

# Episode 173-- Guns, Teen Dating Violence, and the CDC

📅 Mon, 5/2 1:16AM ⌚ 31:43

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

gun violence, gun, teens, intimate partner violence, research, violence, firearm, people, relationship, teen dating violence, adult, mass shootings, home, dickey, bender, domestic violence, women, abusive relationships, brady, problem

## SPEAKERS

Annah Bender, JJ Janflone, Kelly Sampson

---



JJ Janflone 00:08

This is the legal disclaimer where I tell you that the views thoughts and opinions shared on this podcast belongs solely to our guests and hosts and not necessarily Brady or Brady's affiliates. Please note, this podcast contains discussions of violence that some people may find disturbing. It's okay, we find it disturbing too.



JJ Janflone 00:22

Hey everybody, welcome back to another episode of Red, Blue, and Brady. I'm JJ, one of your hosts.



Kelly Sampson 00:42

And I'm Kelly, your other host. Welcome, everybody.



JJ Janflone 00:45

And this is our last episode of February. And what you may not know out there is that February also marks Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month.



Kelly Sampson 00:52

Yeah, and that's a huge deal because dating violence is much more common than people think, with one in three teens in the US reporting they've experienced abuse be that physical, sexual or emotional abuse before they reach adulthood.



JJ Janflone 01:06

And as we talked a lot about on this podcast, the presence of the firearm in the home is very dangerous in a domestic violence situation. Half of all adults intimate partner homicides are committed with guns.



Kelly Sampson 01:17

But we don't have a lot of information on why or how that is, and especially not how it impacts young people, which is really troubling.



JJ Janflone 01:24

And so to break down why we don't have that information, and the risks facing teens in our lives. We're joined by the great Dr. Annah Bender, an assistant professor at the University of Missouri St. Louis's School of Social Work, who is an expert on intimate partner violence, firearms access and dealing with trauma.



Annah Bender 01:44

Thank you so much. Thanks for having me again. So my name is Annah Bender, I I'm an assistant professor in the School of Social Work. And I'm also a faculty affiliate with the Gender Studies program at the University of Missouri St. Louis. And I really research all things intimate partner violence. So I'm interested in how people kind of enter and exit abusive relationships, how mental health is affected as a result of that, and also how like victims, survivors seek help and conceive of justice. And so yeah, I've just I'm always fascinated by like, human behavior, light and dark side, all of the areas and in between, and so, you know, this very grim national obsession that we have with firearms is really something that I find intriguing from a from a kind of socio cultural perspective,



JJ Janflone 02:30

You know, for that reason not to get like super personal but can I ask, you know, what, what brings you into, you know, this field in this line of study, because I know, Kelly and I get all the time to, you know, why, yeah, gun violence? Yeah, right. You know, why not Puppies, right? Sort of what we get? Yeah,



Annah Bender 02:48

it is always awkward to be, you know, at a party or something and introducing myself in my, in my research, and, you know, kind of looking at people slowly backing away, like, "Oh, okay, wow, you're you're a downer." But anyway, so I'm a, I'm a social worker, by training, I got my

start in the field as a very, I would say, naive and idealistic 19 year old university student, I was working at a women's shelter in the town where I attended college. And so I hadn't intended on going into social work or academia. But really, thanks to the experience of working with survivors of abuse and trauma, and some excellent mentors, I got very, I grew very passionate about just serving others. And I was inspired by and really still am social works commitment to the most vulnerable members of society. And you know, while always being in tune to the need to advocate advocate for social change, I also grew up in rural Missouri, and I now live in St. Louis. And so I've always been around guns, but it was really when I was doing my dissertation research for my Ph. D. program that really solidified that deadly intersection of intimate partner violence and gun violence for me. As part of my research, I talked to 20 women from rural Missouri who were either in an abusive relationship or had just left one. And every single one of them during the course of our conversation brought up the fact that they had been threatened with or injured by a firearm, and they kind of said, this matter of factly, like I did not set out to do a study on gun related intimate partner violence. So you know, trying to interpret this data and kind of connecting that with my own experiences of working with survivors as a practicing social worker, got me interested in like, what research has been done, what linkages might there be in, you know, between gun access and relationship violence, and of course, intimate partner homicide,

K

Kelly Sampson 04:40

I totally relate to what you said about the moment at a party when people ask what you do, and it's like, it can only go it's either you're a downer, or they are too interested. Totally relate there. And since you've already mentioned the term could you explain what intimate partner violence is, and since it's Teen Dating Violence Awareness month, could you also explain what that is?

