Effects of News Media Messages About Mass Shootings on Attitudes Toward Persons With Serious Mental Illness and Public Support for Gun Control Policies

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Objectives

- test the effects of news stories about mass shootings on public attitudes toward persons with serious mental illness and support for gun control policies
- examine whether news coverage of proposals to prevent persons with serious mental illness from having guns exacerbates the public’s negative attitudes toward this group
Methods

- Respondents were randomly assigned to groups instructed to read one of three news stories or to a no-exposure control group.
- Outcome measures included attitudes toward working with or living near a person with serious mental illness, perceived dangerousness of persons with serious mental illness, and support for gun restrictions for persons with serious mental illness and for a ban on large-capacity magazines.
Results

- the story about a mass shooting heightened respondents’ negative attitudes toward persons with serious mental illness and raised support for gun restrictions for this group and for a ban on large-capacity magazines