



The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues

October 6, 2017

SPSSI Members,

To what extent can we as members of a society enjoy richly lived experiences when the public spaces that enable us to come together are the same spaces that make us vulnerable to acts of great violence? As we saw in Las Vegas this past Sunday evening—and as we have seen countless times before—violence perpetuated by one person can directly destroy the lives of many others and shatter the sense of safety for many more.

With an average of more than one mass shooting every day, and more than 30,000 gun-related deaths each year, the United States is a nation where people regularly feel terrorized by the threat of gun violence. We fear gun violence in our homes, on our streets, in our classrooms, in our offices, in our movie theaters, on our campuses, and in our concert venues. We fear gun violence at the hands of our intimate partners, our neighbors, our classmates, our co-workers, our children, and even people we have never met.

A little more than a year ago, SPSSI leaders called on U.S. lawmakers to invest in research that can be used to better understand and address gun violence. As we noted in that [open letter](#), the United States government provides relatively little funding for research that could be used to prevent gun-related violence, which is a *100 percent preventable source of injury and death*.

And yet there is so much research that can be done, and should be done, to address this public health crisis.

A 2013 National Academies report entitled [Priorities for Research to Reduce the Threat of Firearm-Related Violence](#) articulated that “there is a pressing need to obtain up-to-date, accurate information about how many guns are owned in the United States, their distribution and types, how people acquire them, and how they are used.” For example: What motivates people to acquire guns? What groups and sub-groups are at greater risk of being victimized? What risk and protective factors—such as gender inequality, socioeconomic status, and neighborhood social cohesion—are related to gun violence? Which prevention strategies and interventions work to curb gun violence, and for whom do they work?

There are so many important research questions that demand exploration.

Wendy Williams, President Elizabeth Cole, President-Elect Chris Crandall, Past-President Richard Wiener, Secretary-Treasurer

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However, we are not starting from ground zero; much important research evidence already exists. As noted in a 2013 expert report issued by the American Psychological Association (APA) entitled [Gun Violence: Prediction, Prevention, and Policy](#), we already know that the use of a gun greatly increases the odds that violence will result in a fatality. We already know that the type of ammunition used is directly related to lethality. We already know that assault weapons and guns with large-capacity ammunition feeding devices account for half of the weapons used in mass shootings. We already know that mass shootings with these types of weapons result in about 1.5 times as many fatalities as those committed with other types of firearms.

In addition, SPSSI members' research speaks to the ways in which the media frame this kind of violence, including the language used to describe the perpetrators and the roles that race, religion, and mental health play in how the media cover these events. Over the coming days and weeks, as we learn more about the *how* and *why* of what happened, the work of our members will be important in educating the public about how to prevent these kinds of events.

Moreover, as scholars, educators, and students, as psychologists and other social scientists, SPSSI members can play an important role in advocating for the use of research evidence in developing smart policies at institutional, local, state, federal, and/or international levels. We can also play an important role in highlighting the need for institutions—both public and private—to collect data, fund research, and encourage the use of research evidence in policy making.

It is hard not to be fatigued by continually facing these tragic events. Our hearts go out to our members in Las Vegas and those who have been affected by this shooting—and all the others in our communities who are impacted by gun violence on a daily basis. But as I look over the body of work our members have done, I'm proud to be a member of this community, and I ask you to continue to do the hard work.

Sincerely,
Wendy R. Williams, Ph.D.
SPSSI President