A

Annah Bender 05:02

Yeah, absolutely. So intimate partner violence is domestic violence. And that is any physical, sexual or psychological harm or threat of harm toward a current or former romantic partner, boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, hookup, friend with benefits, someone you're dating, etc. And so there may be a really wide range of behaviors that are employed within that relationship, to control dominate, manipulate, intimidate somebody else. So a common misperception, I would say, of domestic violence is that there has to be a physical harm, physical violence. And in fact, in many cases, it's really the threat of that violence. The coercive controlling environment that the abuser creates that is often much more traumatizing and frightening to the, to the victim. And so teen dating violence is exactly that except with adolescents. And it may look a little bit different than what we typically think of when we might think of, you know, adult relationships or adult intimate partner violence. For example, teens who are dating or hooking up are probably not living together as partners. So in some ways, there may be less ability for the abusive partner to control their partner, financially, or use kids as leverage are all of the other things that abusers typically like to do. However, there may be other dynamics that are a little bit different in a teen dating relationship. So there might be more use of social media to harass a partner, there does seem to be some evidence that teen dating violence is often more reciprocal or mutual than in adult relationships, although we need better data on that. But and also, there's a lot of indicators now that adult domestic violence often starts out as teen dating violence. So there's a CDC study from I guess, like 10 years ago, now that found that about a

third of women who reported being in abusive relationships, reported that their first abusive relationship was during high school, and close to half say that they were 25 or younger when their abusive relationship started. So starts, tends to start early and then continues on into adulthood.



**JJ Janflone 07:10**

Well, and one of the things that you just mentioned there reciprocal violence, can you explain that a little bit more? What what is that? Exactly?



**Annah Bender 07:17**

Yeah, sure. So I think there's this idea that in, in domestic violence and teen dating violence, there's, there's one person who's abusive and you know, physically dominating or domineering, and the other person is always a victim. And that's, that's often not the case, even in adult relationships. You know, there could be, the literature calls it sometimes like mutual violence, or common couple violence, where both partners engage in physical violence and manipulation against one another. And so that phenomenon seems to occur more often in teen relationships, again, with more research with the caveat that we need more research. But that does seem to be like, so teen girls, for example, seem to fight to initiate conflict and fight back more often than, say, adult women do in, in relation, in adult abusive relationships. And, you know, so that, that also, I think there's, there's dynamics at play that maybe just a little bit different because of age and developmental stage, and kind of like where teens live and play, and recreate and all of that kind of stuff. So I guess I maybe the the major point to underline here is that this is not just like a, I don't want this to seem like it's just a male, boys and men issue. You know, with guns, it's also a female, and it's also a girls and women issue. And it's not just a straight couple of dynamic. This is a LGBTQ couple, this is a trans dynamic, a lot of there's actually a lot of good evidence that LGBTQ teens and adults experienced intimate partner violence at higher rates than straight couples even. So this could you know, it's it's a it's an issue that affects a large percentage and in a diverse array of different kinds of couples.



**JJ Janflone 09:10**

Well, that's one of the really hard and dangerous things about this, right, is that because intimate partner violence is inherently so personal, you know, a lot of it happens behind closed doors, and folks don't talk about it. So it just sort of allows the cycles of trauma to keep happening.



**Annah Bender 09:29**

Yeah. And so a lot of times, you know, people will kind of have the, you know, might not think of themselves as being in an abusive relationship or being abused because of that very, because of those very reasons like, "Well, you know, he's not hitting me or, you know, she's not threatening me or he hasn't done this or that." But, you know, it's that it's that environment of coercive control and manipulation that tends to escalate and, you know, often does escalate

over time and can lead into things like physical violence, sexual violence, you know, especially of course, there's the greater risk when there's a gun in the home or, you know, access to a gun.

K

Kelly Sampson 10:03

And you mentioned the greater increased risk of guns. And I'm wondering, you know, can you help us understand? What is the role of firearms in in teen dating violence? Are teenagers using firearms? Is there, you know, what's the risk of teenagers in particular having access to guns when it comes to dating violence?

