

Mental illness not to blame for gun violence study finds

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Counter to a lot of public opinion, having a mental illness does not necessarily make a person more likely to commit gun violence. According to a new study, a better indicator of gun violence was access to firearms.

A study by researchers at The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston looked into the association between [gun violence](#) and mental [health](#) in a group of 663 young adults in Texas. Their results were published in the journal *Preventive Medicine*.

"Counter to public beliefs, the majority of mental health symptoms examined were not related to gun [violence](#)," said Dr. Yu Lu, a postdoctoral research fellow at UTMB and the lead author of the study.

What researchers found instead was that individuals who had gun access were approximately 18 times more likely to have threatened someone with a gun. Individuals with high hostility were about 3.5 times more likely to threaten someone.

"These findings have important implications for gun control policy efforts," Lu said.

Each year, an estimated 75,000 to 100,000 Americans are injured by firearms and 30,000 to 40,000 die from firearms, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

"Much of the limited research on gun violence and [mental illness](#) has focused on violence among individuals with severe mental illnesses or rates of mental illness among individuals arrested for violent crimes," Lu said. "What we found is that the link between mental illness and gun violence is not there."

Lu and Dr. Jeff Temple, another author of the study and a professor at UTMB, surveyed participants in a long-term study about their firearm possession and use as well as about anxiety, depression, stress, [posttraumatic stress disorder](#), hostility, impulsivity, [borderline personality disorder](#), mental health treatment and other demographic details.

The researchers found that individuals who had access to guns, compared to those with no such access, were over 18 times more likely to have threatened someone with a gun, even after controlling for a number of demographic and mental health variables. Meanwhile, most mental health symptoms were unrelated to gun violence.

"Taking all this information together, limiting access to guns, regardless of any other mental health status, demographics or prior [mental health](#) treatments, is the key to reducing gun violence," Temple said.

More information: Yu Lu et al, Dangerous weapons or dangerous people? The temporal associations between gun violence and mental health, *Preventive Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ypmed.2019.01.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2019.01.008)

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