

Is firearm violence greater among the mentally ill?

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A new study finds that the majority of mental health professionals believe firearm safety issues are greater among mentally ill people, yet they do not screen their clients for firearms or provide firearm safety counseling. The public and politicians have unrealistic expectations for mental health professionals' ability to determine which patients are likely to be involved in firearm violence in the future, according to a study published in the journal *Violence and Gender*,

In the article "Firearm Violence by the Mentally Ill: Mental Health Professionals' Perceptions and

Practices," James Price, PhD, MPH, University of Toledo (OH) and Jagdish Khubchandani, MBBS, PhD, Ball State University (Muncie, IN), present a rigorous review of the scientific literature. The researchers conclude that [mental health professionals](#) need more training on firearms issues if they are to have a larger role in preventing firearm trauma by the [mentally ill](#), with the greatest potential impact being on firearm suicides.

"Access to firearms is probably the most important variable in threat and dangerousness assessment," says *Violence and Gender* Editor-in-Chief Mary Ellen O'Toole, PhD, Director, Forensic Sciences, George Mason University (Fairfax, VA), Forensic Behavioral Consultant, and Senior FBI Profiler/Criminal Investigative Analyst (ret.). "If a person poses and/or makes a specific threat of violence AND has access to firearms, it can exponentially increase their level of risk-from a threat assessment perspective."

"Screening of mental health [patients](#) for this information should be the first measure of threat assessment completed in a mental health intake situation," continues Dr. O'Toole. "If [mental health professionals](#) knew their patients' ability to have access to weapons, particularly patients they determine are at high risk for suicide, it would not only change their treatment plan, but very likely save lives. However, how realistic is it for these professionals, who too often must rely on self-reported information, to know if one of their patients has access to firearms, or if firearms are readily available in the home?"

More information: James H. Price et al, Firearm Violence by the Mentally Ill: Mental Health Professionals' Perceptions and Practices, *Violence and Gender* (2016). [DOI: 10.1089/vio.2015.0045](https://doi.org/10.1089/vio.2015.0045)

Provided by Mary Ann Liebert, Inc

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