



How to Address Firearm Safety with the Rural Suicidal Patient

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Objectives

- Increase understanding that suicide prevention is more than assessing risk;
- Increase understanding of **rural** firearm culture and implications for messaging related to limiting access to lethal means.

Why Health Care Providers?

- 64% of those who die by suicide in the US have had contact with their primary care provider within a year of death*
- 45% of those who die by suicide have had contact within 1 month of suicide**
- Health care visits are an optimal opportunity to identify and support persons at risk of suicide and their family members.

*Ahmedani, et al. (2014)

**Luoma, et al. (2002)

Risk factor: Easy Access to Firearms



- Not a pro-gun or anti-gun issue
- Important to temporarily limit access to guns when individuals are in crisis
- Need to make it socially acceptable for friends and family members to hold onto a potentially suicidal gun owner's weapon until the crisis has passed

(Craig Roberts, Clackamas County Sheriff, 2016)

Background

- ~51% of all deaths by suicide occur with the use of firearms (CDC, 2016)
- In Oregon, firearms are the most common method of suicide for males, accounting for over 61% of deaths (OHA, 2015)
- Discourse about limiting access to firearms gives rise to constitutional concerns and political polarization (Caine, 2013), often accentuated in rural areas.

Investigation Premises

Discourses about clients voluntarily limiting access to firearms during periods of suicidal ideation will achieve successful outcomes **if culturally appropriate messaging about firearm safety is identified and implemented.**

Initial Investigation

Interviews with 39 adult
owners of firearms

22 men, 17 women

5 focus groups and four key
informant interviews

Designed to understand the
culture of gun ownership in
rural communities

Findings

Guns are Pervasive: members of this demographic own multiple firearms, many loaded at all times, often not locked or not stored in secure locations.

Firearm Safety: most frequently cited basis of firearm safety has been explicit training of children and young adults, primarily through instruction from family members, and secondarily through formal firearms safety courses.

Findings, continued

Firearm Taboo: highly inappropriate to ask someone where they keep their guns, how many guns they have, and other details of firearm ownership and safety in the home.

- The above suggests that traditional, public health driven messages around firearms (e.g. store ammunition separately from weapons, use a gun safe, impersonal physician in-take forms) may be ineffective for at least some portion of the gun-owning population.

Crisis Situations: in discussions of actual and hypothetical mental health crises with the potential for suicide, trust in the person asking the individual to relinquish their firearm is deemed fundamental. A trusted friend or family member can successfully breach the ***Firearm Taboo***.

Findings, continued

Trust in Primary Care: extremely important; point blank questions about firearm ownership (including intake checklists) or means restriction from someone who has not established trust are often perceived as threatening and antagonistic; fear of reporting to a government registry, especially among veterans

Suicide Prevention as an Expression of Cultural Values: optimism about making culturally-appropriate resources available in a primary care setting if means restriction is treated as a basic extension of rural cultural values that emphasize firearm safety (rather than “loss of access”) and care for friends and family

Quantitative Study: Suicide Prevention Messaging Test

- $n = 817$ (Amazon MTurk system)
- Gender (54.2% male; 45.8% female)
- Race/Ethnicity
 - 82.2% White;
 - 6.9% Black/African American;
 - 6.2% Latino/Hispanic;
 - 3.7% Asian American;
 - 0.4% Pacific Islander;
 - 0.7% American Indian / Alaska Native
- Age ($M = 35.65$, $SD = 10.92$)

Quantitative Study: Suicide Prevention Messaging Test

- Educational attainment (0.5%, some high school, 9.2%, high school diploma or GED, 38.5%, some college or associates degree, 37.8%, bachelor's degree, 14.0%, master's degree or higher)
- Household income (14.0%, less than \$25,000; 31.1% from \$25,000 to \$49,999; 26.3% from \$50,000 to \$74,999; 14.6% from \$75,000 to \$99,999; 13.9%, \$100,000 or more)
- Rural-Urban (77.9% reported living in metro areas of at least 250,000 individuals)
- **Random Assignment to:**
 - **Control**
 - **Standard**
 - **Gun Culture**
 - **Gun Culture + Standard**

Findings

- Standard message + culturally informed message resulted in the greatest likelihood of temporarily removing guns for family member, friends or self if contemplating suicide
- Standard message + culturally informed message resulted in the greatest likelihood of the person speaking about firearm ownership with their physician.
- Results strongest for those who were politically conservative, living in rural areas, and those in favor of gun rights.

Implications

Culturally informed messaging about limiting access to firearms is more impactful on gun owners than a message that ignores cultural norms

The effect was greater on individuals who more strongly identified as conservatives and who more strongly advocated for gun rights – suggesting that a targeted approach to this messaging intervention may be most effective.

Likelihood of restricting lethal means for suicide prevention is shaped by *framing*

PEOPLE WHO LOVE GUNS, LOVE YOU

With Help Comes Hope

GET HELP NOW, CALL 24/7
800-273-8255
OR TEXT '273TALK' TO 839863



We believe firearms are an American way of life—a constitutional right and a necessity in order to protect ourselves and our families.

And with this **RIGHT** to bear arms comes **RESPONSIBILITY.**

“If you are the person who is going through a tough time, it may feel risky to give your guns to a friend for safekeeping. We know it’s a big step, but it’s just a temporary step until things get better. Remember that people who love guns love you. Temporarily entrusting guns to a friend or family member might just save a life.”

Care; loyalty; liberty;
individualist risk perception

Marino, E., Wolsko, C., Keys, S., & Wilcox, H. (2018). Addressing the cultural challenges of firearm restriction in suicide prevention: A test of public health messaging to protect those at risk. *Archives of Suicide Research*, 22(3), 394-404.

People Who Love
Guns Love You

Why does this work?

- Cultural cues within words and graphics
- Ingroup affiliation established

Creating Research- based Tools

- Overview of the Project
- Firearm Safety Brochure for Clients
- Research Brief for Providers
- Firearm Safety Website for Providers
<http://oregonfirearmsafety.org/addressing-firearm-safety/>
- Firearm Safety Webpage for Clients
oregonfirearmsafety.org/firearm-safety/
- Training videos for providers on firearm safety with the rural suicidal patient
<https://vimeo.com/309988955>
<https://vimeo.com/309989416>
<https://vimeo.com/310201407>
<https://vimeo.com/310002505>

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