A

Annah Bender 10:24

Well, yes, adolescents do use guns, that much is, is very well known. So even though, you know, people under the age of 18, are not legally able to purchase guns or own guns, their parents usually are. And in some instances, as we've seen in the news recently, and I won't mention names, but there are instances of, of teens whose parents have purchased them guns as gifts. And so the extent to which adolescents have gun access and use guns is another area where a lot of the nationally representative data that we have kind of comes after the fact, just too late. Teens show up at the emergency room with gunshot wounds, for example, you know, we're currently seeing another spike in deaths by suicide among teens, even among females and black youth of any gender. These are two groups that have historically died, attempted and and or died by suicide at rates that are much lower than those of their white male counterparts. And so the presence of a firearm in the home just exponentially raises those risks. accidental deaths, injuries caused by guns, it's also associated with higher rates of family violence in general. And of course, intimate partner homicide, especially femicide, or the murder of females and girl, women and girls.



JJ Janflone 11:40

What I wonder if you could explain to our listeners, what some of those dangers are, of having, you know, just guns readily available, even to adults, that are unfortunately experiencing, you know, domestic or intimate partner violence.

A

Annah Bender 11:55

Yeah, so um, within, you know, a gun just escalates things. So, within within adult relationships, there's a nurse researcher at Johns Hopkins University, I believe her name is Jackie Campbell. And she's done study after study starting in like the 80s, on what makes certain relationships lethal. And the common denominator is almost always a firearm. It's not mental health. It's not, you know, all of these other kind of usual suspects. It's a firearm. So the presence of a gun in a home then raises the risk, like I said, of accidental injury and death. But it also raises the risk of intentional injury and death, which can include suicide. And so one study found that the risk of intimate partner homicide increased nearly fourfold when there was a firearm in the home. So obviously, injury and death are a major factor why guns are dangerous, but within the relationship violence scenario, whether it be adult intimate partner violence, or teen dating

violence, it's an escalator. There's a conflict, there might be jealousy, a broken relationship, a betrayal. And you know, maybe the gun is only there to threaten or intimidate initially. But all too often, of course, it ends tragically.

K

Kelly Sampson 13:11

If you're an adult, a mentor, a coach, a parent, and there's a teen in your life, what are some of the things that you can or even I should say, schools as well. What are some of the things that they can do to protect teens? Or what role do they play in protecting teens from dating violence?

A

Annah Bender 13:29

Yeah, that's such a good question. So in terms of both guns and teen dating violence, there are a lot of promising strategies for preventing both gun violence and teen dating violence that families and schools mentors could implement, although, as is so often the case, we need a lot more data and a lot more buy in, I would say at the state and federal level to, you know, for funding to try some of these programs out and figure out what works best and what doesn't. So a big one for gun violence is CAP laws or child abuse prevention laws. For example, these, this is a strategy that differs by jurisdiction, but typically involves holding the gun owner liable for whatever is done with that gun. So if they haven't stored it properly, somebody gets a hold of it and injures themselves or somebody else, the gun owner could be charged. The problem there, of course, is that there's no federal CAP law. So we're kind of dealing with a patchwork of policies and policies, environments that, you know, differ by state, but just broadly, I would say the number one thing that parents can do, a family, guardians can do is talk to and engage with their teen.

A

Annah Bender 14:35

So I don't know about you, but for me adolescence was a time when I felt really disconnected from my family. And from my parents in particular, I felt they didn't understand me, they didn't want to know what was going on. And so even if parents have a warmer relationship with their teen, it's still really difficult to talk about things like dating and sex and hooking up. Really difficult to talk about violence and abuse and you know nowadays, you know, which wasn't the case when I was younger. But nowadays teens have their whole lives online. And they might have a whole life online that their parents know nothing about. And so remaining open and willing to listen to your teen, understanding that their brain works very differently than the adult brain does. And then setting boundaries, as unpopular as that probably is, around technology use, you know, could all be ways of keeping those lines of communication open, because you want your kid to come to be able to come and tell you when something's going on. And what researchers have heard from a lot of teens who experienced relationship violence is that they felt they could not go to anyone, they couldn't go to their parents, they couldn't go to their teachers, they would have gotten in trouble. Maybe they weren't supposed to be hanging out with this guy in the first place. You know, so there's that aspect.

