

DEPRESSION AWARENESS MONTH


MARCH FOR OUR LIVES

Topic At A Glance

October is the dedicated month for Depression Awareness. It is an issue that affects more than 17 million adults in the U.S and 1 in 5 teens experience depression. The purpose of the month is to increase understanding, decrease stereotypes and to help educate on mental health issues. It is dedicated to destigmatizing mental illness. Depression is a common mental illness not only throughout the U.S but also the world. It's more than just feeling sad, it can disrupt school, work, and relationships. There are a lot of misconceptions about people with mental illness and it affects people's willingness to seek care. Many different organizations use this month as an opportunity to raise money for research on treatment options. During this month, reach out to loved ones because depression can't always be seen. Educate yourself about depression and understand that depression is not the same for everyone.

**Topic's History**

The awareness month started off as a week that was launched by the founder, Clifford W. Beers, of Mental Health America. The organization's goal with this was to destigmatize mental illnesses and raise awareness on suicides, while educating the public about mental illness, including depression.

Over the past 20 years, organizations within the U.S. like the department of health and human services have been making great strides in their efforts to increase the importance of understanding and openness of mental health issues.

Some of the most successful efforts are:

- The Affordable Care Act – This act expanded health insurance coverage to about 30 million americans, with an estimation of 11 million who will have access to mental health service needs
 - The Community Mental Health Services Block Grant – This grant provides financial assistance to states and territories to carry out plans to offer mental health services to adults with serious mental illnesses and children with emotional disturbances
 - Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 – This act eliminated the practice of unequal health treatment and improved access to needed mental health and substance use disorder treatment services
- People like Bebe Moore Campbell, an American author, journalist, teacher and mental health advocate, brought the issue of mental health surrounding people of color to national attention. Throughout her life, Campbell learned her own lesson as she struggled to support her daughter who battled mental illness. This eventually led her to create the NAMI-Inglewood which is National Alliances on Mental Illness California.

Current News

On September 22nd 2023, President Joe Biden announced the first ever office of Gun Violence. The Office of Gun Violence will be overseen by Vice President Kamala Harris. The White House has said that the Office of Gun Violence will work to implement the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. According to CBSnews the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act is a piece of legislation that will focus on enhancing background checks for buyers under the age of 21, close the boyfriend loophole, improve mental health services, clarifies the definition of federally licensed arm dealer, and incentives states to implement state crisis intervention program. The Office of Gun Violence will have an important role in protecting the youths of america.

The office is in great hands as the Director of the office of Gun Violence is Stefanie Feldman, Stefanie has the role of currently being the Assistant to the President, being the White House Staff Secretary. During the Obama-Biden Administration Stefanie has helped implement various policies trying to reduce gun violence. She has especially helped develop critical executive action and legislation after the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting in December 2012. Along with an amazing Director the role of Deputy Director is also in great hands. The Deputy Director Greg Jackson is very qualified for this position as he has been a leader for gun violence prevention for over ten years. Greg has led a gun violence prevention organization group called the Community Justice Action Fund. With these two great leaders at the face of this gun epidemic the youths at March for Our Lives Iowa have hope for a safer future.

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Topic's Relation to Gun Control

Gun violence and depression are more related than you may think, so if you are a strong advocate for those suffering from depression, you may also consider advocating against gun violence.

One of the correlations between gun violence and depression is the impact shootings have on the victims. Shootings, overall, take a severe toll on mental health, not just causing depression. "People who are impacted by gun violence may experience stress, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (United Against Gun Violence). A specific example of a shooting where this had an impact on the victims would be the Sandy Hook shooting in Newtown, Connecticut. This shooting deeply impacted the community of Newtown, so the mental health effects were widely present. "The consequences of gun violence are more pervasive and affect entire communities, families, and children. With more than 25% of children witnessing an act of violence in their homes, schools, or community over the past year, and more than 5% witnessing a shooting, it becomes not just an issue of gun regulation, but also of addressing the impact on those who have been traumatized by such violence (Finkelhor et al., 2009)." This was a terrible event that left a lasting mark on this community; furthermore proving that we should all do what we can to prevent similar incidents from happening.

Another correlation between gun violence and depression is the contribution guns bring to the mortality rate present in suicides. Though suicide prevention month was last month, that theme and this one go hand in hand. Based on a survey of American households conducted in 2002, HSPH Assistant Professor of [Health Policy and Management](#) [Matthew Miller](#), Research Associate Deborah Azrael, and colleagues at the [School's Injury Control Research Center](#) (ICRC), found that in states where guns were prevalent—as in Wyoming, where 63 percent of households reported owning guns—rates of suicide were higher. The inverse was also true: where gun ownership was less common, suicide rates were also lower.

I hope this made the connection between these two topics more apparent and helped educate more on the overall subject of gun violence. Thousands and thousands are suffering from depression because of the effects of gun violence; therefore you should join the fight for more common-sense gun laws!

**Kendrick Castillo's Story**

"Don't be a hero"... The advice from John Castillo fell deadly upon the ears of his son Kendrick Castillo. John hadn't ever prepared Kendrick on what to do if a shooter appeared because it shouldn't have been the kinds of things high school students had to worry about. Despite telling his son he didn't have to be the hero, John quoted Kendrick replying " You raised me this way. You raised me to be a good person. That's what I'm doing". That's why when the shooter entered his classroom, just days before his graduation, Kendrick didn't hesitate to lunge in and subdue the shooter. Along with two other seniors, Jackson Gregory and Lucas Albertoni, they took him down and saved the lives of countless others. Unfortunately Kendrick Castillo was the victim of his heroism and bled out on the classroom floor. His memory will live on forever in the hearts of the classmates he saved and the family member's who mourn his passing. Cole, a fellow student and friend of Kendrick said "Kendrick was one of the nicest people at that school by far. He always helped others whether he knew them or not. He didn't have a secret motive ... It didn't matter if he knew them personally, if they were new students he was always that person who was there to help." It's clear that Kendrick's impact and legacy will not be forgotten for his bravery and willingness to put others before himself, but he never should have been forced to make that choice in the first place. Our students deserve the right to feel safe in schools and actions need to be taken so kids don't need to be a hero like Kendrick. Just 8 miles from Stoneman Douglas High School sits Columbine High School, where, 20 years ago the same story played out. Thousands of more times this story has played out and will play out if we don't take action now and stop it.

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