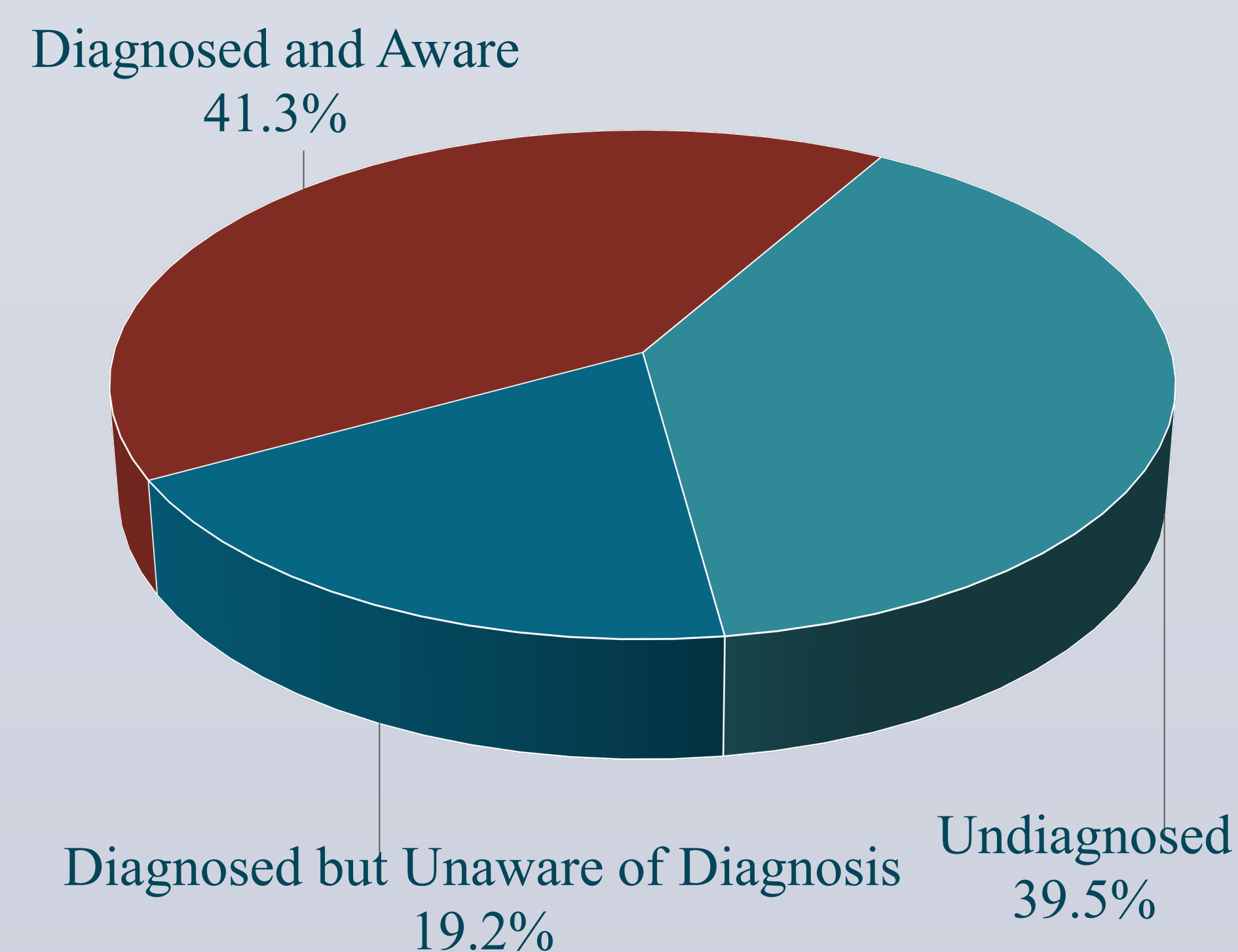


Sonja Hillman Suchy, B.A., & Kristine M. Jacquin, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