A

Annah Bender 15:45

Of course, the flip side of that is that the unfortunate fact that a lot of teens who are in abusive relationships, are watching their parents in abusive relationships, and not insignificant proportion of teen dating violence survivors are also victims of family violence, or watch their, you know, witnessing intimate partner violence in the home. So there's a culture aspect of this as well, that we're all responsible for. And that's where schools could step in, maybe there's curricula on healthy relationships, on affirmative consent, and safer sex, you know, whether you're straight or LGBTQ, and school counselors, and psychologists also have a role to play with assessing and intervening when there's, you know, relationship conflict or family conflict. And, you know, asking about guns in the home should be like one of their number one priorities in those cases, but again, you know, the problem is, every school district is different. And what superintendents can and cannot do is directly impacted by your local school board and governance. So I guess, it's incumbent for us to get involved.

K Kelly Sampson 16:46

So you've been walking us through some of the different factors around teen dating violence, and you were just saying how one of the differences from adults may be that there may be a greater tendency to have reciprocal violence, and maybe because of life stages and development. And, but one of the things you also talked about is how there hasn't been enough research done on intimate partner violence among teens, and on the way that guns interact in that, and I'm wondering, you talk a little bit about one, the dearth of research and then to why, why is there such a dearth of research?

A Annah Bender 17:23

Yeah. So I think, you know, gosh, where to begin on this? I'm sure there's a lot of answers that could explain this, at least at the gun violence level. A major factor, as I see, it, has been the lack of funding at the federal level for any research on the negative consequences or that could be construed as having as as highlighting negative consequences of guns and gun policies. So your listeners are probably, maybe familiar with the Dickey Amendment from 1996. I believe this restricted federal funds to that would advocate for gun control. And so it was lobbied for by the NRA, and spearheaded through Congress by a congressman named John Dickey. And apparently he later regretted his work. But the CDC, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Institute of Health, interpreted this amendment as essentially a moratorium on research into Gun Violence and Injury. And so for about 20 or so years, really a generation. And this was also a generation in which we became almost inert to the ubiquity of mass shootings, you know, there's Columbine and Marjory Stoneman Douglas, you know, kind of bookending this, this time. There just wasn't funds for basic research or surveillance at this at a national level on a really grave public health issue that separates the United States, pretty much from the rest of the world.

A Annah Bender 18:49

And so that moratorium had a chilling effect, because when the government indicates that something, you know, a social problem, a disease, a pathology is not worthy of taxpayer investment in research, scientists don't study it, because they can't have their work supported, which is necessary in most academic institutions and think tanks to hang on to your job. So it's

also a clear signal kind of, you know, at a more at a broader level of what we value as a society, what we value as a country. And so it's curious that we have this huge problem of gun violence, which affects so many of us, and that it just isn't deserving of notice of funding and research and thus, policies priority. And so the fact that we have this moratorium for so long means that we have really missed out on collecting some important data, especially nationally representative data on the risks and contextual factors and effects of gun violence in our communities. And so I would say, you know, the the Parkland, the the shooting in Parkland, Florida a couple of years ago prompted some belated action from Congress. And so they ended up clarifying that the Dickey Amendment did not mean that research on gun violence was prohibited. So very tentatively at the CDC has been dipping its toes back into this line of inquiry. And beginning in the last fiscal year, they started awarding some of their first rounds of grants to researchers to investigate the extent and the toll of gun violence in the United States. So we'll see where that goes. And you know, full disclosure, some colleagues and I have already applied for one to study gun carrying and access and how that influences or intersects with teen dating violence among youth experiencing homelessness.



JJ Janflone 20:28

Well, I mean, it's amazing, but I wish everyone I hope we hope you get it. But to, you know, I imagine I'm sure that you're in this position to you know, we it was over 20 years, two decades of no funding, so just a, so I'm sure that, you know, what could we have done with that information? Had we been a people been able to run that study 20 years ago, or even five years ago, because even we've had other academics on the podcast to discuss, you know, the research around mass shootings, pointing to how a lot of them start out to as domestic incidences so that these things are not unrelated. It the terribleness of gun violence is kind of one big rolling ball of awful. For a very beautiful metaphor.



