

# Gun Policy and Serious Mental Illness: Priorities for Future Research and Policy

Emma Elizabeth McGinty, Ph.D., M.S.; Daniel W. Webster, Sc.D., M.P.H.; Colleen L. Barry, Ph.D., M.P.P.  
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## Abstract

**Objective** In response to recent mass shootings, policy makers have proposed multiple policies to prevent persons with serious mental illness from having guns. The political debate about these proposals is often uninformed by research. To address this gap, this review article summarizes the research related to gun restriction policies that focus on serious mental illness.

**Methods** Gun restriction policies were identified by researching the THOMAS legislative database, state legislative databases, prior review articles, and the news media. PubMed, PsycINFO, and Web of Science databases were searched for publications between 1970 and 2013 that addressed the relationship between serious mental illness and violence, the effectiveness of gun policies focused on serious mental illness, the potential for such policies to exacerbate negative public attitudes, and the potential for gun restriction policies to deter mental health treatment seeking.

**Results** Limited research suggests that federal law restricting gun possession by persons with serious mental illness may prevent gun violence from this population. Promotion of policies to prevent persons with serious mental illness from having guns does not seem to exacerbate negative public attitudes toward this group. Little is known about how restricting gun possession among persons with serious mental illness affects suicide risk or mental health treatment seeking.

**Conclusions** Future studies should examine how gun restriction policies for serious mental illness affect suicide, how such policies are implemented by states, how persons with serious mental illness perceive policies that restrict their possession of guns, and how gun restriction policies influence mental health treatment seeking among persons with serious mental illness.