

Stigma, fear may keep shooting survivors from seeking mental health services

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A new study finds that shooting survivors may not seek the mental health services they need after experiencing gun violence due to stigma, fear and a lack of trusted resources. [The study](#), led by assistant professor Lauren Magee with the Indiana University O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs in Indianapolis, is featured in the *JAMA Network Open*.

Magee and her partners with Stop the Violence Indianapolis interviewed [survivors](#) of gun violence in the Indianapolis area, all of whom were between the ages of 13 and 34 at the time they were shot. The study did not include survivors of shootings that also involved fatalities.

Despite describing symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress and [anxiety disorders](#), half of participants believed they were adequately coping without formal services. Thirty-nine percent said they did not seek professional help due to a fear of potential repercussions from peers for providing information to police or health providers; 56% said they did not seek mental health assistance because they did not trust providers.

Most survivors said that if they were to seek professional help, it was important the provider understood their lives and communities.

The research team found that survivors preferred receiving support from their existing networks instead of professionals. In fact, 83% of the survivors surveyed said they relied on their families and friends for physical and mental healing, whether serving as primary support or through connecting them to mental health care.

Responses from survivors also showcase the broad impact that nonfatal shootings have on their families—emotionally and in day-to-day life—highlighting a need for broader recovery support.

These study results are critical for those seeking to help develop appropriate support systems for survivors of [gun violence](#) and their families.

Researchers said the key takeaways include the need for trusted resources within communities for survivors and families and the importance of a credible provider who understands their [life experiences](#)

More information: Lauren A. Magee et al, Engagement With Mental Health Services Among Survivors of Firearm Injury, *JAMA Network Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.40246](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.40246)

Provided by Indiana University

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