



NARPA

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RIGHTS PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY

NARPA STATEMENT

Political Violence

In recent days, Americans have been alarmed and horrified at the acts of a few individuals. These acts of racial and political violence have included the murder of African-Americans in Kentucky, the mailing of pipe bombs to prominent Americans who have been criticized by the President, and the massacre of 11 people at a synagogue in Pittsburgh. We mourn with the survivors and the families of those murdered and threatened.

In the aftermath of tragic events, it is human nature to reach for a simple explanation. For some, the simplest and handiest explanation for evil beyond our imagining is “mental illness.” We’re hearing indications that some of the perpetrators of these acts are being called, at least by some, “mentally ill.” The National Association for Rights Protection and Advocacy (NARPA) pushes back against the assertions that any of these acts of violence were caused by an individual’s psychiatric diagnosis. The typical response to shootings in this country is to call for more mental health screening, but those calls are a way to dodge responsibility for irresponsible words and acts.

Violence aimed at people of color or non-Christians is *not* a characteristic or criteria of any identified “mental disorder.” Neither is violence based on political beliefs. Most people who have been given psychiatric diagnoses do not pose any threat of violence. Only 4% of interpersonal violence can be attributed to a psychiatric diagnosis¹. The incidence of violence among people with any “mental illness” is 1.7%.²

Critical examination of the complexities suggests that racism, hate, and hate speech are far greater contributors to these kinds of events than any known psychiatric diagnosis. Decades of research has clearly identified risk factors for violent behavior, including past violent behavior, misuse of alcohol and illicit drugs, domestic violence, and easy access to weapons. As we grieve with our fellow Americans, we must not allow the many thousands of people with psychiatric diagnoses to be scapegoated for these tragedies.

¹ Metzlj JM, MacLeish KT. Mental illness, mass shootings, and the politics of American firearms. *Am. J. Public Health.* 2015;105(2):240–49.

² McGinty, E.E. Mental Illness and Gun Violence: Disrupting the Narrative. *Viewpoint: ps.psychiatryonline.org.* June 20, 2018