

Table of Contents

Kelly, Susan - #5592 - Veterans' Feedback on a Secure Firearm Storage Campaign at a Rural VA	1
Abstract submission for Institutional Repository	1



Research Week 2024

Veterans' Feedback on a Secure Firearm Storage Campaign at a Rural VA

Susan Sotka Kelly, LCSW; Lauren Maxim, PhD; Tess Gilbert, MHS; Kathleen Carlson, MS, PhD

OHSU-PSU School of Public Health
VA Portland Health Care System

Keywords

Secure firearm storage, VA healthcare system, Veterans, Rural health

Abstract

Background:

Firearm-related injuries and deaths are a serious risk among Veterans in rural areas, where almost 25% of Veterans reside. Firearm ownership is more common among Veterans (45%) than non-Veterans (20%), and 1 in 3 Veteran firearm owners store at least one firearm unlocked and loaded. With Veteran input and local VA collaboration, educational materials were created promoting secure firearm storage and disseminated within a rural VA healthcare center. This study sought to evaluate Veterans' perceptions of the materials.

Methods:

We designed a survey to measure Veterans' beliefs about secure firearm storage and the relevance, acceptability, and potential effects of the educational materials. Surveys were mailed to a random sample of 1,434 Veterans with at least one healthcare visit from July through August 2023, during the implementation timeframe. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each survey question and stratified by firearm ownership and exposure to the materials.

Results:

We received surveys from 105 Veterans; 80% were firearm owners and 47% were exposed to the educational materials. Among firearm owners, 83% agreed that secure firearm storage can keep their family safe from injuries from their firearms, and 85% agreed that secure storage can prevent someone from using their firearm in a suicide attempt. Among those exposed to the materials, most (64% - 83%) agreed that they were acceptable and useful. Among exposed firearm owners, 46% endorsed changing how they stage/ store at least one of their firearms after seeing the materials.

Conclusions:

Preliminary results from this pilot study among Veterans receiving services from a rural VA suggest that messaging around secure firearm storage is relevant and acceptable, and may be effective in promoting behavior change. Results will inform implementation of secure storage messaging at additional VA healthcare facilities in ongoing efforts to reduce risk of firearm injuries among Veterans and their families.