



**PERXU**

Program Evaluation and Research Unit

# Firearm-related experiences & perceptions among U.S. Veterans

---

*Presented by Patti Tanner*



University of  
**Pittsburgh**

School of  
Pharmacy

# Learning Objectives

**By the end of this module, you will be able to do the following:**

- Identify the **differences in rates of firearm ownership and suicide involving a firearm**, by Veteran-status and gender
- Discuss the **theory of planned behavior** and identify the **differences between ‘perceived behavioral control’ and ‘actual behavioral control’**
- Identify key considerations for conducting **firearm lethal means safety and safe storage** interventions in a **trauma-informed manner** with Veterans



University of  
Pittsburgh

School of  
Pharmacy

PERXU

# Veterans & Firearms

	Non-Veteran Men		Veteran Men		Non-Veteran Women		Veteran Women	
	2019	Change*	2019	Change*	2019	Change*	2019	Change*
Suicides involving firearms	53.0%	(-5.0%)	70.2%	(+2.9%)	31.3%	(-4.2%)	49.8%	(+12.8%)
Firearm ownership	30.3%		47.2%		11.8%		24.4%	

*\*Suicides Involving Firearms, 2019 and Change From 2001*

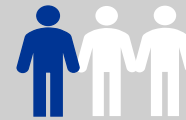
# Inherent Risk

More than 15 U.S. case-control and cross-sectional studies have found that **firearm access is an independent risk factor for suicide**<sup>1</sup>

Access is key 



**1 in 2** Veterans **owns**  
at least one firearm



**1 in 3** Veterans **stores** a  
firearm loaded & unlocked<sup>2</sup>

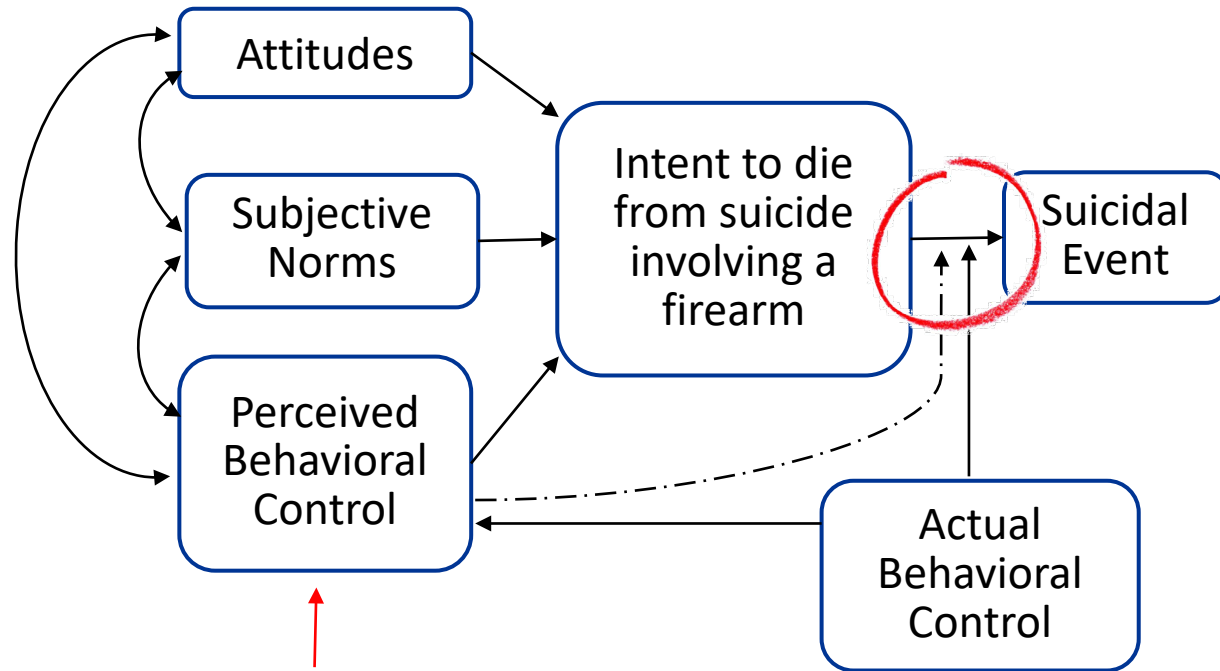


University of  
Pittsburgh

School of  
Pharmacy

PERXU

# Theory of Planned Behavior



3 factors are greatly influenced by stigma and mental health literacy.

