Firearms, Culture and Suicide Risk: What Is Safety?

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Interventions for Suicide Risk

Coping and problem-solving

Protective factors

Suicidal desire

Suicidal storyline
Alone, worthless, hopeless

Tunnel vision
Motivated action
Emotion-regulation, problem-solving, communication

Suicidal preparation

Lethal means safety

What is safety?

Cultural worldviews and cultural humility

The population at risk

What is the message?

Cultural competency training

Cultural knowledge

Suicidal capability

Coping and problem-solving

Suicidal desire

Suicidal storyline
Alone, worthless, hopeless

Tunnel vision
Motivated action
Emotion-regulation, problem-solving, communication

Suicidal preparation

Lethal means safety

Values and Beliefs

Safety from home invasion and attack
(Self-defense)

Readily accessible

Safety from unintentional injury

Unloaded

Locked

Ammunition separate

Inaccessible to others

Safety planning

Unloaded

Locked

Ammunition separate

Temporary off-site storage

Inaccessible to the owner and others at risk

Suicide & Fatal Firearm Injury

Suicide methods
WA state 2015-19

Firearm suicide

48%

16%

Other: 6%

CDC WISQARS

Fatal firearm injury
WA state 2015-19

Gun violence prevention

Firearms = Violence
Firearms threaten freedom

Clinician

I and others need to be kept safe from guns

Gun rights

Firearms = Freedom
Firearms represent and protect freedom

Patient

I and others keep ourselves safe with guns

Stewart & Kuhls, 2016 in JTACS; Yamane, 2017; Yamane, 2018
White males account for the highest proportion (78.6%) of firearm suicides and have the highest rate of these deaths. Males and females of all races and ethnicities are potentially affected.

Total number of firearm suicides (2015-2019)
Male: 86%
Female: 14%

Males and females of all races and ethnicities are potentially affected.

Suicide Methods by Race/Ethnicity

Suicide by Race/Ethnicity

All races White Black Hispanic AI/AN Asian

Firearms

Suffocation

Poisoning

Other

50.5%
51.8%
48.6%
36.0%
35.1%
24.6%

National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report (2020) for 2018
Male Suicide
Non-Vet Veteran
Female Suicide

Poisoning

Suffocation

Firearm

68.2% of Veteran suicides

Pre-existing, often longstanding ownership:
- Median of 11 years before firearm suicide. Cummings, et al., 1997
- Ownership >1 month in 85%. Suders, et al., 2020
- Less than 10% with recent firearm purchase. Vriniotis, et al., 2015
- Legal ownership: 92% would have passed a background check (Butter, et al., 2019).

Populations at Risk & Patterns of Firearm Ownership

Patterns of firearm ownership

- Recent purchase
- Prohibited person
- Longstanding
- Pre-existing
- Legal

Community-based:
Education, training, policy from firearms organizations

Health Care:
Education, training, policy on lethal means safety

Legislation & Policy:
Prevent/delay firearm ownership; storage

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Prohibited person
Longstanding
Pre-existing
Legal

Scope of the problem
Suicide Firearm fatality
48% 71%

Populations at Risk

Pattern of ownership

Recent purchase
Prohibited person
Longstanding
Pre-existing
Legal

Patterns of firearm ownership

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Firearms and Suicide: Summary
Firearms and Suicide Risk: What is the Message?

Households without firearms
- Lower risk of suicide

Households with firearms
- Higher risk of suicide

1

Unloaded
Locked
Ammunition
separate
Inaccessible
to others, esp. children

2

Apply the same level of safety, protection and responsibility to the number one cause of fatal firearm injury.

3

Out-of-home transfer
- Remove firearms from the home temporarily until someone has recovered.

Safety from home invasion and attack (Self-defense)

Health care delivery
- Low assessment of firearm access
- Low use of lethal means counseling

Values and Beliefs
- Focus on cultural factors to improve communication

Attitudes: Cultural humility
- Common cultural worldviews
- Bias in worldviews
- Cultural meaning of firearms

Values and Beliefs
- Common cultural worldviews
- Worldviews among physicians
- Bias in worldviews
- Ethical responsibilities

Targeted Interventions
- Cultural factors related to firearm ownership and use

Knowledge: Firearms and suicide care
- Cultural knowledge about firearm ownership and use
- Scientific basis of lethal means safety
- Practical knowledge
- Safety goals, beliefs, practices

Health status
- Suicide risk related to whether firearms are kept in the home
- Suicide risk related to how firearms are kept in the home
- Suicide risk relative to unintentional injury

Health care delivery
- Low assessment of firearm access
- Low use of lethal means counseling