- ❖ Persons sixty-five years and older are the fastest growing category of firearm owners in the U.S. (Greene et al., 2007).
- ❖ The U.S. accounts for over half of the civilian gun owning population in the world (Karp, 2018):
 - ❖ 42% live in gun household (Igielnik, 2017).
 - ❖ 38% of gun owners say there is a loaded and accessible gun available in the home (Igielnik, 2017).
 - ❖ Over 70% of gun owners feel gun ownership is essential to their right to freedom (Igielnik, 2017).
- ❖ Older adults with firearms are at increased risk of suicide and homicide (Greene et al., 2007; Salari & Maxwell, 2016; Vars, 2017).
- ❖ Dementia, the broad term used for progressive cognitive dysfunction that impacts executive functioning, is diagnosed in 1 out of 9 persons over 65 (Alzheimer's Association, 2022).
 - ❖ There is no known cure
 - ❖ Mild cognitive impairment can begin up to 20 years before diagnosis and is often unnoticed (Alzheimer's Association, 2022).
 - ❖ Only 41% of dementia cases are diagnosed and aware of diagnosis (Amjad et al., 2018).
- ❖ See figure below for study on diagnosis awareness (Amjad et al., 2018).

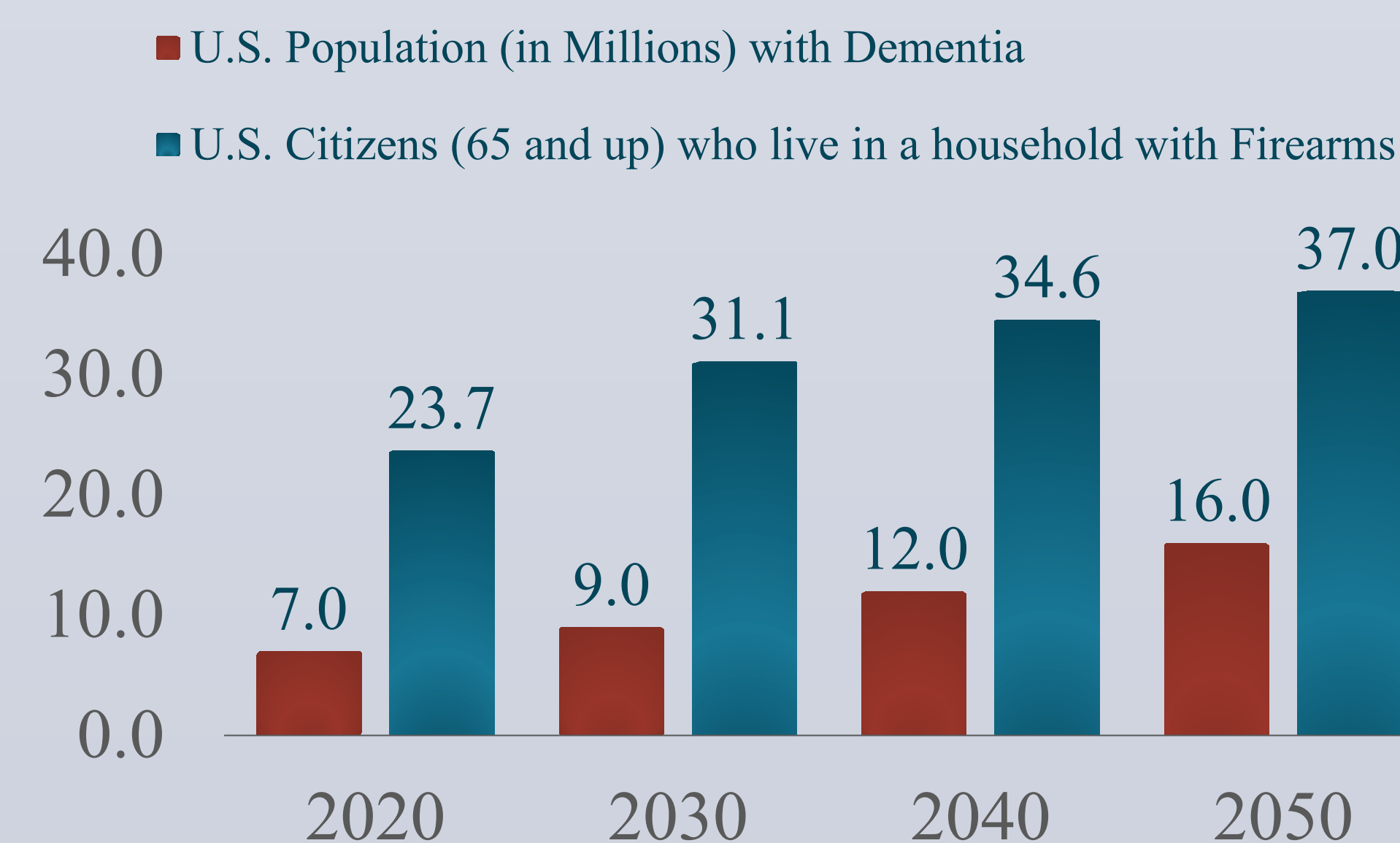
Diagnosis Awareness (Amjad et al., 2018)