Three underlying factors:

1. Attitudes
2. Subjective Norms
3. Perceived Behavioral Control

Actual Behavioral Control

- Availability of a firearm
- Access to a firearm
- Context of risk (i.e., external constraints)



University of  
Pittsburgh

School of  
Pharmacy

PERxU

# Male Veterans

Gain **initial firearm knowledge** and exposure **at a young age** through older **male family** members.

**Safety lessons** during early firearm encounters **focused on preventing unintentional injuries** through safe firearm handling and using “common sense.”

Firearms serve an **important social function** across their lifespans (e.g., hunting and target shooting).

Perceive firearms as **useful for protection**.

Believe that **not everyone should have access to firearms**.

Perceive **trust** as essential to firearm discussions (prefer **family members** to initiate and/or be included).



University of  
Pittsburgh

School of  
Pharmacy

PERXU

# Female Veterans

Gain **initial firearm knowledge** and exposure at a **young age** through older **male family** members.

**Military service** led to broader **exposure to firearms**, which were perceived as **important for survival and protection** in a male-dominated environment (predominantly due to the risk for sexual violence).

The **desire for self-protection** motivated firearm ownership and storage practices (e.g., IPV and MST).

Obtain their **first firearms** at **later ages**, **own fewer** firearms, and are more likely to own **only handguns**.

More likely to **live in a household** with **firearms** that **they do not personally own** (access provided through male family members/partners).

Perceive **trust** as essential to firearm discussions (prefer **family members** to initiate and/or be included).



University of  
Pittsburgh

School of  
Pharmacy

PERXU

# Trauma-Informed Interventions

## Actual Behavioral Control

- **Availability of a firearm** - Extreme Risk laws
- **Access to a firearm** - Promote secure storage practices (unloading ammo, locking the firearm, storing firearm and ammo in separate locations)
- **Context of risk** (i.e., external constraints)
  
- Trust/involvement of family or loved ones
- Social and protective functions
- IPV/MST



University of  
Pittsburgh

School of  
Pharmacy

PERXU



# References

- Dempsey, Catherine & Benedek, David & Zuromski, Kelly & Riggs-Donovan, Charlotte & Ng, MPH, Tsz Hin (Stanley) & Nock, Matthew & Kessler, Ronald & Ursano, Robert. (2019). *Association of Firearm Ownership, Use, Accessibility, and Storage Practices With Suicide Risk Among US Army Soldiers*. JAMA Network Open. 2019;2(6):e195383. doi: [10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.5383](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.5383).
- Miller, M., C. Barber, R. A. White, and D. Azrael. (2013). “*Firearms and Suicide in the United States: Is Risk Independent of Underlying Suicidal Behavior?*” American Journal of Epidemiology, Vol. 178, No. 6, pp. 946–955.
- Monteith, L.L., Holliday, R., Dorsey Holliman, B.A., Brenner, L.A., Simonetti, J.A. (2020). *Understanding female veterans' experiences and perspectives of firearms*. Journal of Clinical Psychology. 2020;76:1736–1753.



- Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. *2019 National veteran suicide prevention annual report*. (2019). Available at [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2019/2019\\_National\\_Veteran\\_Suicide\\_Prevention\\_Annual\\_Report\\_508.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2019/2019_National_Veteran_Suicide_Prevention_Annual_Report_508.pdf).
- Simonetti J.A., Azrael D., Rowhani-Rahbar A., Miller M. (2018). *Firearm storage practices among American Veterans*. *Am J Prev Med* 55(4): 445–54.
- Simonetti, J.A., Dorsey Holliman, B., Holiday, R., Brenner, L.A., Monteith, LL. (2020). *Firearm-related experiences and perceptions among United States male veterans: A qualitative interview study*. *PLoS ONE* 15(3): e0230135. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0230135>
- Waliski, A., Matthieu, MM., Townsend, JC., McGaugh, J., Kirchner, J. (2017). *Understanding Veteran Suicide by Firearm*. *Journal of Veterans Studies* 2(2):91.





*The University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy, Program Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU) is dedicated to meaningful work that facilitates each patient or community member's ability to achieve optimal health, well-being, recovery and choice.*