Risk factors
- Suicide risks related to firearm access
- Trends in suicide

Cultural Knowledge
- Sub-populations
- Reasons for ownership
- Types of firearms
- Values
- Trusted messengers
- Practical knowledge
- Safety goals, beliefs, practices
Cultural Knowledge
Sub-populations & motivations for ownership

Protection / Self-defense: 67%
Hunting: 38%
Sport shooting: 10%
Gun collection: 13%
Professional: 8%

Pew Research Center: 2017

Cultural Knowledge
Types of firearms: Handguns

Pistol
Revolver
Semi-automatic
Concealed carry
Home defense
Sporting
Collectors
Professional use

Cultural Knowledge
Types of firearms: Long guns

Rifle
Shotgun
Hunting
Self-defense
Professional use
Competitive
Home defense
Collectors

Cultural Knowledge: Values

This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine. My rifle is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life. Without me, my rifle is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. My rifle is human, even as I, because it is my life…We will become part of each other. Before God, I swear this creed…My rifle and I are the defenders of my country. So be it, until victory is America’s and there is no enemy, but peace!

The Rifleman’s Creed

Cultural Knowledge: Values

“We are dedicated to the legal, safe, and responsible use of firearms for self-defense of the sexual-minority community. We no longer believe it is the right of those who hate and fear gay, lesbian, bi, trans, or polyamorous persons to use us as targets for their rage. Self-defense is our RIGHT.”

“We will help you select a firearm, acquire a permit, and receive proper training in its safe and legal use for self-defense.”

The Pink Pistols

“The right to own guns is essential to my sense of freedom.”

Gun owner, grew up with guns: “Agree” 79%
Gun owner, didn’t grow up with guns: “Agree” 65%
Non-gun owner, grew up with guns: “Agree” 44%
Non-gun owner, didn’t grow up with guns: “Agree” 30%
Pew, 2017
Cultural Knowledge: Values

NAAGA Mission Statement
“The mission of the National African American Gun Association (NAAGA) is to establish a fellowship by educating on the rich legacy of gun ownership by African Americans, offering training that supports safe gun use for self defense and sportsmanship, and advocating for the inalienable right to self-defense for African Americans.


DC Project: Women for Gun Rights
“The DC Project raises awareness that firearms safety and violence prevention are achieved through education, not legislation; encourages the preservation of America’s gun culture; and highlights the diversity and rising demographic of female gun owners through ongoing advocacy because gun rights are women’s rights.”

Individual journeys on one unified path: to preserve the Second Amendment

Cultural Knowledge: Values


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank ordered messengers: Best to worst</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Law enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Military veterans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Current military personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. National Rifle Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Hunting or outdoor organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Physicians or medical professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Celebrities</td>
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</tbody>
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Firearm locking devices
- Cable lock
- Trigger lock
- Gun case
- Lock box

Cultural Knowledge: Values

Laws related to firearms
- Background checks: It is legal to transfer a firearm without a background check if it is intended to prevent suicide and meets other criteria (RCW 9.41.113).
- Voluntary waivers are an option for people wanting to place their own name on the “do not sell” list as a prohibited person.
- HIPRC has a Firearm Safe Storage Map with organizations willing to hold firearms.
- Extreme risk protection orders (ERPO) can be used in high-risk situations.

Training topics among firearm owners with formal training (61.4%)
- Safe handling: 61.1%
- Safe storage: 12%
- Preventing accidents: 25%
- Preventing theft: 26%
- Suicide prevention: 14.7%
Cultural Knowledge: Safety Goals

Unintentional injury prevention

1. All guns are always loaded.
2. Never let a gun point at anything you don't intend to shoot, kill, or destroy.
3. Keep your finger off of the trigger until you are on target and intend to fire.
4. Be sure of your target plus what is around and behind it.

Morrison, G.B., 1991

Cooper's Four Universal Rules of Safe Firearms Handling

Suicide prevention

- Prevalence: “Suicide is not a common cause of gun deaths.”
- Inevitability: “If someone is determined to die, there's nothing anyone can do about it.”
- Method substitution: “If they don't have a gun, they'll just find another way.”

Walton & Stuber, 2020; Knopke, et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2006

Beliefs about firearms and suicide

Prevalence  Duration of crises  Long-term survival  Lethality

Sub-populations  Types of firearms  Practical knowledge: Laws, locking devices

Values: Safety, protection, responsibility, freedom, community

Trusted messengers  Safety goals: Self-defense, unintentional injury prevention

Suicide prevention

Out-of-home transfer  "Time and distance"

Higher in-home security

"Time and distance"

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- What is the message?
- Cultural competency training
- Cultural knowledge