FIREARM RISKS

- ❖ Dementias are accompanied by aggression in 96% of cases as the disease progresses, a situation that adds to caregiver fatigue and frustration by all parties. (Alzheimer's Association, 2022; Vars, 2017).
- ❖ By 2050, there will be 88 million persons over 65 in the United States (Alzheimer's Association, 2022).
- ❖ 11% will have Alzheimer's dementia alone (Alzheimer's Association, 2022).
- ❖ The more educated an individual is, the faster the cognitive decline can be following diagnosis (Karr et al., 2018).
- ❖ Many dementias lead to cortical excitability changes, a desire for stimulus, and lack of inhibition and judgement (Cipriani et al., 2016; Salari, 2016).
- ❖ Family members can be reticent to report issues of emotional lability and may deem it disrespectful to discuss symptoms such as accidents, disorientation, paranoia, and hallucinations (Cipriani et al., 2016).
- ❖ Suicide risk by firearm is highest in the 65 plus age range (Schwertner, 2021).
- ❖ In addition, suicide rates are high in individuals with a dementia diagnosis (Choi et al., 2021).
- ❖ Older white males with suicidality are the most frequent perpetrators of spousal homicide, and instances are rarely foreseen (Salari, 2016).
- ❖ Conversations about gun management can be challenging and neglected by caregivers as dementia advances (Choi et al., 2021).

