

Gun violence **not** due to mental illnesses



To Be Honest
Christy Avery

“Mental illness and hatred pull the trigger. Not the gun.”

-President Donald Trump

By 2019, society expected we would have flying cars. Instead, we have telekinesis. Or so the President says.

We also have, according to the Gun Violence Archive, 300 mass shootings and over 15 million firearm background checks, aka attempted purchases, so far this year, according to the FBI. Yet we are still pretending that bullets can be fired with mindpower, that the gun has nothing to do with it. And still pretending that mental illness is a leading cause of violence.

In the words of Emma Gonzalez, I call BS.

The stigma is nothing new: A 2006 national survey showed that 60 percent of Americans saw people with schizophrenia, for example, as likely to be dangerous. We are still filling headlines with proposals for “institutions,” still using terms like “crazy” or “insane,” still pulling the focus back around to us somehow after every incident. And yes, I say us; I

have diagnosed mental health issues. But the pills I take are not bullets, and would I ever dream of mowing down a school or concert? No.

And I am not an outlier. Research has shown that people with any mental health condition are generally no more violent than the general population—and only account for around 3-5 percent of all mass violence at all. According to the National Center for Health Statistics database, only 5 percent of the 120,000 gun-related killings in the U.S. between 2001 and 2010 were perpetrated by those with a pre-existing mental health condition.

All of this is not to say that everyone is innocent; a killer is a killer, and mental illness is no excuse. But the bottom line is, it does not cause crime by itself. Most people with mental illnesses, such as myself, live perfectly normal lives. To view us as dangerous and unpredictable creates a culture of fear. It prevents people from getting help. It creates a vision that mentally ill people are

automatically red flags; that perhaps the latest proposal by the government to possibly use smartphones to track us in order to “prevent” violence—in turn violating civil liberties—is the solution.

So what accounts for the other 95 percent of violent crime, then? In my opinion, it is something more complex and difficult than what can be studied or diagnosed. Trump

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mentioned it, but did not elaborate: hatred.

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Think of some of the biggest mass killings the U.S. has seen: Pulse nightclub. The attacking of a black church in South Carolina. The Tree of

Life synagogue shooting. What do these all have in common? Certain factors and predictors that are far more reliable than mental illness: Homophobia. Racism. Anti-Semitism. A history of past violence and threats. Often, the issue is darker than a diagnosis.

And maybe that is why we find every other excuse for the bloodshed: we fear the darkness we cannot treat.

In America, even if we do not want to admit it, it often goes into the barrel of a gun. It is convenient. If the world’s countries were all competing for the title of “Most Guns” in the largest gun show known to man, America would win. Our numbers are harrowing: on average, there are 89 firearms for every 100 U.S. inhabitants. Weigh that next to other countries’ rates, and it gets worse. For example: Canada. For every 100 people, there are only around 31 firearms. Why? Gun laws, of course. Canada’s five-step process to purchase a gun, including safety courses and written tests, is far more complex than that of the U.S. Here, making a basic gun purchase is quite literally as easy as 1, 2, 3.

For a country fairly similar

to the U.S., Canada’s experience with firearms is certainly much different. But here is where we circle back: their mental health statistics are not. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 1 in 5 Americans has a mental illness. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, their numbers are the same. That should speak for itself: fewer guns and stricter laws equal less violence. But in America, even if we do not want to admit it, we do not seem to be getting the memo. Sure, politicians may say that stricter gun laws are important, but what tangible action has been taken? Instead of calling it what it is, we keep buying our guns, making vague excuses, holding tightly to our ever-so-sacred Second Amendment. Even when it has the power to kill.

So yes, this is a gun problem. If we want to really change, we need to follow in other countries’ footsteps to enforce stricter gun laws and background checks. Because maybe we cannot fix hatred, but we can reduce how easy it is to express it.

Call America sick. Or be like me and call it hateful. But the bottom line is, people are dying. And we are too distracted with our selfishness and scapegoating to do much about it.

What do you think causes gun violence?



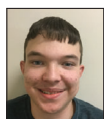
senior
Abbie Gillespie

“I don't think it's mental illness... usually gun violence is suicides. The recent ones have been homicides.”



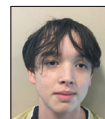
junior
Maria Hopper

“I think environmental factors like abuse, or you've seen others do violent things and want to.”



senior
Logan Stafford

“I believe it's caused by how they're treated sometimes... but I don't think mental illness is the primary cause.”



sophomore
Colin Johnson

“I think what a lot say; cyberbullying, neglect from friends and family. A lot of people feel neglected.”



junior
Ashtyn Houglin

“Who you grow up around influences you... and video games, because there's a lot of killing games.”

To give your opinion on what causes gun violence and propose possible solutions, go to @FCHSBagpiper on Twitter.com/FCHSBagpiper.