

Q&A Session

Talking About Gun Violence: Changing the Conversation to Move Policy Forward

Q: Injury prevention professionals have been trained to use storytelling focused on INDIVIDUALS, including saying that it isn't effective unless you do. Discuss issues with this approach when trying to affect policy.

Linda Degutis: It will take much more than a few paragraphs to provide a comprehensive discussion of the issues and what can be done in using stories to influence policy, but here are a few thoughts.

There are multiple ways to use stories of individual events and experiences, as well as stories about a community or population, but they should be used to illustrate the data. In other words, the purpose of the stories is to put a face on the issue rather than presenting a bunch of numbers that make people's eyes glaze over. Policymakers and staff, and the public, do relate to the emotions of a story, particularly if it is relevant to their constituents or even to their own family. But, you also need to know how to tell the story so that it is compelling and holds someone's attention. And sometimes it is difficult to make someone else's story your own. You can use stories from the work that you do - and perhaps provide examples of how your work has impacted individuals or a community, or the frustration that you feel because you cannot do something due to lack of resources for an essential prevention initiative.

Q: Is "means restriction" an acceptable euphemism for gun violence prevention or gun control?

Linda Degutis: Means restriction is used to discuss the way in which preventing access to guns impacts the severity of violence that occurs. However, it may be difficult to use this term broadly. There may be an automatic reaction to the use of the word "restriction" much as there is a reaction to the term "control". Generally, people who are doing work in the field of gun violence prevention are not using the term gun control because it has very negative connotations.

Q: Ever since Congress prohibited the CDC from doing research on gun violence, there has been a shortage of scientific data available to inform the public dialogue. How do we overcome this obstacle?

Linda Degutis: Great question – and it requires a fairly long and complex answer. This answer will be brief and highlight some of the considerations that we need to take into account in addressing this.

In order to obtain data, we need resources, the ability to collect data, and access to data that have been collected. For example, there are data that are collected by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) related to gun sales. These data would aid in identifying the small proportion of gun dealers who are problematic, but the data are not accessible due to laws that prohibit access. We need to remove these kinds of barriers.

Q: I agree with the "framing" concept, but even in Dr. Gilliam's presentation, all roads seemed to lead to pre-determined solutions such as registration, bans, etc. This seems to circumvent the discussion "How does the policy address the problem?"

Linda Degutis: I don't think the roads all lead to pre-determined solutions. But what we need before we even get to a discussion of policy is the ability to have a discussion without one side (and there are sometimes more than 2 sides in the debate) shutting down, or one side threatening another side. We need to find a way to talk to one another and have a debate about what might work without coming to a standoff or stalemate. We need to not start out talking about a policy or policies, but to talk about the problem that we are trying to address. The problems need to be broken down and understood, so that we can identify and discuss the risk factors that contribute, the ways in which those factors can be mitigated, and what policies might relate to that mitigation.

Q: For 20 years CT has tested different types of framing, mostly around the value of child safety. Every time, the response to policy change is always NO. Do you have a specific example of framing a meaningful policy message that has elicited a YES?

Q: If the problem is "violence" (take gun out of the equation) these solutions don't seem to be effective. Should the discussion be framed as Social Determinants of health rather than "gun education or control?"

Linda Degutis: Clearly social determinants of health are an important part of many issues. And violence is present in communities of all types, and is multifaceted with respect to risk and protective factors. But we could have a very interesting and informative dialogue using this framework, and see whether it allows us to have a discussion and identify realistic solutions. And, we should not frame a discussion as gun control as it is too polarizing.

Q: The gun industry (NRA - NSSF) have never used the term 'gun violence.' They do not believe that there is something called gun violence. How do you create a 'dialogue' with the other side about something the other side doesn't believe exists?

Linda Degutis: Generally, what you try to do is to meet them where they are, much as you would on other topics where you see a problem but the other person doesn't seem to think it exists. What we may need to do is to identify the problem that we are trying

to address (suicide, for example), and start from there to talk about the issue and potential solutions.