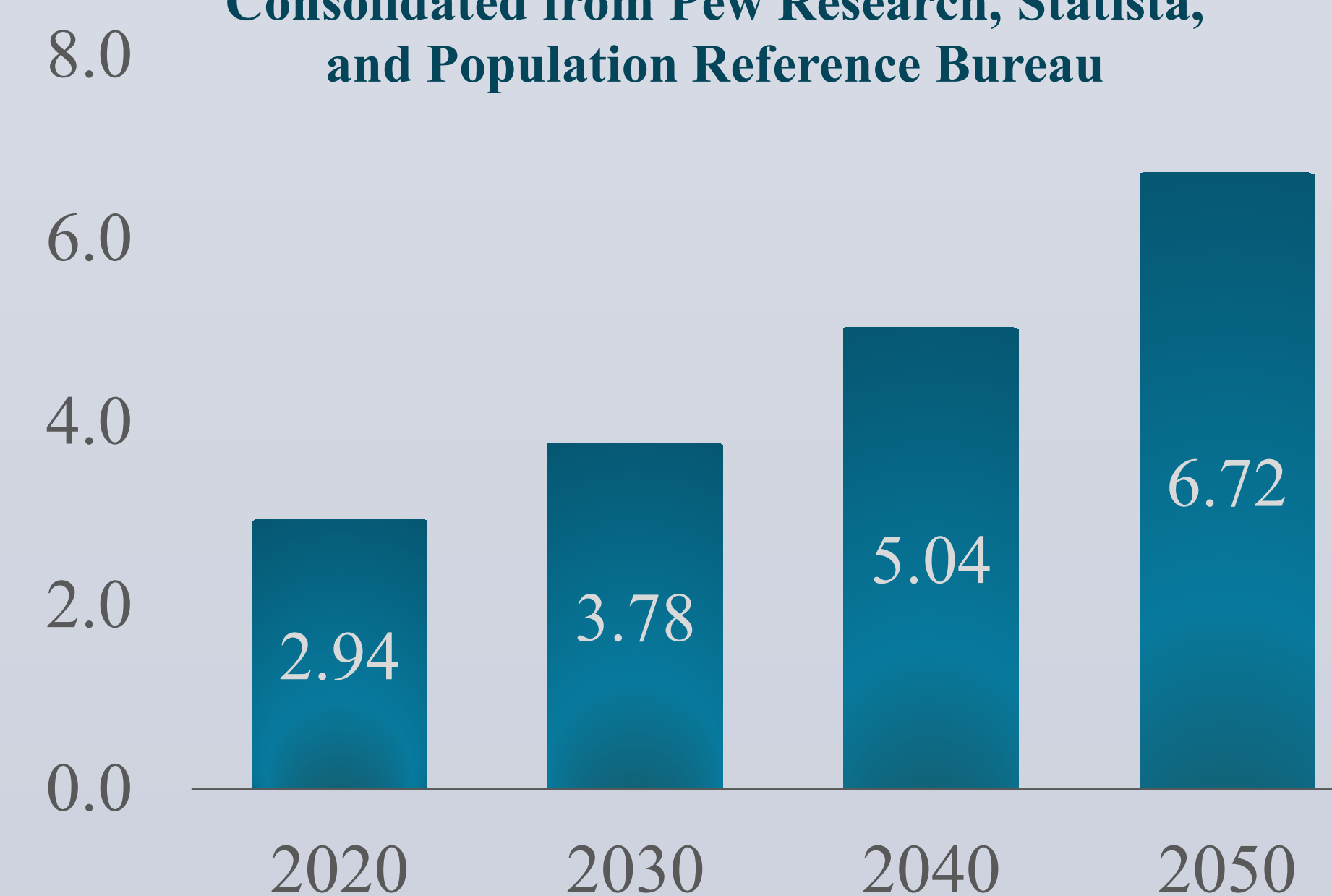
Projected growth of dementia (in millions) and access to firearms in the home (in millions) for age group 65 and older: Consolidated from Pew Research, Statista, and Population Reference Bureau