Annah Bender 21:12

Yeah, I was just to your point about the link between mass shootings and domestic violence, I'm always struck by you know, anytime that one of the first things that comes to my mind, anytime there's the there's been a mass shooting is almost always, was there domestic violence? And I think we've seen in a lot of cases, even even among, like young men who have engaged in, in mass shootings, there's a lot of antipathy towards women, you know, and some, some some gender toxicity there. That I think is really fascinating. And, again, something that maybe we could have predicted if we had more had more research on this topic.



JJ Janflone 21:53

Since since you have been able to do or you have had access to research that does kind of talk about this issue. I wonder if you have any thing that you wish, you know, that folks knew before they brought a gun into their home, right, like sort of base knowledge there, whether it's somebody who's got teens at home, or even, you know, young children who become teens, or who, you know, maybe someone who has fallen into believing the NRA party line that you know, you need, you know, that if you are a woman, you need a gun in your home to protect yourself, which is their, their particular brand of misogynistic sales, but you know,

A

Annah Bender 22:29

Yeah, I so and that's my, that's my thing that I would say, as many people bring, especially women, because it's marketed that way, many people bring guns into their home, because they believe that it makes them safer. But in fact, it actually makes them less safe. So I think that's probably the number one thing that I would want people to know, especially women to consider, if if what you're, if you're, if you feel like you need a gun to be safe, it's making you less safe to have it around. So that's, that's one thing I would say, I think I'd also really want people to consider what it means to take a life, even in self-defense, if that's what it is. My, I had a family member who's, you know, went through, was getting his concealed carry license, and was really struck by something that the, the instructor of this course said, and that was, you know, "If you get if you have the gun in your hand, you have to be ready to, to use it." And my family member said, I don't think I could, he backed out of the he backed out of the course, because he was like, I don't think that I'm actually ready to do that. I don't think that I could take someone's life, even in self-defense. And I think just that like little, you know, that that little sort of piece of awareness there, I think that we kind of bypass that a lot. And I've seen, you know, I've seen that kind of happen.

A

Annah Bender 23:53

With the ubiquity of guns, I think means that a lot of people and I think this is true, especially of younger people think that maybe it's not that big of a deal to have a gun or carry a gun, as it is, but it is actually incredibly, there's a lot of weight to that. And, you know, just considering that you're carrying around this lethal weapon, and what that could do to somebody. And that's, that's something that I think that sort of like awe around this, this, this weapon gets lost and a lot of our national conversation around, you got to be safe, and you got to have this for self defense, and it's my second amendment right. And, you know, so on and so forth, is the fact that this could kill somebody. And are you, you know, if you're carrying that around you, you might be responsible for something like that or have that in your home, you know, so I guess I guess those are like things that I wish that people thought about or considered before they before they brought a gun into their home especially, especially when they're when they're women and they think that they might need it for self defense purposes.



JJ Janflone 24:57

It's a very victim blaming narrative as well, I think that when we take things from one of the unfortunate I think downlines from if we take the perspective of, you need a firearm to protect yourself against, say firearm violence, you need a firearm to protect yourself safe from domestic violence or intimate partner violence, it then pauses that you need to be the one who's having this reaction, as opposed to well, this is actually violence that shouldn't be happening to you, or to anyone, and that's more of the problem.

A

Annah Bender 25:26

Yep.



JJ Janflone 25:26

Then the response as well.

A

Annah Bender 25:28

Well, that's our and, you know, there's, there's a lot of ways in which our society is structured in that kind of sense that it's your responsibility, it's the individuals responsibility to take care of, you know, these things. It's not our collective responsibility as a society to keep people safe. And to protect teens and to protect women or to protect, you know, people from relationship violence or gun violence, that it's the individuals responsibility to keep and bear arms and protect their home and whatnot. And so that's, you know, there's a, there's a lot of other examples in which we kind of have that mentality in the United States around around social issues. And essentially, you're right, it is a victim blaming, and ultimately victim blaming mentality.

