



Position Statement on Firearm Violence

The American Psychoanalytic Association, in light of the recent tragic shootings in our country, takes the following position:

The recent shootings in our schools, churches and community centers have brought the crisis of violence under intense public scrutiny. However the American Psychoanalytic Association views this crisis as long-standing and occurring each day in our communities. Firearm violence is a major public health issue. According to the centers for disease control, in 2010, there were 11,078 firearm homicides and 19,392 firearm suicides. Of all the firearm deaths in the 23 highest-income countries in the world in 2003, 80% occurred in the U.S. despite our having a smaller population than those other countries combined.

Research and the dissemination of research findings regarding health risks associated with firearms and best practices in firearms safety must not be restricted. This data is essential to the development of public health interventions.

Psychoanalytic treatment and research have shown that violent behavior is often rooted in childhood trauma connected to environmental factors such as poverty, child abuse and neglect. These environmental factors interact with biological factors and can cause difficulties with attachment and relationships. However many forms of violent behavior are treatable and can be prevented with appropriate intervention.

Because of the human potential for aggression, rage and loss of impulse control, the accessibility of firearms in our country contributes significantly to the public health problem of firearm violence, including injury, homicide, suicide and mass murder.

The harmful impact of violence affects the lives, development and growth of our children thereby contributing to the cyclical nature of this critical social problem.

The psychological roots of violence in our communities cannot be seen in isolation from the violence committed around the world in the form of war, genocide and ethnic cleansing often perpetrated by destructive but charismatic leaders.

Firearm violence is complex and multifactorial--it cannot be ascribed to a single cause or single population, such as the mentally ill.

Every human being, regardless of having a mental health diagnosis, is capable of acts of aggression under stress. While mental health professionals, law enforcement officers, court officers and other professionals are responsible for making a careful assessment of imminent danger to self and others within the scope of their discipline, they cannot be called upon to make more than a probabilistic estimate of the potential for future violence. Research and clinical experience demonstrate that mental health professionals cannot make reliable long-term predictions as to whether or not an individual could safely possess a firearm.

The American Psychoanalytic Association, through its membership, public information, lobbying, educational programs, research, and liaison programs in our communities, is committed to working

with other groups and experts to facilitate research about firearm violence and create effective policies and interventions to prevent firearm violence.

Furthermore, APsaA strongly urges and supports the development of laws and regulations at federal, state and local levels to control the availability of dangerous firearms.

Adopted January 2013. This position statement updates and replaces APsaA's May 2000 position statement on violence.