FORENSIC CONSIDERATIONS

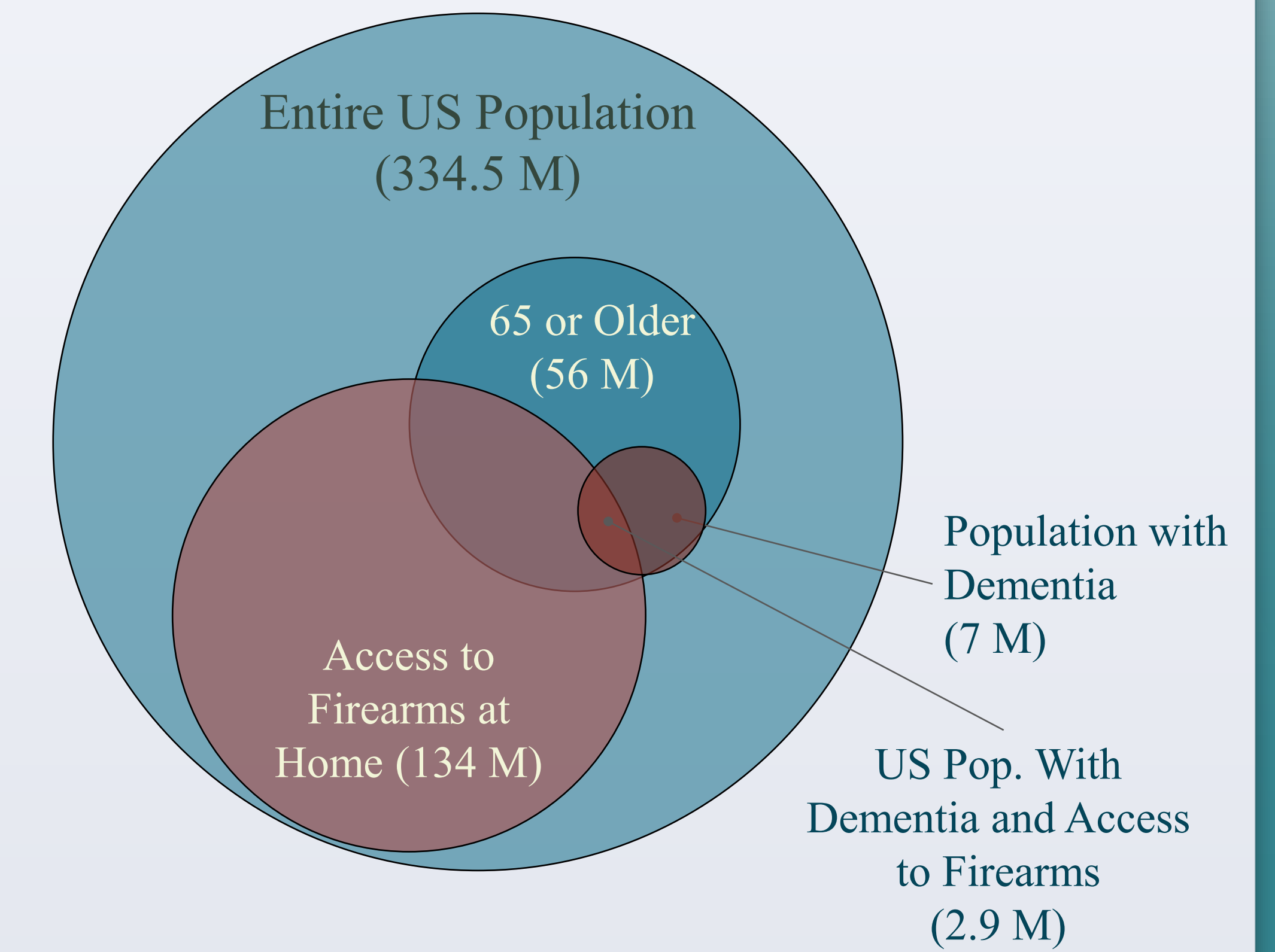
- ❖ The judicial system is not well equipped to accommodate cognitively impaired transgressors or sustain associated costs (Baird et al., 2020).
- ❖ Perpetrators with dementia are often incompetent to stand trial and may become a fiscal burden (Pincock, 2018).
- ❖ A multimodal approach to address this should be designed.
- ❖ Older adults with mild cognitive impairment who are responsible for firearms must be aware of long-term concerns, offered voluntary options versus rights restrictions (Pincock, 2018).
- ❖ Attorneys may assist in the design of a plan or a trust for the guardianship of the firearm in advance of mental impairment with clients.
- ❖ When psychologists evaluate dementia patients, civil competency measures should be established to rule out suicidality, assessing hopelessness and other factors (Obegi, 2020).
- ❖ If high risk, firearm accessibility must be limited to protect against instances of suicide and homicide.
- ❖ Forensic psychologists and attorneys need to be aware of these facts and develop plans regarding firearm accessibility with older adults and support teams in protection of public health.

Projected number of U.S. population with dementia and access to firearms in the home (in millions) for age group 65 and older: Consolidated from Pew Research, Statista, and Population Reference Bureau



DEMENTIA & FIREARMS

Americans 65+ years with Dementia and Firearm Access (2020 Data)



Consolidated research from Pew Research, Population Reference Bureau, and Statista

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