K

Kelly Sampson 26:16

So you've already mentioned that you and some of your colleagues have applied for funding to research, the impact of gun carrying and dating relationships between unhoused teens. But I'm wondering, is there any other research or other actions that you'd like to see in the future to help prevent gun violence?

A

Annah Bender 26:34

Oh, so glad you asked this question. Because there's a lot, I think, I think a really big one would be, and I, you know, as a, I don't know anything about how this could even be done, because I'm not a lawyer. But a big one would be to somehow get rid of the gun lobby. In the state where I live in Missouri, it's, it's really impossible to get elected to public office unless you are 100%, pro gun rights and 100% against any, any measure that could be viewed as potentially advocating even a miniscule form of gun control. And a big reason is because that stance pays off financially, and it pays off politically. And so gun policy varies pretty widely from state to state. And sometimes the culture around guns varies widely within a state. So this is an area I think, where people could really watch their local politicians and exert pressure there to potentially affect real change. Right where you live. In terms of research. I mean, the field is so wide open, there's so much low hanging fruit. I mean, because there's so much that we don't know from a social science or a public health perspective, you know, beyond just the beyond just getting a true picture of the impact of gun violence, which we still do not have at a national level.

A

Annah Bender 27:51

There's interesting questions about like, how and why people carry guns, why we as a society put up with these staggering levels of gun violence and untimely death among our young people, who is allowed to have guns and who isn't allowed to have guns. I mean, we look, you know, we look very differently upon Black men and women who arm themselves than we do at

white men and women who do the same. So you know, gun violence is bound up with all of these other social problems. It's a symptom of other things in our society that we need to take a hard look at. So I guess, you know, there's, there's just so many places where where academics could get started, I could, I could send a list of research questions. But I also, I guess, I want to say I'd also be remiss if I didn't share that, you know, in terms of teen dating violence, and this is Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month. You know, this is not gun related, per se. But if anyone is in a relationship, if you or someone you know, is in a relationship with someone who's being threatening or is threatened with violence, or is abusive in any way, that considering creating a safety plan, there are a lot of templates available, there are some apps that you can download. One is my plan, and that considers the level of risk if your partner has a gun, or has friends who has a gun or knows you know where to get one. And of course, there's always the National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-7233 It's a resource for anyone who's struggling with relationship violence, and that's also the National Teen Dating Abuse hotline as well.



JJ Janflone 29:22

Those are fantastic resources. Thank you for sharing them. And for listeners. Of course, we will have them linked in the description of this episode, plus more, but I cannot thank you enough, Dr. Bender for coming on. Kelly and I really, really appreciate it.



JJ Janflone 29:38

So as always, Kelly I am so impressed with our guests. Dr. Bender was amazing.



Kelly Sampson 29:43

Yeah, she really, really was. And I'm still really struck by the ways that the lack of federal funding for gun violence prevention research for over 20 years has really hurt a lot of people.



JJ Janflone 29:54

Yes, I mean, I don't think folks realize how much advocacy is built on research. You know, you need to know the ins and outs of a problem to try and solve it. And the gun lobby successfully blocking funding for so long has really hurt gun violence prevention efforts and groups.



Kelly Sampson 30:11

Yep. Here's looking at you Dickey Amendment



JJ Janflone 30:13

The worst, right?



Kelly Sampson 30:15

Yeah. And I mean, fortunately the CDC has now started to approve funds for research which, in turn will likely lead to evidence based policy solutions and programs that can actually start to reduce gun violence



JJ Janflone 30:27

well, and I don't know about you, Kelly, but it does make me feel better to to know that there's folks like Dr. Bender out there, you know, working to make us all safer.



JJ Janflone 30:37

Hey! Want to share with the podcast? Listeners can now get in touch with us here at Red Blue and Brady via phone or text message, simply call or text us at 480-744-3452 with your thoughts, questions, concerns, ideas, whatever! Kelly and I are standing by.



Kelly Sampson 30:52

Thanks for listening. As always, Brady's life saving work in Congress, the courts and communities across the country is made possible thanks to you. For more information on Brady or how to get involved in the fight against gun violence. Please like and subscribe to the podcast. Get in touch with us at [Bradyunited.org](http://Bradyunited.org) or on social [@Bradybuzz](https://twitter.com/Bradybuzz). Be brave and remember, take action, not sides