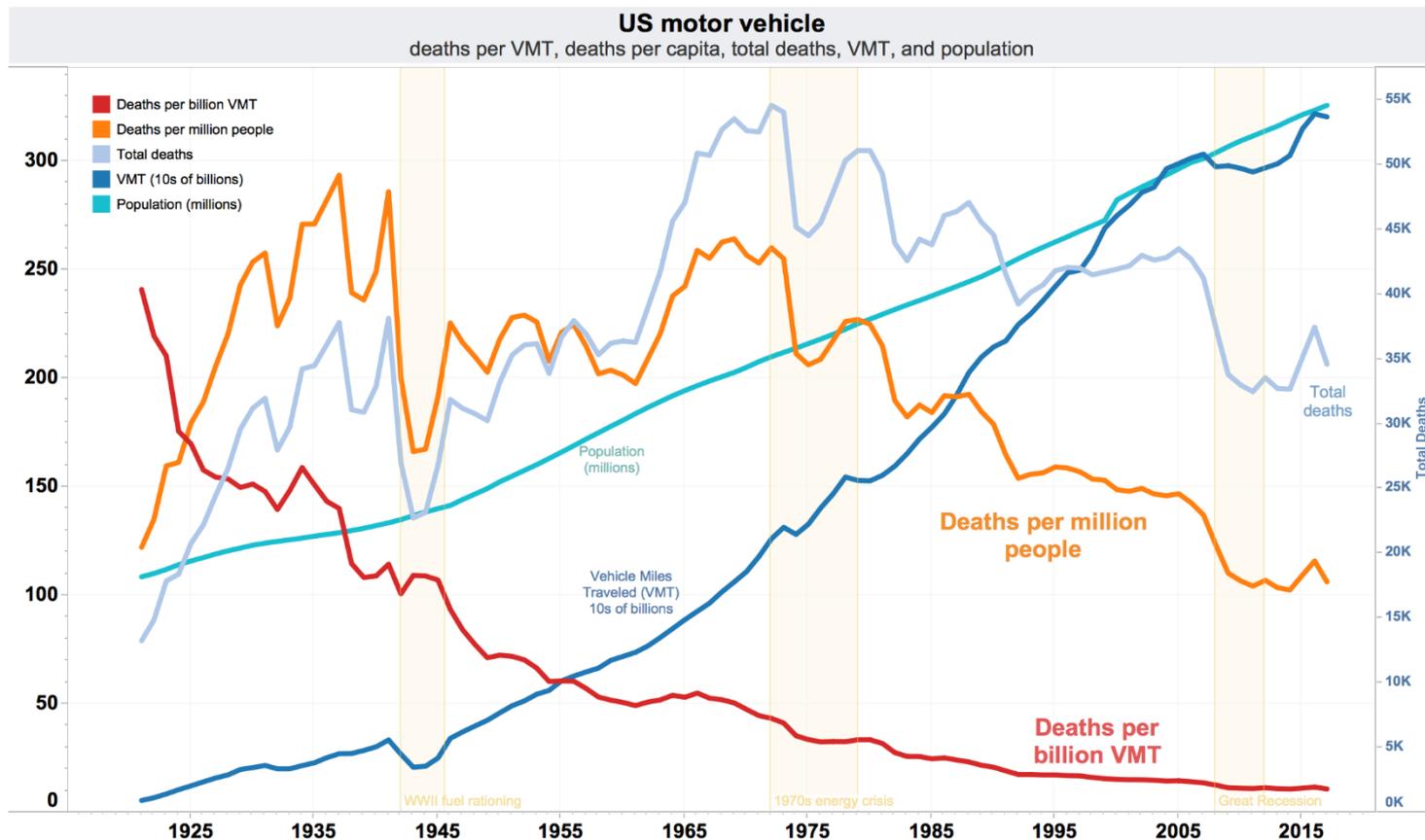
- We need more and better research on firearm violence, for public health reasons:

Causes of death in US (2017)	Number	Rank
• Car crash	40,231	14
• Firearms	39,498	(15)
• Suicide by gunshot	23,854	21
• Homicide by gunshot	14,542	31
• Killed by police	616	58
• Accidental shooting	486	59

- Source: CBS News Death Index, using CDC data

Harm Reduction

Source: Wikipedia



Firearm Harm Reduction

- Promote safe storage of firearms:
 - Stored in a lockbox
 - Locked
 - Unloaded
 - Ammunition stored in a separate lockbox
- Promote firearm education and training for owners
 - With a focus on responsible and safe practices for the use and storage of firearms

Firearm Harm Reduction

- Parallel to driving and car ownership, we should require:
 - Time-limited license to operate a firearm
 - Annual registration to own a firearm
 - Fees to fund education and prevention
 - Insurance to own a firearm
 - To provide compensation for victims of firearm violence
- A San Jose (CA) city ordinance will require firearm owners to obtain and maintain liability insurance and pay an annual gun harm reduction fee

Firearm Harm Reduction

- Indiana firearm statutes:
 - Indiana no longer requires a license to own or carry a handgun
 - A private business, employer, or church may prohibit firearms on their property
 - Firearms are prohibited on school property
 - Registration of (almost all) firearms is not required
 - A background check is not required for the private transfer of a firearm
 - Police may seize a firearm if they believe the owner is a danger to himself or others

Firearm Harm Reduction

- Federal law prohibits firearm ownership by people who have a history of:
 - Felony conviction
 - Domestic violence conviction or restraining order
 - Civil commitment
 - Finding of incompetent to stand trial
 - Finding of not guilty by reason of insanity
 - Guardianship
 - Dishonorable discharge
- NICS database used for background checks

Firearm Harm Reduction

- The US Supreme Court has held that:
 - Individuals have a right to possess a handgun in their home for self-defense
 - DC v. Heller, 2008
 - States may not prevent individuals from concealed carry of weapons for self-defense outside their homes
 - Except in “sensitive places,” like courts, legislatures, and voting places
 - NYSRPA v. Bruen, 2022

Summary

- The interaction of firearms, violence, and mental illness in the US is politically, socially, and clinically complex and volatile