



PRESS RELEASE:

World Mental Health Day

Five Things You Need To Know About Guns And Suicide

10 October 2017: Guns are the most lethal suicide method. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that 17% of all suicides are committed using a firearm, these types of suicide attempts are almost always fatal and also the most preventable.

October has been declared Mental Health Awareness Month by the Department of Health and the 10th of October, World Mental Health Day, with the aim of educating the public about mental health and to both support and reduce the discrimination that people with mental illness may experience. The month is also used to highlight interventions to assist those living with a mental illness, and to prevent the most fatal result of a mental illness – suicide.

While there are many factors that push someone to suicide, a growing body of research indicates that intent isn't all that determines whether someone commits suicide; **how** people attempt suicide is also important. The WHO's most recent publication on suicide prevention, *Preventing suicide: A global imperative*, recognises the increased risk firearms pose, and notes that, "An effective strategy for preventing suicides and suicide attempts is to restrict access to the most common means...including firearms."

Here are five things to know about firearms and suicide, points that can save a life:

1. Households with guns have a higher risk of gun-related suicide

The means or weapon used to commit suicide depends on availability; research shows a close correlation between households owning guns and gun-related suicide. A gun in the home increases the risk of a gun-related suicide irrespective of whether anyone living in the home has been diagnosed with a mental illness or not.

2. Gun are a leading cause of suicide in South Africa

Latest data show that guns are the third leading cause of suicide in South Africa. Suicide with a gun is quick and irreversible, once the trigger is pulled, death usually follows within minutes. Attempters who use other methods have some time to reconsider mid-attempt and summon help or be rescued, even suicide attempters who use hanging can stop mid-attempt.

3. Guns are the most lethal method of suicide

An analysis of the success rates of different suicide methods in the United States shows that guns are by far the most lethal method for committing suicide: While 85% of all



suicide attempts with a gun are fatal, this percentage drops to 69% for hanging and 31% for jumping from a height.

4. Men are more at risk of suicide by gunshot

Global research shows that men are more at risk of suicide by gunshot, with shots usually aimed at the head (mouth, temple, forehead) or chest; the research also shows that gun suicides most frequently take place at home.

5. Stronger gun laws reduce access, leading to fewer gun-related suicides

Countries with low gun ownership levels have low levels of gun-related suicide, while countries with high levels of gun ownership have high rates of gun-related suicide. Studies also show a link between the type of gun available and its use in suicide: In countries where handguns are more prevalent, these will be the weapon of choice; while countries with more long guns (rifles and shotguns) available will see more suicides involving these weapons.

South Africa's own experience shows that reducing access to guns reduces their use in suicides: In the country's suicide capital, Pretoria, hanging replaced gun-related suicide between 2007 and 2010; with four forensic medicine researchers from the University of Pretoria arguing in the South African Medical Journal that the introduction of the Firearms Control Act (2000), which clamped down on gun ownership, "has positively impacted on the use of such weapons in committing suicide."

Gun-related suicides can be prevented

Preventing someone from committing suicide is not simple, but what is clear from the huge body of research into suicide prevention is that the means matter, and that gun-related suicide is preventable. If you know someone who should not have a gun and for more information on removing a gun from the home visit www.gfsa.org.za

For more information on mental illness, and if you know someone who is suicidal and needs help, contact the South African Depression and Anxiety Group:

- To contact a counsellor between 8am-8pm Monday to Sunday, call **011 234 4837**
- For a suicidal emergency contact **0800 567 567**
- 24hr Helpline **0800 12 13 14**
- **SMS 31393** (and SADAG will call you back)