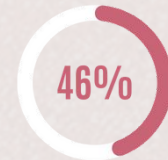


# Perceived Motivators of Gun Violence among College Students

Kelly Vuong, Saechan Lee, Siobhan Loh

UC San Diego

Herbert Wertheim  
School of Public Health and  
Human Longevity Science



**Survey from 2013:**  
46% of US citizens found individuals with mental health illnesses **more dangerous** than the general population

## Objectives

To determine “**what are the perceived motivators for gun violence in a college population?**”  
College students were asked about their beliefs of reasons for gun violence. We hypothesized that **mental health would be the primary motivator for gun violence**. Additionally, our study reviewed the recommendations put forth by college students concerning the legislation surrounding gun control.

## Background

- The prevalence of firearm related incidents has been steadily rising in recent years, justifying the acknowledgment of gun violence as a significant public health concern.
- Currently, anyone who is 18 years or older can legally purchase and possess a gun with only a few restrictions under federal laws.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2022 alone, the United States had **647 mass shootings**, and approximately **80 mass shootings** had been reported last year.
- In the United States, poor mental health is seen as the biggest motivator of gun violence as portrayed by the **public, media, politicians**.<sup>2</sup>

## Results

The results support our hypothesis on college students perceiving poor mental health as a primary motive for gun violence. The outcomes of our survey show convincing evidence of what is found to be the principal issues associated with mass shootings in the United States by the college population.

Based on the overall **demographic responses**, we found:

- 77% were aged 18-23
- 49.6% were females
- 51.5% identified themselves as White/Caucasian background

## Conclusion & Policy Implications

- ‘Mental health’ was the most voted motivator of gun violence; with ‘access to firearms’ and ‘revenge’ following as the second motivators.
- Surveyors were asked what government intervention should be implied to combat gun violence. The results support our hypothesis on college students perceiving mental health as a primary motive for gun violence.
- The outcomes of our survey show convincing evidence of what is found to be the principal issue associated with mass shootings in the United States by the college population and how it should be dealt.
- Policymakers should focus on correcting mental health issues of certain individuals.

## Methods

- To investigate what college students identify as the most important motivators of gun violence, we performed a **cross-sectional survey** administered online via Qualtrics.
- The survey consisted of demographics questions as well as **multiple-choice, ranking, and short-answer responses** regarding motivations for gun violence. We also elicited short responses on suggested interventions for effective gun control.
- The survey was distributed in a time frame of **two weeks** by publicizing it on social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, etc.) for UCSD students and other university campuses to participate. Total responses received: N=351



**CONFIRMED KNOWING SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN SUBJECTED TO GUN VIOLENCE**



RESPONDENTS WHO CHOSE MENTAL HEALTH AS A MOTIVE FOR GUN VIOLENCE, ASSOCIATED THE FOLLOWING MENTAL ILLNESSES WITH GUN VIOLENCE

1 **DEPRESSION**  
17.33% OF RESPONDENTS

2 **BI-POLAR/SCHIZOPHRENIA**  
17.06% OF RESPONDENTS

3 **BULLYING**  
16.78% OF RESPONDENTS



**MENTAL HEALTH**

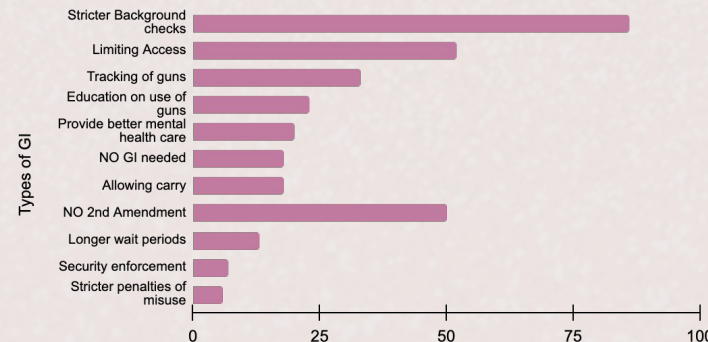
Mental health was identified by 17.3% of participants as a perceived motivator contributing to gun violence



**ACCESS TO FIRE ARMS**

Access to firearms was identified by 15.2% of participants as a perceived motivator contributing to gun violence

## Suggested Government Interventions (GI)



## References

- Lee, L. K., Flegler, E. W., Goyal, M. K., Doh, K. F., Lanzaque-Arena, D., Hoffman, B. D., & Prevention, C. O. I. V. a. P. (2022). Firearm-Related Injuries and Deaths in Children and Youth. *Pediatrics*, 150(6). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2022-060071>
- Ahonen, L., Loeber, R., & Brent, D. A. (2019). The Association Between Serious Mental Health Problems and Violence: Some Common Assumptions and Misconceptions. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 20(5), 613–625. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838017726423>
- Philpott-Jones S. (2018). Mass Shootings, Mental Illness, and Gun Control. *The Hastings Center report*, 48(2), 7–9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hast.832>
- McGinly, E. E., Webster, D. W., & Barry, C. L. (2014). Gun policy and serious mental illness: priorities for future research and policy. *Psychiatric services (Washington, D.C.)*, 65(1), 50–58. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201300141>
- Black D. W. (2013). Gun violence and mental illness: no clear path. *Annals of clinical psychiatry: official journal of the American Academy of Clinical Psychiatrists*, 25(2), 81.
- Swanson, J. W., McGinly, E. E., Fazel, S., & Mays, V. M. (2015). Mental illness and reduction of gun violence and suicide: bringing epidemiologic research to policy. *Annals of epidemiology*, 25(5), 366–376. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepidem.2014.03.004>
- Metz, J. M., Piemonte, J., & McKay, T. (2021). Mental illness, mass shootings, and the future of psychiatric research into American gun violence. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 29(1), 81–89. <https://doi.org/10.1097/hrp.0000000000000290>
- GA S., Neil, A., & Andry, T. (2023, January 23). *The US had 647 mass shootings in 2022. Here's the full list.* Insider. [https://www.insider.com/number-of-mass-shootings-in-america-this-year-2022-58?utm\\_source=insider&utm\\_medium=article&utm\\_campaign=insider](https://www.insider.com/number-of-mass-shootings-in-america-this-year-2022-58?utm_source=insider&utm_medium=article&utm_campaign=insider)

## Acknowledgements

Our group would like to specially thank Dr. Haley Ciborowski and the two TAs: Myung Kim and Vivian Chou.