

# Rethinking criminalizing language in firearm research and intervention

September 14 2022

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Injuries associated with firearm violence pose a persistent public health threat in the United States. The term "recidivism" is often used when referring to those who experience repeat firearm injuries. A

commentary in the journal *Preventive Medicine* cautions against its use in clinical and public health discourse and as an evaluation descriptor for violence prevention and intervention programs.

"Recidivism" reinforces stigma when used to refer to people who experience [firearm injuries](#), the commentary's authors explain. They suggest using language like "reinjury" or "recurrent violent injury" instead. They also advocate for reconsidering the term when used as a core evaluation metric for the success of tertiary firearm injury prevention programs.

"We are addressing the use of [recidivism](#) because it connotes racialized criminality, and reinforces stigmatizing perceptions of firearm-injured people, especially those injured in communities and geographies where firearm violence is endemic," says the article's lead author, Sara F. Jacoby, Ph.D., MPH, MSN, Assistant Professor of Nursing in the Department of Family and Community Health at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing (Penn Nursing).

The authors explain that the harm inherent in using [words](#) like recidivism is that it can shape [clinical practice](#), and in turn, impact patient outcomes by reinforcing implicit and explicit biases about patients and their deservingness for care. Similarly, using the term in violence prevention and intervention programs can reinforce criminalizing language and may inadvertently detract from emphasis on effecting change on factors that lie on the pathway between injury and reinjury.

"Rethinking recidivism allows us to consciously reflect on the biases that underlie the words we choose when referring to people who have been injured by firearms," says Dr. Jacoby.

Co-authors of the commentary include Randi N. Smith of Emory

University School of Medicine and Jessica H. Beard of the Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University.

**More information:** Sara F. Jacoby et al, Rethinking "recidivism" in firearm injury research and prevention, *Preventive Medicine* (2022).  
[DOI: 10.1016/j.ypmed.2022.107221](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2022.107221)

Provided by University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing

Citation: Rethinking criminalizing language in firearm research and intervention (2022, September 14) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-09-rethinking-criminalizing-language-firearm-intervention.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.